Between Apologetics, Identity, and Identification: On the Study of Christianity by Jewish Scholars in Israel[*]

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> The educated reader interested in rabbinic Aggadot will surely wonder why the author should compare these legends to the writings of the Church Fathers…. Has he tended his own vineyard so well that he feels free to roam the fields of others?[1]

1. Pre-Text

I was traveling with a colleague on the new fast train back from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. While describing to her my study of Christianity as part of my research, we noticed that an elderly ultra-orthodox person, sitting across from us, was listening attentively to our conversation. At a certain moment, the person asked to join our conversation, and with an astounded look on her face inquired whether I was Christian—although my appearance clearly exposed my affiliation with Orthodox Judaism. My simple answer that I am Jewish was not satisfactory, and so she kept inquiring if I had converted from or was in the process of converting to Christianity, or perhaps if I was half-Jew-half-Christian. And the more I tried to argue that I was merely a Jewish scholar of Christianity for purely intellectual reasons, just as a mathematician's engagement with mathematics does not have a prerequisite of conversion, she seemed only more confused. In her eyes, it was inconceivable that a Jew, by his own choice, would

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[1] Menachem Hirschman, *The Bible and its Midrash: Between Rabbinic Literature and the Church Fathers* (Ra'anana: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1996), 7.

be interested in Christianity without somehow identifying with or being attracted to it. As in other encounters between the seemingly trivial and the scandalous, this brief encounter did not give me rest. On the one hand, her surprised, and very sincere, response was unusual in my everyday academic surrounding, where questions of emotional attachment are rare, but also in wider Israeli liberal circles, where Christianity, I felt, lost not only its menacing aura, but even its very essence as a rival "religious option." My interlocutor was not only amazed by a Jew studying Christianity, but also by the presumption that one might study any religion without it being motivated by some sort of underlying attachment or affection, and while denying it having any impact on his perceptions and life.

Yet presenting my interest here as stemming merely from this one-time troublesome encounter would be inaccurate, and perhaps it only unleashed denied and repressed thoughts that have been lying beneath the surface since the beginning of my academic study of Christianity. I felt a need to confess, but I did not know exactly about what, nor to whom. And since I am still a disciple, albeit a university one, yet a disciple nonetheless, I wish to go back and examine my teachers' beginnings, and where their own interest originated.

2. Prologue

In this essay I shall address the subject of introductions, prefaces, forewords, and so on, to scholarly works on Christianity written by Jewish scholars in Israel, beginning in the early twentieth century. Although I will occasionally venture into the body of the texts themselves, in general this study deliberately limits itself to the introductions appearing at the beginning of the discussed works—the part that ostensibly precedes the work, even if written, most often, after the work was concluded. This is a liminal space that appears in the scholar's book but is also clearly distinguished from it. In the research context this distinction carries multiple meanings that I will discuss in detail below, but which can easily be illustrated via one small example: in contrast, for instance, with the body of the text, its preface usually lacks footnotes, is often written after the study is peer-reviewed, and does not undergo the classical process of academic scientific appraisal. In this sense the preface is a kind of "implant," an external organ added onto the book's main structure—even more so than in the case of other paratexts, such as the book's title.

The question of the function and significance of introductions/prefaces with respect to the "main text" has received little scholarly attention. One of the first attempts to examine this phenomenon was undertaken by French literary

critic Gerard Genette in his book *Paratexts*.[2] Genette defines the paratext as all details that accompany the main text—such as titles, dedications, prefaces, notes by the publisher, etc. All these function as a kind of "vestibule"—an entrance to, or a threshold between the work and the audience, text that is both external and internal—and as such serve as a kind of gate through which the reader must pass in order to reach the work itself. Such a "gate," of course, is not essential: in the Middle Ages texts could "wander" among readers in a state that, in our eyes, would seem to be almost raw, for example, lacking a title or author's name.[3] This is thus first and foremost a phenomenon that characterizes the modern era.

The preface supplies the reader with answers to several important questions that are not necessarily indicated in the work itself: where and when it was written (in this sense, not only where and when—information that can be found in the book's bibliographical details—but also in conjunction with which event or important date on the calendar, and in which circumstances); its imagined audience; its authors and how they present themselves, and more. In this sense, it serves not only as a gate, but also as a kind of map, or dictionary, which the reader must carry with him and occasionally revisit in order to rearrange his spatial and temporal orientation in the text.

These assertions become even more pertinent with regard to academic texts. By definition, the academic text seeks to don a mantle of objectivity, so that the questions mentioned above—the identity of the author, the reason for the work's composition, and so on—may be considered inappropriate. Research literature, by its very nature, attempts to present itself as lacking a particular identity, as if the author serves simply as a vessel, lacking history or ideology. It is precisely this trait that lends the academic text its validity and scientific character. If each introduction is a kind of "membrane connecting inside and outside … allowing the outside in, making the inside out,"[4] then the academic introduction is the arena wherein, according to the rules of the discourse, the Subject is allowed to be made present, just before plunging into the realm of objectivity.[5] Thus, the introduction is also a dangerous junction, since it can

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[2] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[3] Genette, *Paratexts*, 3.

[4] Genette, *Paratexts*, 1, n. 2. Genette quotes from J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom, et al. (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 219.

[5] This is, of course, a generalization; there are disciplines, particularly in the social sciences, in which—especially after the so-called "crisis of representation"—the identity

potentially undermine the entire supposedly objective edifice that immediately follows; it can expose the individual, the subject hiding behind the scientific study, with their dreams, aspirations, historical background, and attachment to particular people and places. The latter, by their very presence in the preface, attest not only to an existence "outside" the study but also to their significance for the academic work, the *scientific study itself*, though they may be excluded from it, inscribed only on its margins. Conversely, the absence of a preface can indeed obliterate the subject, who is swept up in the objective scientific research. In fact, some of the prefaces discussed below are no less than an outcry on the part of the author, who wishes to make manifest, if even for a moment, the profoundly subjective nature of his research.

This does not mean—as is repeatedly stressed in these texts—that the study does not present its findings as they truly are from the author's standpoint; it only indicates that the author is an "interested party," for whom the contents are of personal relevance—related to a specific place and time and addressing a specific implied reader. It is, in fact, the author's implicit hope that his work may not only benefit his imagined readers but also anger, excite, offend, and above all move them in some way. Paradoxically, then, the preface presents the subject's final words—yet we, the readers, usually skip these paratexts at the beginning of the work, hurrying on to the study itself.

However, in a small number of fields, the question of the scholarly subject cannot, it seems, be entirely obscured. One of these is the study of "Christianity through Jewish eyes," or Jewish-Christian polemics, in which major personal, national, and religious questions hover persistently above the objective research; most significantly, these questions are marked by a long and bloody history. Here I will focus on prefaces written by Jewish scholars in Israel. In addition, I will only focus on academic scholarship—not on literary or artistic works, which have already been amply studied. Nevertheless, I will employ some of the insights gained from these studies. For example, various works have discussed the renewed interest in Jesus in the context of the Jewish national struggle: as a means of reverting to a pre-rabbinic stage of Judaism so as to shape a non-Halachic "native-Eretz-Israeli" Jewish identity; and even as an attempt to transcend the dominant Israeli discourse on secularization, yet without

of the scholarly subject and the need for reflection on the work process are issues that are strongly foregrounded.

returning to the hearth of "exilic," that is, traditional Judaism.[6] Note, though, the profound difference between these fields of activity: whereas literature and art essentially seek to take familiar (historical or cultural) symbols and put them to new use, thereby changing the object by lending it a new, subjective meaning, scientific scholarship, at least in principle, seeks to remove the object's literary, artistic, and cultural interpretations and additions and to revisit the original, presenting it "as it truly is."

3. Introduction: Samuel Krauss and the Early Jewish Scholarship on Christianity

In 1902, Samuel Krauss published his important study on *Toledot Yeshu.*[7] Krauss was, in Joseph Klausner's words, "one of the few Jewish scholars who did not recoil from the study of Christianity—a field that many feared to approach, for obvious reasons."[8] However, just as Krauss symbolizes one of Jewish scholarship's "breakthrough moments," he also represents the limitations of writing, in the early twentieth century, an objective study that is not "tainted" by religious identity. Yonatan Moss has placed Krauss's work within his time, particularly in light of Jewish attempts to participate in an academic discourse that was ostensibly objective, yet which continued to function in a framework unquestionably dominated by Protestant Christian scholarship. In Moss's words:

> Unlike the intrinsically partisan realms of apologetics and polemics, philology was conceived as the "objective science" of the age. In the realm of philology, Jews and Christians, despite their competing belief systems and presumed divergent

[6] See Ruth Kartun-Blum, "The Burden of Secularity: The Dialogue with the New Testament in Israeli Literature," *Dimuy* 27 (2006): 32–37; Neta Stahl and Tzelem Yehudi, *The Representations of Jesus in 20th-Century Hebrew Literature* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007); Tafat Hacohen-Bick, *'I Want a River / No Small Temple': Theology and Poetics in the Poetry of Pinchas Sadeh, Yona Wallach, and Zelda Schneerson* (PhD diss., Ben Gurion University, 2019).

[7] Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1902).

[8] Joseph Klausner, "Professor Samuel Krauss and His Life's Work," in *Professor Samuel Krauss Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1936), xx. There were, of course, Jewish thinkers who wrote about Christianity before Krauss. Particularly worthy of mention is Abraham Geiger. See Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

> allegiances, could meet on a common ground of scholarship. Nevertheless, as we saw, the ground was not common and the scholarship was not objective.[9]

Already at the beginning of his book Krauss stresses that he is not writing an apologetical work but rather a critical historical-philological study. It is, however, difficult not to see in the work—like those written by other Jews of that period—an apologetical attempt undertaken in a Christian environment in which Jewish emancipation was partial at best, if not entirely superficial. Yet in light of Krauss's declarations that he is not an apologist—and, in particular, the fact that the publication of *Toledoth Yeshu* was indeed against "Jewish interests"—Moss refuses to define Krauss simply as an apologist. Instead, he prefers to approach Krauss's writing in terms of a "double consciousness,"[10] seeing him as a scholar who simultaneously seeks to act as an objective author working in a purely scientific academic space, and as a Jewish writer who cannot but be aware of the possible consequences of his work, and of the possibilities—or lack thereof—facing him and the reception of his scholarship by a wider audience.[11]

However, according to Moss, the real issue is the essential duality of language itself, or rather, the (im)possibility of translating a Jewish language into a Christian one. The problem is not the "technical" complexity of translating Hebrew concepts into modern Latin languages, but rather a more inherent and

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[9] Yonatan Moss, "'I am not Writing an Apology': Samuel Krauss' *Das Leben Jesu* in Context," in *The Jewish Life of Jesus (Toledoth Yeshu) in Context*, ed. Daniel Barbu and Yaacov Deutsch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 339. I am very grateful to Dr. Yonatan Moss for allowing me to read his paper prior to publication and for the illuminating conversations we held on this subject.

[10] Although developed by W. E. B. Du-Bois in relation to the experience of African Americans, I follow Moss's borrowing of this term in relation to the experiences of Jews at the turn of the century. Furthermore, it is possible that there is not only an analogous but also an historical connection between the idea of Jewish and Black double consciousness, as recently argued by Thomas, who pointed to the ways in which Du-Bois's personal experience of German antisemitism helped shape his theorizing of Black double consciousness (James M. Thomas, "Du Bois, Double Consciousness, and the 'Jewish Question,'" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43 [2020]: 1333–1356).

[11] For a discussion of a fascinating figure in this context, see Matthew Silver, "A Jew's View of Jesus: Stephen Wise, Joseph Klausner, and Discourse about the Jewish Jesus in the Interwar Period," *Zion* 70 (2005): 31–62.

fundamental difficulty involving the inability to translate Jewish ideas into a Christian context, which is saturated with the classical replacement theology and a long tradition of Jewish-Christian hostility, in a manner wherein Judaism and the Jews supposedly will "come out well." I would like to connect Moss's argument to Gershom Scholem's letter to Franz Rosenzweig on the dangers inherent in the secularization of Hebrew language. Scholem warns of the moment when the theological and historical contents of the secularized language will break through, precisely because of the attempt to repress and deny them. This is an inevitable process, in which Scholem sees himself as belonging to an intermediary generation between Hebrew as a sacred or a secular language. This is a unique moment wherein one can still distinguish the process of the "repression" or "neutralization" that attempts to transform a religious language encumbered by tradition and messianic ideas into one that is new and secularized. Finding himself on the brink of an abyss, Scholem feels obliged to warn others:

> Language is names. The power of the language is contained in the name; in it is sealed its abyssal substance. Having invoked the ancient names daily it is no longer in our power to distance their potency. These will appear, aroused, for surely, we have invoked them powerfully. *Certainly we speak in rudiments, certainly we speak a ghostly language: the names pass through our sentences; in writings and newspapers one or another plays with them, and lies to himself or to God that it doesn't have to mean anything, and often the power of the Holy One speaks from out of the ghostly shame of our language.* For the names have their own life, and if they did not, woe to our children who would be abandoned to the void without hope.[12]

I would like to propose a similar argument regarding the possibility of translating Jewish-Christian polemics into an objective, scientific-secular language. As opposed to Scholem, this refers not only to language but to the secularization of *discourse*. One consciousness—that of the objective scholar—seeks to secularize the Jewish-Christian discourse, while, at same time, a

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[12] Gershom Scholem, "A Confession regarding Our Language," translated in William Cutter, "Ghostly Hebrew, Ghastly Speech: Scholem to Rosenzweig, 1926," *Proof* 10 (1990): 431 (emphasis added).

different consciousness remains aware of the impossibility of this process of translation; feeling threatened, it attempts to obscure and disrupt the act of translation itself. Scholem was convinced that "God will not remain mute in a language in which he has been invoked and summoned into our existence in countless ways."[13] Does this assertion also hold for the one who, to a large extent, was seen by both Christians and Jews as the "curse of God"—to Jesus?

While Krauss does not fit into many of the criteria of my case studies discussed below, he is nonetheless valuable for illuminating some key themes, especially that of double consciousness and apologetic scholarship. Furthermore, Krauss believed that there was a profound difference between his research and earlier Jewish intellectual engagement with Christianity. Similarly, later Jewish scholars, living in Israel in a completely different cultural and political climate, at a time when the Jewish scholarly position dovetailed with the emergence of Zionism and the establishment of a new Jewish national identity, also considered their own work as fundamentally different than previous research conducted under Christian dominance and influence. Nevertheless, I will attempt to show that even in an entirely different reality, the same "double consciousness," and the tension it entails between an objective and an apologetic position, continues to exist.

I will first discuss three prominent case studies, focused on three prominent Israeli scholars writing on Christianity—Joseph Klausner, David Flusser, and Israel Yuval. As I will show, despite the differences in the contents of their studies, these scholars found it necessary to preface their works with an introduction that, among other things, refers to their point of departure as Jewish scholars and to the question of the Jewish scholar's ability to undertake an objective study of Christianity. Although they should not be seen as representing all Israeli scholarship on these issues, each of them expresses dominant and central voices of their generation, which had a great impact even beyond the narrow walls of academia. In the second part, I will argue that since the beginning of the twenty-first century such prefaces have completely disappeared, replaced mostly by "classic" academic prefaces—with no signs of identity-based conflict or ideological investment in the object of study. I will attempt to characterize these changes by reading them as part of a deep process of the "secularization of Christianity"—yet, interestingly, by Jews.

[13] Scholem, "A Confession," 432.

4. Part 1: Israeli Scholarship on Christianity—From Klausner to Yuval

> The Jewish stomach cannot digest a half-Jew-half-Christian, or rather, a Jew from the waist down.[14]

The first *Hebrew* study on Jesus was begun, according to its author, approximately at the time of the publication of Krauss's work—around the turn of the century. The work in question is Joseph Klausner's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1922).[15] At the time of publication, Klausner had already gained a reputation as an important and well-known figure in the Zionist movement. In this sense, *Jesus of Nazareth* is the first study of Jesus to have been written from a wholly Zionist perspective, in Hebrew, and in a geographical, cultural, and social environment completely different from that of European Jewry.[16]

Klausner wrote an introduction and four different prefaces to his book, one for each new edition. In the first preface from 1927, Klausner emphasizes that this is the first study addressing the subject from an entirely objective and scientific point of view and with a scholarly intention ("as if I were writing on Socrates, Plato, Muhammad, or Buddha").[17] In addition, Klausner notes that his main objective is not to improve the understanding of Christianity or Jesus's Jewish roots, but rather to demonstrate the differences between Judaism and Christianity. Furthermore, he admits, though somewhat vaguely, that he hopes

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[14] Ephraim Deinard, *A Sword for the Lord and for Israel* (New Orleans: Moinster Printing Company 1923), 152.

[15] For a short review of Klausner's position regarding Christianity, see David Fox Sandmel, "Joseph Klausner, Israel, and Jesus," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 31 (2004): 456–464; Tsvi Sadan, *Flesh of our Flesh: Jesus of Nazareth in Zionist Thought* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2008), 127–162.

[16] In this the study departs significantly from Claude Montefiore's work, *The Synoptic Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1909). Montefiore's introduction contains many of the characteristics that I will discuss in this paper. From the beginning, Montefiore "marks" his study as one written by a Jew on Christianity. He does this in order to underline the uniqueness of his point of view, as well as to excuse his limited knowledge of Christian scholarship on the New Testament. To some degree the introduction attempts to emphasize that his study offers a kind of "Jewish knowledge" on Jesus that can compensate for the lack of "scientific knowledge." Nevertheless, Montefiore emphatically asserts that despite the anguish of past Jewish-Christian relations, and despite his own Jewishness, in his study he seeks to present the facts as they truly are. Montefiore's position encountered fierce criticism among Zionist circles, in particular Ahad Ha'Am, who later published his essay "Al Shnei HaSeifim" (*HaShiloach* 23 [1910]: 97–111).

[17] Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching*, 6th ed. (Jerusalem: Stiebel, 1922; repr., Ramat Gan: Massada, 1969), 13 (Hebrew).

his book will be beneficial in the national sense—though he insists this was not his goal:

> The God in my heart knows that in my work I strove for nothing but the scientific truth. It fills me with joy that this truth aligns—this is my inner belief—with the best interests of our nation and all of its spiritual properties. For it is not only the scent of the soil, the soil of Eretz Israel, that the reader can sense in this work in each step taken by Jesus and in each word spoken by him, but also the difference between Christianity and Jesus's doctrine, and the degree to which historical Judaism is essentially different and separate from both.[18]

This excerpt conveys the paradox in which Klausner finds himself: on the one hand he writes of the return to Jesus as a figure whose every step and every word emanate the "scent of the soil of Eretz Israel"; on the other hand, he seeks to underline the great difference between Judaism and Christianity. These two contradictory impulses appear at a time when the real possibility of establishing a new Jewish national identity vied with continued Jewish assimilation in Christian European society. As noted by Tsvi Sadan, though Klausner believed in Jesus's Jewishness, he consistently opposed the views of other Jews who held that Jesus's doctrine did not differ from the Judaism of his period; this assertion, according to Klausner, both obliterated Jesus's uniqueness and, at the same time, justified all of his positions—even those that clearly contrasted with Judaism. This paradoxical approach is also apparent later in the preface, in which Klausner explains that he did not intend to demonstrate the superiority of one religion to the other, but rather to show only

> *the differences that set Judaism apart from Christianity and vice versa.* This, and only this, is the goal of my book, *which I strove to write as objectively as I could* and as scientifically as I could, and in which I distanced myself from subjective religious and national trends that are incompatible with science…. For it is not my wish to defend Judaism and indict

[18] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 15.

> Christianity, but to elucidate and explain the great contrast between them.[19]

Klausner was fully aware of the novelty of his approach—"the first attempt to write about Jesus from an exclusively historical perspective." Indeed, the book was distributed widely and quickly translated into numerous languages. Yet it was also the subject of attacks by both Jewish and Christian critics. Klausner's preface to the third edition reflects the intensity of emotion the book aroused; and whereas he expected the critiques of Christian writers, he was surprised and hurt by the Jewish critics:

> But for Jews, who know of my work in the course of forty years for the benefit of the entire Jewish people … —that Jews should rise and accuse me of "undermining the foundations of Judaism" in "hymns of glory for Jesus," and even of preaching Christianity and receiving money from missionaries … —this I could never imagine.[20]

Klausner's book was indeed harshly criticized. Thus, in 1923 Ephraim Deinard published a work titled *A Sword of the Lord and of Israel* (*Herev le'Adonai ve'LeIsrael*), dedicated to "Dr. Klausner / Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not."[21] Klausner is described as having donned "a priest's garments, with a pen as his sword and a cross held aloft in his hand, as if to say: Here, I have brought you God, kiss the Son of God. Here is your God!"[22] According to Deinard, the scholarly-objective outward appearance of Klausner's work is a deception intended to lure the youth of Israel "so that they fail to recognize that death is in it." Deinard, it should be noted, composed many polemical works on various subjects, and was at times sharp-tongued to the point of baseless exaggeration; his book should not be seen as an expression of scholarly criticism,[23] but on the contrary—as an example of the strong emotional and subjective response that Klausner's supposedly objective

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[19] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 18 (emphasis added).

[20] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 12.

[21] Deinard, *A Sword*, 1.

[22] Deinard, *A Sword*, 3.

[23] Most of Deinard's assertions are completely unfounded and it is unlikely he believed in them himself—for example, the charge that Klausner wrote his book in order to obtain a bishop's position in London (*A Sword*, 15).

study stirred in his readers. Deinard's criticism was aimed not only at Klausner's objective arguments but also at his very ambition for objectivity:

> [S]uch a man—his first duty is to proclaim openly that he is not a Jew, and not, as he cunningly wrote in his preface, that he is objective, as if standing at a distance and looking on impartially. Unbiased, God forbid, in Judaism's favor. And even if he were to keep this promise, in that case as well it would be as if he ceased being Jewish, at least for the entire duration of writing his book. And that duration, according to him, is twenty-five years.[24]

Later he continues in the same vein:

> Can a Jew born, raised, and educated in the Torah, whose livelihood depends upon the Jewish people, be objective (without tending towards one side or the other) in speaking about Christianity and Judaism?… Can it be that a Jewish author … who has seen the beloved little ones dashed against the rock, merciful mothers slaughtered like sheep … all these deeds perpetrated by the faithful of the "doctrine of love," can it be that a Jewish author should boast of writing about Christianity in a moderate spirit and a mild heart, without tending to one side or the other? It beggars belief! Supposing even that his heart is of stone, can it be?[25]

Another figure to sharply criticize Klausner's book upon its publication was Aharon Kaminka, a prominent figure in the period's cultural and intellectual life. Like Deinard, Kaminka begins by asking whether a historical study can ever be objective; he seems to imply that Klausner's positive attitude toward Jesus may indicate that Klausner himself has crossed the lines of his own national-religious identity.[26] Indeed, a similar assertion underpins Kaminka's historical argument regarding Jesus: he claims that, as Jesus takes a hostile position toward

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[24] Deinard, *A Sword*, 6.

[25] Deinard, *A Sword*, 14.

[26] Aharon Kaminka, "The Learning of the Sages of Israel and the Christian Legend," in *Critical Historical Writings: Selected Essays* (New York: Sefarim, 1944), 175 (Hebrew).

Israel and their sages, he clearly could not truly be a Jew. And although Kaminka is, to a very limited degree, prepared to accept a historical study of Jesus written by a Jewish scholar, he can hardly accept the "unnatural auto-suggestion … on the part of Jewish scholars who beg for charity from those whose entire moral assets are taken from us."[27]

In his preface to a later book, *From Jesus to Paul* (1931), Klausner writes in a slightly different tone. There, Klausner draws a connection between past and present events, namely, the 1929 Palestine Riots, and, in particular, the "persecutions, murders, and incitement in Germany and Italy." All of these distressing events should be understood, writes Klausner, in light of the fact that "the Jews did not listen to Paul, and did not abandon their unique doctrine along with their unique nationality." The answer to the question of "why the Jews did not become non-Jews" in Paul's day is still relevant, and Klausner's historical study is meant, among other things, to strengthen the understanding that the Jews were justified in adhering to their faith and national identity both in Paul's days and in the present. Thus, although the book "addresses a purely scientific problem," it is nevertheless "not a drawback if, at the same time, it answers a question of crucial life-or-death importance."[28]

In his last preface from 1956 to *Jesus of Nazareth*, Klausner's tone is milder. He no longer mentions the harsh criticism which the book met on all sides or the "torment and pain the book caused" (as he wrote earlier). Furthermore, though he concludes this preface as well by noting the importance of *difference*, his tone is more conciliatory—and Messianic: "May this book serve to increase understanding between Judaism and Christianity, and thereby realize the words of the prophet: 'For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever' (Mic 4:5)."[29]

The most prominent figure after Klausner, and undoubtedly the most famous and influential in the Israeli context, is David Flusser.[30] Flusser, born in

[27] Kaminka, "The Learning of the Sages," 191. For more on Kaminka, see Sadan, *Flesh of Our Flesh*, 154–156.

[28] Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, vii.

[29] Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, 7.

[30] Indeed, between Klausner and Flusser there were other important scholars in Israel who wrote on Christianity—most notably Yitzhak Baer and Ephraim E. Urbach. However, their interest in Christianity is secondary to their main interest in Judaism. Nonetheless, As Oded Irshai has demonstrated, one can notice also within their work their (very different) subjective beliefs regarding the role of Christianity within Jewish

Prague in 1917, immigrated to Palestine in 1939, and in 1969 was appointed professor of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University. In 1968, Flusser's book, *Jesus*, was published in Germany, and in the following years it was translated to many other languages—however not to Hebrew. In 1997 a new English translation was published, containing many additions and changes. It was only in 2009, 9 years after Flusser's death, that the book was published in Hebrew.

In his preface to the 1997 English edition, which also appears in the Hebrew translation, Flusser writes about his motives for studying Christianity and about the historical circumstances that shaped his conception of Jesus. Like Klausner, he does not attempt to obscure his Jewish identity, being perfectly aware of the possibility that his Jewishness might arouse opposition to his scholarly arguments on the part of a subset of readers ("some excessively conservative Christian circles"). On the contrary, Flusser believes that his Jewishness affords him a more accurate historical perspective, based on his deep acquaintance with late Second Temple period Judaism. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that his Jewish identity, whose work is based, among other things, on "Jewish knowledge," does not render his book a "Jewish study"—that is, a study that should be attributed to Jews, seen as speaking in their name, or considered subordinate to any collective or Jewish identity:

> I have not written this book to describe Jesus from the "Jewish standpoint." The truth of the matter is that I am motivated by scholarly interest to learn as much as I can about Jesus, but at the same time being a practicing Jew and not a Christian, I am independent of any church. I readily admit, however, that I personally identify myself with Jesus' Jewish Weltanschauung, both moral and political, and I believe that the content of his teachings and the approach he embraced have always had the

history and theology (Oded Irshai, "Ephraim E. Urbach and the Study of Judeo-Christian Dialogue in Late Antiquity: Some Preliminary Observations," in *How Should Rabbinic Literature Be Read in the Modern World?* ed. Matthew Kraus [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006], 167–197). According to Irshai, when Urbach turned to discuss Christian sources, it was mainly to reject "allegations concerning the impact Christianity might have had on the rabbinic world" (Irshai, "Ephraim E. Urbach," 179). Therefore, their apologetic stance regarding the history of Jewish ideas is more relevant for understanding the historiography of Jewish Studies, as opposed to the study of Christianity—although there are obvious, and important, connections between these two fields.

> potential to change our world and prevent the greatest part of evil and suffering.[31]

Flusser attempts to have it both ways: he does not hide his connection with the object of his study and the modern-day interest he finds in Jesus's (Jewish) views, yet insists that his main motive for writing the book is scholarly interest, with his Jewishness presented as an advantage in his objective research rather than as a drawback. In his concluding statements, he indicates the goal of his many years of scholarship in one clear and pointed assertion: "My ambition is simply to serve as a mouthpiece for Jesus' message today." His use of the word "mouthpiece" can be understood as an image of his intention to explicate Jesus's message, yet it is hard to ignore the hidden Messianic context (see Exod 4:16).

The Hebrew edition was accompanied by a translation of a foreword from 2001, written by Steven Notley. In his foreword, Notley describes Flusser's special attitude toward Jesus. When reading Jesus's words, writes Notley, Flusser "does not work as a detached historian. He works as a man of faith who sees his scholarship as having relevance to the complex challenges of the present age."[32] Flusser's work was not simply theoretical; concerning current events, he would often wonder—"what would Jesus say." In this context, Notley cites two examples. Notably, while the first touches on a classic moral issue, the second is deeply intertwined with the foundations of Jewish national identity and Middle Eastern and global politics. According to Notley, one day, while visiting Flusser during the tense period preceding the first Gulf War, when "the streets of Jerusalem were virtually empty in anticipation of the outbreak of war … [u]pon opening the door, he pondered aloud, 'Interesting days we are living in. What would Jesus say? Let's go and find out'."[33] As Notley mentiones, Flusser's assumption was "that the study of the words of Jesus should make a difference in how we conduct our lives." Following Flusser's own words, Notley concludes his introduction with the hope that his contribution to the book will strengthen "Flusser's desire that this biography 'serve as a mouthpiece for Jesus' message today.'"

A special "Introduction to the Hebrew Edition" follows, written by two Israeli scholars, Serge Ruzer and Aryeh Kofsky. Their text supplies important information regarding Flusser's scholarly approach, placing him within the

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[31] David Flusser, *Jesus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), 15.

[32] Flusser, *Jesus*, 11.

[33] Flusser, *Jesus*, 12.

wider research on early Christianity. However, here there is no mention or discussion of Flusser's personal standpoint. One could presume that the introduction's authors were unaware of this omission; yet their text's concluding sentence functions as a clear intertext with regard to Flusser's own direct and provocative statement. Following the lengthy discussion of Flusser's scholarly method, Ruzer and Kofsky write: "In conclusion, we hope to have presented to the readers a smooth and lucid translation *that will serve as a fine mouthpiece sounding David Flusser's words.*"[34] This sentence should be read as a kind of *midrash* on Flusser's (and Notley's) hope/assertion. This time, however, in an introduction meant for Hebrew-speaking readers, the messianic allusion is entirely obscured, and the mouthpiece is nothing but a mouthpiece, with the sound it emits being not Jesus's voice but the fine scholarly voice of Flusser.

Flusser wrote a much more detailed Hebrew introduction to his book *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (1979). This quite long (15 pages) "prologue" is titled "Christianity as Seen by the Jew." It is difficult to determine to whom the word "Jew" is referring: Does Flusser mean "Jew" as a general, non-specific noun? An ideal Jew? The Jew as a historical archetype? Or, perhaps, a very concrete Jew, namely, David Flusser? In other words, is the text in question a historical-theological essay or a personal, autobiographical confession?

Flusser dedicates the first pages of the prologue to a lengthy discussion of the difference "between the concept of faith in Judaism and in Christianity." In Judaism, he argues, faith is never a cause of salvation, which functions only as part of a broader system of precepts and duties. By contrast, Paul, and not Jesus—whom "such a position would probably fill with repulsion"—introduced into Christianity the conception that faith is a necessity and is the essential condition for salvation. Pauline Christianity created a fearful concept of faith, which, instead of helping man, "has become a threatening whip, a traumatic experience that is difficult to escape."[35] Flusser does not hesitate to describe the Christian faith in pointed psychological terms: "I dare say that this kind of faith carries the risk of psychosis; and it is precisely the traumatic element of such a faith that provides the faithful with 'security,' which, for us, seems deceptive and

[34] Flusser, *Jesus*, 27 (emphasis added).

[35] David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Tel Aviv: Sifriy'at Po'alim, 1979), 15.

psychologically unhealthy."[36] Later he describes the Pauline assumptions as befitting the psychology of young children.[37]

Flusser also draws a connection between the opposing views of Judaism and Christianity regarding the concept of faith and the perception of history. While "the Jew" takes an interest in history and its moral and spiritual meaning, the Christian is focused on faith, thereby removing the historical event from its concrete context and turning it into myth and dogma. It is not Jesus the man—like many other Jews—who died on the cross and thereby atoned for his own sins; rather it is Jesus the son of God, who died and atoned for the sins of all humanity. In this sense, Christianity takes historical events that occurred in the life of a specific Jew, as well as specific Jewish motifs, and rearranges them as a *story*, a myth, and as ideas in which the faithful must believe. This rearrangement contrasts with the "historical Jesus's" conduct, as well as with the fundamental structure of "the Jew," and therefore "no wonder that the Jewish-Christians did not accept the story, but rather took an interest in Jesus as a Jewish wise man, perhaps a prophet."[38]

It is difficult to avoid seeing the first-century Jewish-Christians of which Flusser speaks as a reflection of Flusser himself, while he, as discussed above, may be seen as a reflection or representative of the archetypal "Jew." This archetype is more interested in "Jesus as a Jewish wise man, perhaps a prophet," and not in the "story"—the pagan-Christian principles of faith that Flusser the scholar (but also "the Jew") will prove in his book did not exist at all.

Near the end of the prologue, Flusser attempts to explain the need for his work in a more focused manner. Alongside the aforementioned interest of the "Israeli reader in a greater understanding" of Christianity, Flusser finds it necessary to warn his readers of two types of Christians: not only those "who righteously argue" that Christianity's attitude toward Judaism was a "regrettable mistake" but are unwilling to acknowledge that this negative attitude is an integral part of Christianity; but mostly of those within "certain Christian circles" who "assail Jews and Judaism in Israel and, apparently, abroad, yet not necessarily in order to attack Judaism but rather to attract Jews to Christianity."[39] In particular, Flusser notes the "little-known fact" of Jews who converted to Christianity while insisting on retaining their Jewish identity.

[36] Flusser, *Judaism*, 17.
[37] Flusser, *Judaism*, 23.
[38] Flusser, *Judaism*, 23.
[39] Flusser, *Judaism*, 25.

Flusser himself is ambivalent as to how they should be called ("Jews who converted to Christianity"; "Jews"; "Jews of the Christian faith"; "Christian Jews"; "Messianic Jews"—all in one paragraph!), as well as how they should be viewed. Firstly, he is concerned that this phenomenon is nourished, albeit inadvertently, by the trend of "searching for Christianity's Jewish roots"—of which, of course, he is a prominent representative; yet, even more so, he is concerned that secular Jews "who are utterly ignorant in Jewish matters" may perceive the Messianic Jews, particularly when the latter identify with Israel and Zionism, as no different from other Jews, so that consequently, the danger they pose is greater.

Wherein, however, lies the difference between these modern "Christian-Jews," whom Flusser unequivocally condemns, and the "Jewish-Christians … more interested in Jesus as a Jewish wise man, perhaps a prophet," with whom he identifies? Flusser himself offers an answer to this question, informed by the prologue's distinction regarding the nature of the Jewish versus the Christian faith. Regarding modern "Christian Jews," he writes:

> Do the various "Messianic" Jews not believe, at least in part, in the "story" discussed above? Is the psychological experience of believing in Jesus as the son of God who died and atoned for humanity's sins …—is it not this experience that caused them to join the movement? Did they become "Messianic" simply on account of Jesus's (Jewish) belief, or do they adhere to the belief-in-Jesus—a belief that Jesus himself opposed? … It appears that they do believe in him—adhering to a "faith" that we have found to be a distortion, both of Judaism and of Jesus's own faith.[40]

It seems as if the Messianic Jews are Flusser's personal rivals: like him, they seek to uncover Christianity's Jewish roots, and to some degree, they even reject replacement theology and some of Paul's stern teachings regarding Jewish precepts. And, like him, they seek to present "Jesus's Jewish faith"—and it is precisely for this reason, admits Flusser, that they may exert a dangerous power of attraction.

Flusser concludes the prologue on a seemingly more conciliatory note: "Christianity should be understood. But the meaning of the Torah should also

[40] Flusser, *Judaism*, 26.

be studied. All agree—even the Christians themselves—that both carry important meanings, a profound message, and that both are endowed with great power." However, he immediately resumes his assertions regarding the source of (Pauline) Christianity "in the submerged layers of the human psyche, which are even more primeval than classical idolatry." The Torah, says Flusser, which "rests on a harmony of human psychological powers," is prepared to accept the existence of "elementary forces and impulses in the psyche," yet requires that people "break free of the chains of easily attainable beliefs and the concepts of idolatry" and should strive toward "morality, wisdom, and action." I contend that Flusser sees himself as an *apostle* of the "Torah of Israel," and that the true goal of his scholarship is to free Christianity of the "chains of easily attainable beliefs," that is—of the very concept of Christian faith, bringing it back to its Jewish origin. This accords, says Flusser, with the beliefs, thoughts, and actions of the historical Jesus. Thus, Flusser's scholarly path is fully interwoven with his spiritual-religious one, and with his self-perception: the Christian story should be cleansed and Christianity should revert to its sublime Jewish roots.

John Gager, in an essay dedicated to Flusser's perception of Jesus and Paul, argues that while the distinction between Christianity and Jesus as a "legitimate" Jewish figure appears in the works of many authors beginning in the nineteenth century, Flusser's is the most loving and inclusive description of Jesus written by a Jew. Consequently, writes Gager, Flusser presents Paul as Jesus's negative—the epitome of Christianity's anti-Jewishness.[41] This position, says Gager, is essential in light of the clear Jewish Orthodox framework in which Flusser operated. Yitzhak Laor, by contrast, emphasizes the national-Zionist motivation in Flusser's thoroughgoing adoption of Jesus:

> Flusser claims there is no figure from the late Second Temple period about whom we have as much historical data as we do about Jesus. This is the key to the Israeli longing for Jesus. It is not a longing for gilt Byzantine icons, or medieval painting, or the *Divine Comedy*, or Bach's *Matthaus Passion* (though the average educated Israeli has a deep longing to feel at home in Western culture). Our national longing for Jesus is the longing for the Jews of the Second Temple period, for the existence that

[41] John G. Gager, "Scholarship as Moral Vision: David Flusser on Jesus, Paul, and the Birth of Christianity," *JQR* 95 (2005): 67.

> is a "well-known fact." We were here. That is a well-known fact.[42]

Laor's description complements Gager's to a significant degree, and in particular reveals, from a different perspective, the extent to which Flusser's scholarly endeavor was tied to his self-perception and the beliefs with which he identified and sought to promote. As Gager argues, Flusser's scholarly project assumes that scholarship cannot and should not be objective in the sense that the scholar is uninterested or uninvolved in the object of his study. Flusser's Jesus, then, is to a very great degree the Jesus *of* Flusser; the sense of kinship between the author and his topic is made abundantly clear. Gager himself, as a scholar of Judaism and Christianity younger than Flusser by a generation, openly chooses to adhere to Flusser's approach—not necessarily toward the object of his research, but rather in acknowledging the scholar's obligation to take a moral stand and morally identify with his work.

Flusser and Klausner are perhaps the most prominent examples, but similar expressions can be found in many works written throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, Jacob Katz's *Between Jews and Gentiles* (1961)[43] contains a very short preface, one paragraph long, in which the author asserts/confesses that a book with such a title "necessarily declares a connection with the present.… The roots of present-day problems reach far back into the past, and Jewish-Gentile relations in our times cannot be understood without knowledge of their early stages. The historian may assume that by removing the reader from the present he is not detaching him, but rather preparing an observation point from which the reader's gaze may more easily encompass the place in which we stand." And beneath the paragraph, as in other works, a date appears that soars above objective time: "Jerusalem, the Hebrew University, Yom Kippur, 1961."[44]

[42] Yitzhak Laor, "He's One of Us, He Belongs Here," *Haaretz Literary Supplement*, 28 August 2009, https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1277983.

[43] Jacob Katz, *Between Jews and Gentiles: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1961).

[44] Ordinarily, such temporal coordinates are passed over or seen as supplying merely technical information. This phenomenon is not unique to books on these topics (for example, each of E. E. Orbach's five prefaces to his classical work *The Sages* is mentioned as being composed on the day of the new moon). I believe it is plausible to assume that Jacob Katz was not really seated at his desk on the eve of the holy day, working diligently, at that very moment, on the conclusion of his book—and neither were the other scholars

The last case study I would like to discuss is that of Israel Yuval, who unlike Klausner and Flusser was born in Israel, and after its establishment as an independent Jewish state.[45] Yuval explicitly places his scholarship in a contemporary context: according to him, he wrote his book following an almost incidental family excursion to Trier while staying in Germany for his research. Standing with his family beneath the city's Roman basilica, he read the description of the occurrences during the Crusades, when parents threw their children from the tower to prevent their conversion to Christianity. As Yuval attests,

> This was a rare case when my profession as a historian coincided with my role as a father. The question I posed, as a historian, to myself as a father was incisive: what could lead a person in his right mind to hurl his children to such a cruel death? I was certainly not the first to raise this question, but I may have been the first Jewish Israeli historian to read to his children the chronicle of 1096 beneath the Trier basilica. The direct encounter with the actual site of a historical event in the company of those who could have been its victims stirred deep emotions within me which the texts themselves could not.[46]

In this paragraph Yuval draws a connection between the present moment, standing with his children at the foot of the basilica, and the horror of children falling from their parents' hands 900 years earlier. The contrast between the two periods is stark—the terror of the Crusades, Christian hostility toward the Jews, compared with a pleasant walk through a modern, peaceful city. Suddenly, though, Yuval's visceral insight and the symbolism of his presence there as a contemporary Jewish-Israeli historian overpower the scene, even before historically much closer horrors—those of the Holocaust—enter the narrative.

True, Yuval's formulation is rather vague—was this visit planned? Was it just a coincidence that the Chronicle was in his backpack, ready for perusal? In his description the actual past darkens not only his awareness as a parent; it

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who completed the prefaces to their books on the eve of Passover, Rosh Hashanah, or Hanukkah. The main significance of such temporal descriptions in the framework of the *liturgical calendar* transcends practical-scholarly time, sending the reader to a different temporal dimension, dense with historical-religious-national meaning.

[45] Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb* (Tel Aviv: Alma, 2000).

[46] Yuval, *Two Nations*, 11.

also breaches the boundaries of academic historical scholarship, challenging Yuval's assumption—characteristic of the new generation of scholars born and raised in the State of Israel—that the past can be examined in an objective manner free of historical memories. This breach becomes even more evident later in the preface, when Yuval describes the shocked reception of his work a year after this visit, in 1993:

> As the son of a generation born after the end of the Christian-Jewish polemic … I thought, naively, that there was nothing offensive in this comparison since history often suggests a sequence of optical illusions and conjured images…. That which was meant at first to be just another esoteric scholarly essay, to be read only by the initiated, quickly turned into a fierce battleground joined by many…. It seemed I had hit, unwittingly, an exposed and painful nerve.[47]

Again, the intrusion of emotions into an "esoteric scholarly" historical discussion is considered surprising, particularly "after the end of the Christian-Jewish polemic." In this sense, Yuval's work and outlook constitute a transitional stage between the early period, represented by Klausner and Flusser, and later, twenty-first-century scholarship. Yuval, like his peers and the scholars of the following generation, feels he is living "after the end of the Christian-Jewish polemic," in a period when one can write a historical study on child murder that is almost "esoteric." But this consciousness, which supposedly "transcends apologetics," is suddenly invaded by deep currents of historical sensitivity. To some degree, Yuval's experience at the basilica was the "preview"—a kind of portent—of the drama that was to unfold with the publication of his study the following year.[48]

Here as well, we cannot ignore additional paratexts accompanying the preface. Thus, it concludes with a dedication to the memory of the author's close relatives who were murdered by the Nazis on their way from Vienna to Palestine. Yuval writes: "Their portraits and fate stood before me for the entire duration of the book's writing." Reading the preface as an integral part of the entire work and as a key to it—that is, taking Yuval's words in this sentence

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[47] Yuval, *Two Nations*, 12.

[48] See for example the articles in *Zion* 59:2–3 (1994) and especially Ezra Fleischer's passionate response.

seriously—we cannot but recall his incidental walk through the streets of Trier, or the claim that his generation was born "after the end of the Christian-Jewish polemic."

Although there are, of course, other examples, I believe those discussed above suffice to distinguish several patterns, which, despite their differences, are shared by all the Israeli authors addressed above.[49] In all three cases, I have tried to show the authors' evident attempts to present such scholarship as objective—though this insistence itself, and the very need to put forth such an argument, are not trivial, and, as I will now show, both eventually disappear. Furthermore, in all these texts I have sought to demonstrate how the authors' proclaimed objectivity repeatedly comes up against the subject and their history—whether close or ancient, personal or national—which is the bloody historical relations between Judaism and Christianity.

5. Part 2: Unidentified Research

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a dramatic change can be seen in the tone and contents of prefaces to works on Christian subjects. It is naturally more difficult to present a *lack* clearly, yet I argue that in two decades the confessional element, so characteristic of the previous generations, has disappeared, with prefaces becoming identical to the accepted academic model.[50] They offer an objective presentation of the study, avoiding questions such as the author's subjective position, the emotional history accompanying

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[49] For other examples see Haim Cohn, *The Trial and Death of Jesus* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 2012 [1968]); Hirschman, *The Bible and its Midrash*, 7; Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Jerusalem: Shazar, 2002), first published in English in 1999.

[50] Although this change is particularly noticeable in publications from the last twenty years (see note 54 below), its first expressions can be found already in Guy G. Stroumsa's first book from 1984, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (NHS 24; Leiden: Brill, 1984). However, in this book, Stroumsa is interested in examining Gnostics, that is, groups labeled as heretics and as "others" by the Church Fathers, and therefore might not serve as an adequate example for the purposes of this article, since it is not the Jewish "other" (i.e., the Christian) that is at question but rather the "others'" "other" (the Gnostic). Thus, the problem of the Jewish identity of the scholar is less relevant, and does not incite the same emotional involvement, by the author and by the readers, alike. Stroumsa's later books, which address more specifically what (anachronistically) can be termed "orthodox Christianity," were published already closer to the turn of the century, as well as David Satran's *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine: Reassessing the Lives of the Prophets* (SVTP 11; Leiden: Brill, 1994).

the research, or the expectations or reactions of the book's audience—whether Jewish or Christian.

Itzhak Benyamini, for example, dedicated an extensive study to an examination of Paul's attitude toward the Law from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. In this work, which is certainly extraordinary in its methodology within the scholarly tradition of New Testament studies, Benyamini discusses the theological and political significance of Paul's ideas in the context of modern and postmodern psychoanalytic typologies, such as "psychoanalytical Judaism" or "Levinasian-Derridarian Judaism." However, in light of the author's explicitly post-structuralist perspective and aversion to positivist and objectivist research, the lack of almost any reference to the context and the actual history of Jewish-Christian relations is particularly prominent. Benyamini's introduction to the work lacks any apologetical element addressing the audience or any reference to the question of his personal position and connection with the subject of his research as a Jew—this despite the fact, that his book discusses the very question of the identity between the Jewishness of an author (i.e., Paul, Levinas, Derrida) and the content of that author's work.[51]

Another interesting example is David Malkiel's *The Jewish-Christian Debate on the Eve of Modernity*,[52] which focuses on the work *Asham Talui* by Yehoshua Segre of Scandiano. In the introduction, Malkiel writes that the text that is the subject of his research is like an alien being: "just as an alien lands on our world out of context, and can be judged only by its characteristics … so this book 'landed' on our world entirely out of its cultural context. Yet in this it is not unique: there are dozens of works by Italian Jews of Segre's period … in whose works the modern reader cannot find a cultural point of reference."[53] However, Malkiel's metaphor of the "alien" can also be applied to his own book—which is presented outside of any cultural context, and its paratext reveals only the fact of its composition within an academic context but without historical-social coordinates.

The same can be said of Adiel Schremer's work. In his preface, Schremer contrasts his study with what he sees as a scholarly tendency to read rabbinic literature against the background of Christian writings, which, he argues, "Christianizes" the former and reads it from a colonialist viewpoint—a

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[51] Itzhak Benyamini, *Paul and the Birth of the Sons' Community: An Investigation into the Foundation of Christianity with Freud and Lacan* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007).

[52] Jerusalem: Dinur Center, 2004.

[53] Malkiel, *Jewish-Christian*, 10.

rather harsh critique that is heavily charged ideologically (or "contra-ideologically"). Yet besides positioning the text academically and acknowledging the assistance of institutions and relatives, Schremer reveals no personal-biographical or ideological motivation, apparently finding it unnecessary to justify his engagement with the subject, besides the wish to present a more accurate history of rabbinic literature.[54]

As mentioned above, this phenomenon is apparent in almost all of the (many) works written on these topics in the past twenty years.[55] Reviewing the Hebrew translation of Pau Figueras's *The Spirit and the Bride*,[56] Yitzhak Laor writes, "I suppose that the demand for this book, which is already being published in a renewed edition, reflects a trend—Israelis are attracted to Christianity."[57] Yet is the Israeli interest in Christianity in the twenty-first

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[54] Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), x.

[55] E.g., David Rokach, *Justin Martyr: A Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004); Aviad Kleinberg, *Brother Genfrey's Pig's Foot: Stories of the Saints that Changed the World* (Tel Aviv: Zmura Beitan, 2000); Yair Zakovitch and Serge Ruzer, *In the Beginning was the Word: Eight Talks about the Fourth Gospel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2014); Yehudit Weiss, *A Christian-Kabbalistic Messiah in the Renaissance: Guillaume Postel and the Zohar* (Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 2016); David Barzis, *The Rabbis and the Implicit Discourse with Christianity* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2018); Aryeh Kofsky and Serge Ruzer, *The Early Christian Faith: Challenges, Changes, Debates* (Tel Aviv: Idra, 2018); Guy G. Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009); David Satran, *In the Image of Origen: Eros, Virtue, and Constraint in the Early Christian Academy* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018); Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Yonatan Moss, *Incorruptible Bodies: Christology, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016); Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Yifat Monnickendam, *Jewish Law and Early Christian Identity: Betrothal, Marriage, and Infidelity in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Karma Ben-Johanan, *Reconciliation and Its Discontents: Unresolved Tensions in Jewish-Christian Relations* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2020 [Hebrew]).

[56] Pau Figueras, *The Spirit and the Bride: Six Chapters on Early Christianity* (Jerusalem: Academon, 2014).

[57] Yitzhak Laor, "The Illusionary Boundaries of Eretz Israel," *Haaretz Literary Supplement*, 31 January 2014, https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/study/.premium-1.2228139.

century similar to the interest of Klausner, Flusser, and others in the course of the twentieth century?

In the excerpt quoted above from his review of Flusser's *Jesus*, Laor distinguishes between the Israeli public's longing for Christian-European culture and its longing for the Jews and Judaism of the Second Temple period, expressed through the figure of Jesus. Much tension exists between these two kinds of desires: In the latter the desire and search are for the ancient (lost) Jewish self, where Christianity offers a route back to pre-Exilic, native Judaism; a route employed to establish and consolidate the new Jewish national consciousness. The former, on the contrary, leads to the pre-Zionist, exilic-Christian cultural sphere—not to the cliffs of the Judean Desert, but to the great cathedrals of Europe. Although these two routes of desire could, theoretically, exist simultaneously, it seems that each enjoys dominance at a specific period in time. I propose that at present—that is, during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, and as part of broader post-national processes developing in Israeli society—the yearning for Christianity is rather an expression of a desire for "Europe" and the "West" than for the Second Temple period.

Yet perhaps there is no need to present contemporary scholarship in terms of a *desire* that goes beyond the simple quest for knowledge for its own sake, entirely unconnected with questions of identity and nationality. In other words, the issues of nationality or post-nationality—issues that focus on the question of the author's identity—are possibly irrelevant. Rather, these studies orient themselves toward a kind of scholarship that presents itself, and seeks to be seen, from a neutral viewpoint free of any contemporary political context. This, of course, is the implied self-presentation of these authors, but it is, at the same time, their expectation regarding the readership, which, like them, is seemingly no longer interested in the "Jewish story." Consequently, the engagement with Christianity is no longer accompanied by an amplification of the issue of Christianity's Jewish roots or the degree to which Jewish scholarship on Christianity is legitimate; on the contrary, this scholarship suggests an attempt to obscure the author's Jewish identity and the historical-national-religious conflict that is the backdrop for writing, presenting the figure of a scholar whose approach is universal, unaffiliated with any group, emerging from an objective position based on purely scientific interest. Now there is no longer any need to emphasize this objectivity, which is not even mentioned, as there seems to be no "problem" which must be addressed.

Furthermore, I wish to propose another explanation for the disappearance of the "problem"—one that involves the secularization of

Christianity in the scholarship written in Israel. We tend to think of secularization as pertaining to the religion that is secularized, in other words—that Jews "secularize" Judaism, Christians "secularize" Christianity, and so on. Yet it is perhaps possible to secularize a religion that is not one's own and never has been. In some cases the lack of belief in a religion co-exists with the understanding of its existence as a threat, as *idol-worship* (*Avodah zarah*), as a religious alternative; it is seen as a rival that puts forward arguments that have threatening implications from which the faithful must protect themselves—arguments that exist on a religious plane, that is, as part of an inter-religious dialogue or debate. In the case of Christianity, the threat has always been multi-dimensional: both theological (the fear that Jews may adopt the belief in Jesus) and social (the fear of social and cultural assimilation or conversion).

For the new Israeli identity, however, Christianity is no longer a threat. For the first time in the history of the two religions, it constitutes a neutral subject of research that can be studied using ordinary academic tools.[58] Thus, the double consciousness of the Jewish scholarly discourse in Israel regarding Christianity, so dominant in the course of a century of scholarship, is vanishing, with the words—the language of the research—denoting exactly what they wish to express, concealing no hidden and dangerous theological depths.

Let us now revisit Scholem's words regarding the secularization of language: like Klausner and Flusser, in biographical terms, Scholem saw himself as belonging to the "transitional" generation between traditional and new Judaism, and, regarding the Jewish scholars of Christianity, between the traditional Jewish-Christian polemic and the modern study of Christianity. In this intermediary stage, the dangerous duality of the secular-scholarly language is still prominent and frightening. In the next generation, however—which "has no other language" besides the secularized and objective scholarly idiom—will the language itself, as predicted by Scholem, rise against its speakers? Or is a full secularization of the discourse possible, allowing the Jewish engagement with Jesus and Christianity to be objective and free of the chains of the past?

I have no intention of passing judgment on any of these trends. The secularization of the Jewish language of research on Christianity is not a negative development. In fact, this was precisely the hope of all Jewish scholars of

[58] There are, of course, broader trends that undoubtedly contribute to this change, such as the growing pressure in the Israeli academy to publish in English, the globalization of knowledge and of the academic discourse, and more. However, these processes are relevant to all the humanities and social sciences and cannot explain the unique characteristics of the changes I wish to discuss here.

Christianity, ever since the days of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. All these scholars aimed for objectivity. Nevertheless, the success of this process must also have a price. It carries profound social and theological meanings, worthy of attention.

This disappearance of subjective involvement from Israeli scholarship seems even more outstanding when one considers how over the same period questions of identity, within the research materials and of the scholars themselves, have become one of the most charged topics in the humanities. Indeed, this movement toward scholarly and personal questions of identity is apparent in the works of prominent North American Jewish scholars of Christianity. The case of Daniel Boyarin's *Border Lines* can serve as a good example:[59] as opposed to the "unidentified" tendency in Israel, Boyarin's preface (quite exceptionally quickly translated into Hebrew as a separate essay, without the whole book, as soon as 2005)[60] presents the Jewish engagement with Christianity in the context of queer theory concepts, in a manner that highlights the author's hybrid identity. In other words, Boyarin declares his personal involvement in Christianity while also confessing to the efforts he has made to conceal this emotional involvement under the guise of pure objectivity.

The title of his book's preface—"Interrogate My Love"—introduces the reader to a conceptual world of investigation and confession: "As long as I can remember I have been in love with some manifestations of Christianity." This is a personal infatuation, yet also part of a more general malaise affecting others as well: "Some Jews, it seems, are destined by fate, psychology, or personal history to be drawn to Christianity."[61] However, this love of Christianity is by no means simple—since the Christianity that Boyarin loves is not necessarily the same one beloved by his Christian friends; and, mostly, it is the same Christianity that, throughout history, has conducted a fraught relationship with Judaism, to which, confesses Boyarin, he has an even stronger libidinal attachment.

Later Boyarin acknowledges the complex situation in which he finds himself, between his love for one (Judaism) and his passion for another

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[59] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Admittedly, Boyarin is not an Israeli scholar, yet, in accordance with his scholarly approach discussed below, he might be placed on the margins of Israeli and American scholarship.

[60] Daniel Boyarin, "Interrogate my Love," *Mita'am* 3 (2005): 77–84 (Hebrew).

[61] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, ix.

(Christianity), and his need to "come out." Unlike in his other books, he says, the writing of this book—which specifically focuses on the construction of Jewish and Christian identity—simply refused to end. Lacking *identification* by the author (both as a *subject* and with the *object* of his research), the academic work on *identity* could not be written.

As Boyarin explains in the preface, in late antiquity, Judaism and Christianity were in the process of establishing clear identities and boundaries—a process that, unsurprisingly, included a struggle against liminal and unidentified ideas and groups, which were presented in a negative, even monstrous light. In this context he confesses:

> I speak here, then, for the monsters. But why? What right do I have to do so? I am not, after all, a heretic from either the orthodox Christian or orthodox Jewish point of view, neither a Judaizing Christian nor a Christian Jew (a min), for all my attraction to Christianity and Christians. I do not choose, in any way, to be a Messianic Jew, a Jew for Jesus, or anything of that sort, but actually, to be just a Jew, according to the flesh and according to the spirit…. I need to figure out in what way the position of monster, of heretic, calls me in order to discover the meaning of my work to me. *I think I read the record, in some sense, from the point of view of the hybrids, the heretics, not because I wish, then, to revive their particular religious modality, whether we call it Jewish Christian or find some other name for it, but because there is some other sense in which the position of those "monsters" is close enough to my own to call me to it, to identify with it, as my place*.

Boyarin's *minut* (heresy), his place at the margins of Orthodoxy, stems first of all, according to his description, from his political position regarding Israeli policy, which, he argues, caused him to become unwanted even in his own community. But Boyarin's 'heresy' is also apparent in his academic position. In a later work, he confesses his lack of belonging to any clear academic discipline (History? Literature? Talmudic Studies?), and his being "like a bumblebee, I just keep on flying, bumbling, and buzzing around the disciplines."[62]

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[62] Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), xii.

Boyarin's confession, like Flusser's and Klausner's admission of personal interest, should undoubtedly be seen as an expression of much broader cultural trends of identity formation. Thus, in an essay published seven years before his book appeared, Susannah Heschel proposed that in the context of Jewish-Christian scholarship, Jesus functions as the ultimate cross-dresser, essentially subverting the possibility of establishing a distinct Jewish or Christian identity. Like a drag queen, Jesus appears once as a Jew and once as the ultimate Christian, while, at the same time, the opposite identity can be glimpsed beneath his apparent self, conveying the idea that he can put on and take off his "disguise" at will and transgress contrasting identities. According to Heschel,

> The cross-dresser is at once both a signifier and that which signifies the undecidability of signification. It points toward itself—or, rather, toward the place where it is not. Jesus, too, destabilizes the self-definitions of both Judaism and Christianity…. As a Jew and the first Christian, yet neither a Jew nor a Christian, Jesus is the ultimate theological transvestite.[63]

If Jesus, then, is the paradigmatic signifier of the hybrid identity, then it is only natural that he should become an object of desire for scholars—and readers—occupying precisely this liminal space. Previously, Zionist scholarship searched for alternative messianic Jewish figures, such as Jesus or Sabbatai Zevi, seeking to create an alternative history and model of Judaism to replace traditional Orthodox Judaism. Now, however, the new hero is the heretic—not the King of the Jews but rather a marginalized figure, existing in-between, challenging and obscuring boundaries—and for that very reason is misunderstood and banished.

It is important to note that this confessional or "coming out" rhetoric, insisting on revealing that which the rules of the discourse (whether Jewish or academic) forbid, is not unique to Boyarin alone.[64] Adele Reinhartz, for

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[63] Susannah Heschel, "Jesus as a Theological Transvestite," in *Judaism Since Gender*, ed. Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt (New York: Routledge, 1997), 194.

[64] A comprehensive discussion regarding North American scholarship goes beyond the scope of this paper. On this see, among others, Shaul Magid, "The New Jewish Reclamation of Jesus in Late Twentieth-Century America: Re-Aligning and Re-Thinking Jesus the Jew," in *The Jewish Jesus: Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation*, ed. Zev Garber (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2011), 358–382.

example, sensitively describes in her book's preface how, in the name of scientific objectivity—the very same benevolent factor that allowed her to be active as a scholar in a Christian field—she was also obliged to both obscure her Jewish identity, and deny the emotions stirred in her by Christian texts. Her *non-identified* research in fact required a deeper *denial* of identity. Her preface thus consciously functions as an escape route from this objectivity-based self-denial, formulated in confessional language and as "coming out," in order to foreground the scholar's Jewish subjectivity.[65]

Thus, within the North American context, where sensitivities regarding identity formation, post-colonialism, and gender had a great impact on the fields of Jewish and religious studies, it might be harder to set aside questions of identity, and the discourse, in accordance with postmodern notions on identity and queer theory, is deeply engaged with questions of identity and its (de)construction. This pattern, however, only emphasizes to a larger degree the way in which questions of identity completely disappeared from the Israeli scholarship on Christianity.

6. Conclusion

In this essay, I sought to examine how Jewish scholars of Christianity in Israel present their research, and themselves, in their academic prefaces. The review and analysis of these writings raised many important questions. Can Jews conduct objective research on Christianity? Furthermore—is the aspiration for objectivity a worthy one, even if possible? Must the Jewish scholar be, in Deinard's harsh terms, "non-Jewish" while researching Jewish-Christian topics? Throughout this essay, I had no pretension of answering these questions; rather I sought to bring them to the surface and indicate their discursive developments. My main objective was to thereby raise awareness of the place of the "Jewish subject" in the "objective" study of Christianity. As discussed above, the wish to transcend apologetics to the point of not even considering it necessary to claim objectivity was, to some degree, the aspiration of those scholars who, in their apologetic statements, demonstrated their own Jewish identity; in this sense, the

[65] E.g., "It was clearly time to 'come out' as a Jew" (Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* [New York: Continuum, 2005], 13). Similarly, in Amy-Jill Levine's book, which beautifully describes her biography as a Jew, existing between the Jewish and the Christian spheres, the introduction functions as a declaration of intent to manifest the scholarly subject. See Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2006), 5.

disappearance of this kind of apologetics is a kind of success. Paradoxically, however, the removal of the "Jewish perspective" also signifies the "death" or secularization of the object of research. As already noted by Augustine, the existence of Christianity depends upon the existence of a "Jewish gaze," whose preservation is therefore essential.[66] Indeed, as Jeremy Cohen writes in the introduction to his book on the symbolic Jew, it is somewhat unsettling that Jewish scholars in postmodern times still feel they must take the role of the "Jewish scholar" when they are among a group of Christian scholars.[67] This is patently true, particularly considering the gruesome historical associations of the concept of the symbolic Jew. Yet there is something no less troubling about the removal of this tension, its repression, and the attempt to present a "transparent" ("non-Jewish," in Deinard's terms) scholar, not least in light of the historical, centuries-old suppression of the Jewish voice.

Recalling Scholem's warning regarding the secularization of the Hebrew language, I would like to conclude with a question: Can the Jewish discourse on Christianity be "secularized" at all? Is such secularization worthwhile? Which repressed voices might emerge? And how is it possible to manifest the voice of a (Jewish) scholarly subject without rendering the study biased or ideological, but rather one that stirs interest and identification? As opposed to Scholem, I do believe that words and traditions can be detached from their "abyssal substance." However, as recent years have taught us, secularization is a much more complicated process than previously thought, as "the religious" seems to be returning to the forefront of the public sphere throughout the globe, including in Israel, making the imagined "end of religious polemics," as expressed by Yuval, seem more and more to be only a short episode in modern history, and in the long history of Jewish-Christian relations.

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[66] On the importance of preserving the Jew as a witness in Augustine's works, see, among others, Cohen, *Living Letters*, 23–65.

[67] Cohen, *Living Letters*, 1.