

**“Physician, Heal Yourself”
Baptized Jews & the Wounded People of God**

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Baptized Jews as Agents of Healing

The twentieth century provides us with an impressive list of Jewish disciples of Jesus whose lives and labors have contributed to the cause of reconciliation between the Church and the Jewish people. John Connelly has documented the essential role played by Jewish Catholics such as Johannes Oesterreicher, Annie Krause, Raïssa Maritain, Brunno Hussar, and Gregory Baum in the revolution in Catholic-Jewish relations which culminated in *Nostra Aetate*.¹ Their mantle was taken up in the post-conciliar period by the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger.

The Eastern Church featured the extraordinary witness of Fr. Alexander Men.² Reflecting on his one short encounter with Fr. Alexander, Cardinal Lustiger wrote the following: “When I found myself face to face with Fr. Alexander Men, I felt I had known him all my life. He seemed like a brother, a friend who would always be close to me, despite the fact that we only spoke for perhaps ten minutes. . . My memory of the event has taken the form of a strong, beautiful vision of a meeting in the mystery of the suffering and raised Messiah, a mystery that we both contemplated together.”³ Cardinal Lustiger recognized a kindred Jewish soul with a kindred mission. Neither of these men specialized in the field of Jewish-Christian relations, but their teaching and their lives pointed the way to a more hopeful future for the two communities that each loved and honored.

Among Jewish disciples of Jesus in the Protestant world, Paul Philip Levertoff stands out. Levertoff served as an ordained Anglican priest, but was also one of the most distinguished scholars of Jewish mysticism of his time.⁴ In the 1930s he attempted to alert British Christians about the suffering of German Jews.⁵ It was largely through Levertoff’s influence that Fr. Lev Gillet in 1942 wrote *Communion in the Messiah*—one of the finest books on Jewish-Christian relations ever published.⁶

We can learn much from reflecting on the lives of these exemplary figures. Their stories reinforce a thesis that I proposed in *Searching Her Own Mystery*: “If we [Jewish disciples of Jesus] embrace our Jewishness as a spiritual vocation. . . we become a sacramental sign of the spiritual bond joining the *ecclesia* to genealogical-Israel.”⁷ As a “sacramental sign” Jewish disciples of Jesus are able to function as a “means of grace,” a source of healing and spiritual renewal for both the *ecclesia* and the Jewish people.

However, a danger lurks if these are the *only* stories of baptized Jews which we recall. We may then conclude falsely that the historical trauma of post-Constantinian Jewish-Christian relations was inflicted exclusively by nefarious “others.” In that scenario we baptized Jews are innocent newcomers, who now ride to the rescue in order to save our hapless comrades. If that is

the story we tell ourselves, we are deluded as to the nature of the historical burden, and the attitude that is required from those who are to bear it.

In reality, baptized Jews have played a significant and ignoble role in this historical tragedy. If we do not face that fact honestly, we will never understand the revulsion many of our Jewish kin feel in our presence, or the concerns about us held by many gentile Christians committed to Jewish-Christian dialogue. My aim in this short paper is to remind us of this unpleasant feature of our history, so as to encourage humility as we bear witness to the “the mystery of the suffering and raised Messiah”—who rules in the midst of both Israel and the Church, reconciling each to the other in his own person.

Baptized Jews as Source of Trauma

The medieval period is the nadir of Jewish-Christian relations. It is the era of crusades (with their associated Jewish pogroms), host-desecration and blood libels, coercive disputations, the burning of Jewish books, forced baptisms, expulsion of entire Jewish communities, the Inquisition, and the auto de fe. With their inside knowledge of Jewish affairs, baptized Jews facilitated many of these developments. From one angle, they can be viewed as victims of the rivalry and fear that plagued both communities. But it does no service to those baptized Jews when we negate their dignity as responsible and culpable agents. And it does no service to us twenty-first century baptized Jews when we deny the burdensome legacy we have received from them, our spiritual forbears.

A few well-known examples should suffice. Nicholas Donin was a Parisian Jew who was baptized and entered the Franciscan order in the 1230s. He incited the persecution of Jews in France, and convinced French authorities to burn copies of the Talmud.⁸ Two or three decades later a Jew from Montpellier was baptized and entered the Dominican order. Taking the name Pablo Christiani, he engaged in a famous disputation with Nachmanides in Spain, denounced the Talmud, and convinced King Louis IX of France to require Jews to wear distinctive badges.⁹ Joshua HaLorki (Geronimo de Santa Fe / Hieronymus de Sancta Fide), a fifteenth century Spanish Jew, followed a similar path, participating in disputations and authoring articles such as "*Tractatus Contra Perfidiam Judæorum*" and "*De Judæis Erroribus ex Talmuth*."¹⁰ Johannes Pfefferkorn was a German Jew baptized in the first decade of the sixteenth century. He published many anti-Jewish pamphlets, including one called "*Der Judenfeind*" (the Jewish enemy). Pfefferkorn persuaded the Emperor to order the destruction of all non-biblical Jewish books.¹¹

These baptized Jews saw their past religious life as no better than paganism. Their journey from Judaism to Christianity was an exodus from darkness to light. Solomon Halevi (Paul of Burgos), a fifteenth century Spanish rabbi who became a bishop, expressed well their spiritual vision: “I was...brought up in Jewish blindness and incredulity; while learning Holy Scripture from unsanctified teachers, I received erroneous opinions from erring men, who cloud the pure letter of Scripture by impure inventions...But when it pleased Him whose mercies are infinite to call me from darkness to light, and from the depth of the pit to the open air of heaven, the scales seemed as it were to fall from the eyes of my understanding...”¹² Such insider

testimony confirmed the anti-Jewish prejudice of the Christian world, and added fuel to a fire that was already out of control.

The most egregious anti-Jewish Church practices of the medieval period faded away in the modern West. However, Christian anti-Jewish sentiment remained, and continued to feed on the testimony of learned insiders who made the exodus from Judaism to the Church. A renowned example of such a baptized Jew is Alfred Edersheim (1825–1889), an Anglican priest whose writings on the New Testament continue to enjoy a wide readership. In his magnum opus, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Edersheim has this to say about the Talmud: “If we imagine something... full of digressions, anecdotes, quaint sayings, fancies, legends, and too often of what, from its profanity, superstition, and even obscenity, could scarcely be quoted, we may form some general idea of what the Talmud is.”¹³ Edersheim’s assessment of rabbinic Judaism as a whole is no more flattering. It is not merely *inferior* to Christianity, but *contrary* in its essence:

The one [i.e., Rabbinism] developed the Law in its outward direction as ordinances and commandments; the other [i.e., Jesus] in its inward direction as life and liberty. Thus Rabbinism occupied one pole—and the outcome of its tendency to pure externalism was the Halakhah... The teaching of Jesus occupied the opposite pole. Its starting-point was the inner sanctuary in which God was known and worshipped...¹⁴

Thus as between the two... it may be fearlessly asserted that as regards their substance and spirit, there is not a difference, but a total divergence, of fundamental principle between Rabbinism and the New Testament, so that comparison between them is not possible. Here there is absolute contrariety.¹⁵

Generations of devout English-speaking Christians have learned about Judaism from Alfred Edersheim. While his writings are less inflammatory than those of his medieval forbears, they still add fuel to the fire.

In the East the medieval spirit endured. No more perfect embodiment of that spirit can be found than the figure of Jacob Brafman and the notorious volume he authored, *The Book of the Kahal*. In the early nineteenth century the Russian government related to Jewish communities as corporate entities. The leadership structure in each Jewish community was called a *kahal*. The *kahals* were responsible for the conscription of Jewish youth into the Russian army, and as such they were resented by many Jews. In 1844 this system of administration was dismantled by the Russian authorities. Jacob Brafman was a Jew who struggled against the *kahals* in the final years of their existence, and whose resentment led him to flee Judaism and enter the Orthodox Church. In the 1860s he worked as a spy for the Russian government within the Jewish world. In 1869 he published *The Book of the Kahal*, in which, as Yuri Glazov puts it, “he contended that the *kahal*, though abolished in 1844, continued to exist as a secret organization, controlling the world’s Jews by Talmudic fanaticism and Hasidic obscurantism and seeking to exploit the world’s economy under the guise of religious organizations and charities... Printed at public expense and sent to all government offices to guide Russian officials in dealing with Jewry, it became the most successful and influential Judeophobic work in Russian history, making Brafman the grandfather of all save the occult elements of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.”¹⁶ It is

disheartening to learn that some of the most vicious anti-Jewish tropes of the modern era have their roots in the writings of an embittered baptized Jew.

Brafman followed the medieval model of Christian anti-Jewish activism, in which religious attacks on Judaism were combined with slanderous charges of immoral conduct leveled against Jewish communities. This was a potent concoction, which, as in the medieval period, resulted in horrific violence against Jews. In contrast, the modern Western approach, exemplified by Alfred Edersheim, focused exclusively on the deficiencies of Jewish religious practice. While less threatening to life and limb, the Western attitude of baptized Jews did nothing to heal the wounds opened up by their medieval ancestors.

In general, the example of baptized Jews in the last hundred years has been more edifying. The individuals mentioned at the beginning of this paper were exceptional in their dedication and talents, but represent an orientation shared by many contemporary baptized Jews. In some quarters, however, older attitudes have endured. A pioneering figure in the sphere of late twentieth century Christian missions allegedly charged that “Judaism is a false religion.” An Israeli Jewish Christian leader went on the record with the following: “Rabbinic legalism has destroyed the spirit of the Law and rendered it ineffective. . . . The Law is viewed by Judaism by way of legalistic literalism, which takes it out of the realm of morality and into the realm of a commercial transaction: if I do this and that, you will do this and that for me. . . . In the hands of the rabbis, the Law has been transformed into an instigator of human pride and self-satisfaction.”¹⁷ Such comments hearken back to an earlier era in which baptized Jews drew upon their insider knowledge to heap contempt on their religious origins and to glorify their newly acquired faith.

Some Messianic Jews advance an opposite but only slightly less damaging view. In their teaching, “Christianity” is the “false religion.” Christmas and Easter are considered pagan holidays, and the entire Christian tradition is nullified. Judaism is the one true faith, and all nations are called to adopt it. Such thinking takes us no further along on the road to healing and reconciliation.

Embodying Reconciliation

I offer these depressing accounts with the assumption (and hope) that my friends in the Helsinki Consultation will devote their attention to positive historical figures and inspiring theological truths. My reflections are intended to function in that wider context. So, consider this paper an extended footnote, or a cautionary appendix.

As a leader in the Messianic Jewish movement, I have witnessed too many triumphalist celebrations in which we Jewish disciples of Jesus are the key to the restoration of the Church, the salvation of Israel, and the redemption of the world. In such settings the Church and Israel are sometimes portrayed as wandering in thick darkness, waiting for us Messianic Jews to come to the rescue. Of course, such claims of self-importance should not be taken at face value; they make psychological sense only when viewed against the backdrop of Messianic Jewish marginality and ostracism. To sustain our precarious existence, we Messianic Jews must believe we are fulfilling an essential role in the divine plan. I believe that that is indeed the case, but the

part assigned to us is not to be the *one true Church* or the *one true Israel*. We are to be humble servants of messianic reconciliation, not conquerors overthrowing rival kingdoms.

For my Jewish Christian friends the temptation is to understate rather than underline their distinctive Jewish identity. But this plays into a more traditional *Christian* triumphalist narrative, in which Judaism as a religion pales in comparison with Christian faith, and the voice of the Jewish people sounds an indecipherable note amidst the universal chorus of the nations.

In either case, we have forgotten our checkered history, the history of baptized Jews. The leaders of the Jewish community have not forgotten; that is why they treat us so harshly. They do not behold us as we really are, but see on our faces the masks of Nicholas Donin, Pablo Christiani, Geronimo de Santa Fe, Johannes Pfefferkorn, Paul of Burgos, and Jacob Brafman.

Remembering that history, we will forsake all triumphalism, recognizing that the traumatic tale of Jewish-Christian relations cannot be externalized. It is *our* history, not the history of others. *We are the Jews who suffered; we are the Christians who persecuted; we are the baptized Jews who betrayed our families.*

But we are also the baptized Jews of the past hundred years who have charted a different course. Following the example set by Cardinal Lustiger, Fr. Men, and Reverend Levertoff, we have a unique role to play in the drama of reconciliation. That role requires that we identify loyally with the Jewish people as our people, and also with the community of those who confess the name of Jesus. *The reconciliation that we proclaim is one that we must first embody. The wounds of history are located on our own limbs, and we will only become the healer of others by first being healed ourselves.*

¹ “From the 1840s until 1965, virtually every activist and thinker who worked for Catholic-Jewish reconciliation was not originally Catholic. Most were born Jewish” (John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews 1933-1965* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 5.

² See Yves Hamant, *Alexander Men: A Witness for Contemporary Russia* (trans. Fr. Steven Bigham: Torrance, CA: Oakwood, 1995).

³ Hamant, pp. 209-210.

⁴ See Paul Philip Levertoff, *Love and the Messianic Age* (Marshfield, Missouri: Vine of David, 2009 [orig. edition 1923]).

⁵ See Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Lev Gillet: A Monk of the Eastern Church* (trans. Helen Wright: Oxford: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1999), pp. 233-34.

⁶ Lev Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah: Studies in the Relationship Between Judaism and Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999; orig. edition 1942).

⁷ Mark S. Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery: Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People, and the Identity of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), p. 175.

⁸ See <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5277-donin-nicholas-of-la-rochelle>

⁹ See <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4365-christiani-pablo>

¹⁰ See <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8035-ibn-vives-al-lorqui-of-lorca-joshua-ben-joseph>

¹¹ See <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12081-pfefferkorn-johann-joseph>

¹² Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (New York: Cassell, 2000), 9.

¹³ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971; orig. publ. 1886), p. 103. On the other hand, Edersheim acknowledged that the Talmud has its bright spots: “When we bear in mind the many sparkling, beautiful, and occasionally almost sublime passages in the Talmud, but especially that its forms of thought and expression so often recall those of the New Testament, only prejudice and hatred could indulge in indiscriminate vituperation” (p. 104)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁶ Gregory Yuri Glazov, ed.; Vladimir Solovyov, *The Burning Bush: Writings on Jews and Judaism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), p. 70.

¹⁷ Baruch Maoz, *Judaism is Not Jewish* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2003), pp. 157-58.