Medieval Jewish Cultural Creativity Under Christian Influence

Marc Saperstein

I. Introduction

Did Jews and Christians actually learn from each other? Are there signs of influence by neighbors of the other faith? Did members of these competing religious traditions ever recognize anything of value in the religion or society of the Other? My answer to these questions is a cautious, limited, yet emphatic "yes."

I could illustrate this with examples of Christian openness to Jewish culture, especially in the area of Biblical studies, where Christian scholars consulted with medieval Jews to learn more about the original text of the Hebrew Scriptures, what they called the "*hebraica veritas*" [1)]—and in scholastic philosophy, where Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* was translated into Latin so that it could be used by Christian theologians; Thomas Aquinas frequently cites "Rabbi Moses the Egyptian" with accuracy and respect.[2)]

But I thought that for this occasion it might be more interesting to illustrate with examples of Jewish openness to Christian influences, an openness which does not suggest a weakness of Jewish faith, or an eagerness to abandon it, but rather a confidence that it could accommodate the best in its rival religion while remaining absolutely faithful to Jewish commitments.

II. Penance, Atonement, Confession

I begin with a small yet influential movement within medieval Judaism known as Hasidei Ashkenaz, or "German Pietists," that emerged in the second half of the 12th century, in the period following the massacres of the First and Second Crusades. It is perhaps not surprising that the teachings of this group express extreme hostility toward Christianity and its sancta. The Pietists taught that in time of danger, you may not disguise yourself as a priest even in order to save your life. That a Jew must not go anywhere near a church, for any purpose. That it is forbidden to sing a Christian song as a lullaby to a baby, forbidden to keep Hebrew books in the same cupboard as Christian books, forbidden to teach the Hebrew alphabet or even to play a pleasant tune to a Christian

cleric. This is clearly not a movement of rapprochement with Christianity.[3)]

Yet among the most important teachings of this movement is a distinctive doctrine of repentance, a theological category at the heart of rabbinic Judaism. In order to appreciate the force of the novelty, I will read a classical formulation of the doctrine in the great legal code of Moses Maimonides, who wrote in an Islamic environment:

> What is repentance (*teshuvah*)? It occurs when the sinner forsakes his sin, and removes it from his thoughts, and concludes in his heart not to do it again.... Let him also regret what has happened.... And let the sinner call to God, who knows all hidden things, to witness that he will never return to sin that sin again.[4)]

Forsaking sin, removing it from one's thoughts, deciding never to repeat the offense, feeling regret, confessing to God: all of these are internal states of mind. There is nothing external to indicate to one's neighbor whether or not this repentance is complete. It is purely a matter between the individual and God.

How different is the doctrine of the German Pietists. The example provided pertains to the archetypal sin, of forbidden sexual relations: "According to the apparent pleasure he felt while kissing and fondling and engaging in sexual intercourse, so he must cause himself pain and afflict himself, balancing the pain against the pleasure." After mandating abstinence from meat and wine, hot bread and bathing, the text continues:

> He should scourge himself each day and lie upon a plank without a pillow, except on the Sabbath and holidays, when he may lie on straw and place a pillow under his head.... He must live a life of sorrow, wearing sackcloth, never speaking about anything related to sexual pleasure.
>
> One who has sexual intercourse with a married woman, an offense punishable by death according to Biblical law, must suffer pain as grievous as death. He should sit in ice or in snow once or twice for an hour, and in the summer he should sit among flies or ants or bees, so as to suffer afflictions as painful as death.... He must weep and confess each day, and suffer all manner of affliction, because he made the woman forbidden to her husband.[5)]

Here we have an extreme form of asceticism, including mortification of the flesh that has no parallel in Maimonides' Code or in the rabbinic literature on which it is based. Despite the ingenuity of some of my colleagues, who claim to have found a precedent in a manuscript of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it seems obvious to me that we have here a dramatic example of the influence of the medieval

Christian penitential literature, which ordains many of the same penances.[6] It is as if the Jewish writers felt on some level that this purely internal transformation was not enough, that the standards set by their Christian neighbors were higher, and that for Jews to have what appeared to be an easier way to repentance was psychologically intolerable.

But there is something more. Remember that Maimonides spoke of individual confession to God, a confession which must put vague feelings into words but should not be public, and not necessarily even out loud. Indeed, the Talmud explicitly states that "one is impertinent [to God] in proclaiming one's sins [to others] (Ber. 34b), indicating that confession should be only to God, and that disclosing one's sins to other human beings can, paradoxically, be an egotistical act of calling attention to one's own behavior. Yet the Pietists limited the force of the Talmudic statement while introducing a new practice:

> When [the Rabbis] said, "one is impertinent [to God] in proclaiming one's sins [to others]," it means that one should not tell them to *everyone*. But if the sinner tells them to a *Sage* so that the Sage will instruct him what to do and how to do penance, it is permitted. The sinner should tell the Sage, "I did such-and-such," so that he may tell him in what manner to do penance.[7]

We find here an individual confession of sins to a sage to learn the mode of penance, despite a Talmudic statement and Maimonides' formulation to the contrary. And this precisely at the time when confession to the priest was being made mandatory for all Roman Catholics, through an ordinance of the 4th Lateran Council in 1215. This is another dramatic example of openness to the dynamic environment of medieval Christianity.

Nor did this practice disappear in Judaism. Centuries later, another movement called "Hasidism" emerged in eastern Europe, in which the figure of the Rebbe or Zaddik was developed as a kind of intermediary between the individual Jew and God. One leading Rebbe of the early nineteenth century, Nahman of Bratslav, wrote as follows:

> The power of the true Zaddik is the source of the mending of all misdeeds. If you wish to inherit everlasting life in the hereafter, try with all your might to draw close to the true Zaddikim and their disciples. And *tell the Zaddik everything that is in your heart, making a full confession*. Your sins will be absolved if you do this.[8]

Here it is not just that the sage to whom the sinner confesses will provide guidance in the appropriate mode of penance. Here the act of confession to a special personality itself brings about absolution from sin. Bratslaver Hasidim would, of course, be astonished and outraged to learn of

any possible Christian influence, even indirect, but the origins of this practice seem obvious.

III. Vicarious Atonement and the Messiah

Another doctrine of obvious centrality both to Judaism and the Jewish-Christian debate is the doctrine of the Messiah. Indeed, the differences between Christianity and Judaism are sometimes defined in an overly simplistic and reductionist way in terms of this belief: "Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah, Jews do not; Christians believe that the Messiah has already come, Jews believe that the world is not yet redeemed and that the messianic advent remains in the future." When we look more deeply into the doctrines, we find differences not just on the identification and timing of the Messiah, but on his nature and function.

This is inextricably bound up with the doctrines of incarnation and vicarious atonement. For Christians, the Messiah came as an incarnation of the divine, who took upon himself the sins of the world and, through his suffering and death, provided atonement for all who believe in him, atonement that cannot be achieved through human initiative alone. For Jews this idea of vicarious atonement—that the Messiah takes upon himself suffering that would otherwise come as punishment to the people for their sins—seems totally alien. The people themselves are directly accountable to God, who may forgive as an act of divine grace, and needs no Messiah to suffer in their stead.

Now let us turn to a passage in the Zohar, one of the towering achievements of medieval western spirituality, the classic text of Kabbalah, or medieval Jewish mysticism. The passage begins by describing the destiny of souls in the Lower Paradise. At times, we are told, they roam about the world in which we live, observing the suffering of human beings. Some of this is "the bodies of sinners undergoing their punishment." But some of it is undeserved suffering, "those who are victims of pain and disease, who suffer for their belief in the unity of [God]. They, then, return [to their place in the Lower Paradise], and make all this known to the Messiah," who, the Kabbalists believed, exists at present in the supernal realm, awaiting the signal from God to enter our world. The passage continues:

> When the Messiah hears of the great suffering of Israel in their dispersion, and of the wicked amongst them who seek not to know their Master, he weeps aloud on account of those wicked ones amongst them, as it is written, *But he was wounded because of our transgression, crushed because of our iniquities* (Isa. 53:5).

The use of the famous verse from Isaiah 53 captures our attention, for the normative medieval

Jewish interpretation—to safeguard against the use of this passage by Christian theologians—was to insist that it did not refer to the Messiah but to a prophet in antiquity, or to the personification of the Jewish people.[9] Yet note that this use does not clearly teach vicarious atonement: the Messiah is pained because of the sins of the Jews and their resulting punishment: "He was crushed because of our iniquities," devastated, aggrieved, disappointed.

But we are not yet finished. The passage continues. After the intelligence report from the peripatetic souls to the Messiah,

> The souls then return to their place. The Messiah, on his part, enters a certain Hall in the Garden of Eden, called the Hall of the Afflicted. There he calls for all the diseases and pains and sufferings of Israel, bidding them settle on himself, which they do. And were it not that he thus eases the burden from Israel, taking it on himself, no one could endure the sufferings meted out to Israel in expiation on account of their neglect of the Torah. So Scripture says, *surely our diseases he did bear* (Isa. 53:4)....
>
> As long as Israel were in the Holy Land, by means of the Temple service and sacrifices they averted all evil diseases and afflictions from the world. Now it is the Messiah who is the means of averting them from mankind until the time when a man quits this world and receives his punishment.[10]

Once again a proof text from the "suffering servant" passage in Isaiah 53, but here the "vicarious atonement" doctrine is unmistakable. The Messiah takes upon himself the suffering deserved by Jews and thereby removes much of it from them.[11] Note the difference from the Christian doctrine: the suffering Messiah of the Zohar does not remove individual accountability in life after death. His suffering occurs *before* he enters the world, not after. But the insistence that it is part of the Messiah's role to suffer and thereby to remove affliction from the Jewish people is unmistakable, and dramatic, and it seems to me undeniable that this reveals the power of the contemporary Christian model. The message to thirteenth-century Jews is clear: if you are prospering, it is not because you are blameless but because the Messiah is suffering the afflictions that you deserve; if you are suffering, know that what you really deserve for your sins actually far, far greater. In either case, your religious failures cause the Messiah untold anguish and pain.

IV. Biblical Exegesis: Jephthah's Daughter

Let us turn now to the area of Biblical exegesis. I mentioned above the influence of Jewish Biblical

scholars on Christians interested in the meaning of the original Hebrew texts. But Christians influenced Jews as well. In the late thirteenth century, Jewish exegetes began to work with the idea of four levels of Biblical interpretation, known by the acronym *pardes*: *peshat*, the simple meaning, *remez*, philosophical allegory, *derash*, homiletical interpretation, and *sod*, mystery, or Kabbalistic symbolism. There is a consensus among scholars that this crystallization reflects, in Jewish terms, the Christian doctrine of four levels of meaning that had been formulated some centuries earlier.[12)]

I will provide one concrete example of the impact of Christian values upon Jewish exegesis. This is the problematic and disturbing story of Jephthah's daughter, found in Judges chapter 11. Jephthah, about to undertake a military campaign against the Ammonites, makes a vow to God that if he prevails, *then whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and shall be offered by me as a burnt offering* (Jud. 11:31). When Jephthah did return, his daughter came out to meet him. Constrained to fulfill his vow, he allowed her to go with her companions for two months *to bewail her maidenhood*, and then *he did to her as he had vowed* (11:39).

It seems absolutely clear that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering, analogous perhaps to Iphigenia at Aulis, and so I had for many years understood the passage. Then I came across an exegetical tradition that spared the daughter's life. It depends on two things. First, a technical grammatical, semantic point (those who do not know biblical Hebrew will need to accept this on trust). This is that the conjunction *vav* in *ve-ha'alitihu*, usually translated "and I will offer it," is ambiguous, and it *can* mean "or I will offer it." Precedent for this is in Exodus 21:15, *makkeh aviv ve-imo mot yumat*, which is understood in the tradition to mean *not* "Whoever strikes his father *and* his mother will be put to death," but whoever strikes his father *or* his mother (obviously an important legal distinction). So in this case, Jephthah vows two alternatives: as the thirteenth-century commentator David Kimhi wrote, "whatever comes forth from my house to meet me shall be the Lord's, consecrated to God, if it is *not* appropriate for a burnt offering, *or* I will offer it as a burnt offering."

More relevant to our subject, the interpretation depends also on an understanding of what it could mean for a young woman to be "consecrated to the Lord" other than being sacrificed. So Kimhi wrote, "Jephthah made her a house and put her in it, and there she was separated from other human beings and the ways of the world....Throughout the year she lived in isolation, just as those recluses who are shut off in certain houses." He is referring here not to a model in Jewish society, but to Christian world-renouncing hermits. Kimhi notes that this interpretation goes against the rabbinic tradition, and he covers himself by writing, "This [analysis] seems correct according to the simple

meaning of the verses; as for the words of our rabbis of blessed memory on this matter [that Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter], if it is a received tradition in their hands, it is incumbent on us to accept it." [13)]

If Kimhi's formulation is not clear enough, here is the late fifteenth-century Spaniard Don Isaac Abravanel:

> She had to be secluded in one house and not to emerge from it all the rest of her life... She said, "I will bewail my virginity," meaning that she would not be able to marry. He also had to go and choose a place where she would stay in her seclusion. I believe that from this the Christians learned to make cloisters for women, into which they would enter, never to set forth again for the rest of their lives and never to see a man as long as they live.[14)]

Now it is clear that the Christians did not learn about cloisters from this ambiguous passage in the Hebrew Scriptures. Rather, Jewish intellectuals derived their interpretation from the Christian practice of nuns in cloisters. What is striking is that the Biblical phrase in the vow, "consecrated to God," is interpreted to be fulfilled through a life of seclusion and virginity. It is impossible to derive this from an internal Jewish tradition of celibate eremiticism. What it shows is that this aspect of Christian spirituality, far removed as it was from most Jewish sources and actual behavior, apparently had some impact.

V. Christian Philosophical Influences on Jewish Preaching

Forms of late medieval Jewish preaching seem clearly to be influenced by philosophical modes of argumentation and discourse that most plausibly entered Jewish homiletics by way of Christian models. In order to make this case, we need to review the evidence that Jews were aware of what Christian preachers were doing. In the early middle ages, a Christian writer, Agobard, archbishop of Lyons, reported with shock that simple Christians say the Jews preach better than do their own elders.[15)] By the late middle ages, the pattern was reversed: Spanish Jews were said to listen to Christian sermons and come away impressed by the high calibre of the discourse, complaining that Jewish preachers fall short by comparison. Isaac Arama, one of the most gifted homileticians from the generation of the Expulsion, wrote in the introduction to his classic homiletical work *'Aqedat Yitsḥaq* about the "profound and articulate speakers" among the Christian neighbors of the Jews. It is a passage worth citing at length:

> In every city, their scholars master all branches of knowledge; their priests and princes stand

at the fore in philosophy, integrating it with their theological doctrine. They have written many books, on the basis of which biblical texts are expounded before large congregations. Each day their preachers give important insights into their religion and faith, thereby sustaining it.

For some time now, calls have gone out far and wide, summoning the people to hear their learned discourses. They have fulfilled their promise. Among those who came were Jews. They heard the preachers and found them impressive; their appetites were whetted for similar fare. This is what they say: 'The Christian scholars and sages raise questions and seek answers in their academies and churches, thereby adding to the glory of the Torah and the prophets, as do the sages of every people....The Gentiles search enthusiastically for religious and ethical content, using all appropriate hermeneutical techniques. But our Torah commentators do not employ this method that everyone admires. Their purpose is only to explain the grammatical forms of words and the simple meaning of the stories and commandments. They have not attempted to fill our need or to exalt the image of our Torah to our own people by regaling them with gems from its narratives and laws.' [16)]

This passage provides striking evidence of cultural competition in the best sense: Jewish awareness of the achievements of philosophically trained Christian theologians in the Spanish universities with a ripple effect felt in the pulpits. According to Arama, Jews who have heard Spanish Christian preachers, come away impressed with their sophisticated approach to biblical texts, and demanded a higher level of discourse in their own synagogues. This is obviously a very different dynamic from the common conception of medieval and early modern Jews stuffing their ears when forced to attend conversionist sermons. Arama—who himself held at most an extremely moderate philosophical worldview—presents himself as responding to this pressure.

What were these hermeneutical techniques that were being used in the sermons and applied to theological problems? Hayyim Ibn Musa, a mid-fifteenth-century Spanish polemicist, wrote in a letter to his son expressing considerable dissatisfaction with a "new type of preacher" overly influenced by philosophy: "most of their sermons consist of syllogistic arguments and quotations from the philosophers. They mention by name Aristotle, Alexander, Themistius, Plato, Averroes, and Ptolemy, while Abaye and Rava are concealed in their mouths." [17)] By the end of the fifteenth century, we have clear evidence of the use of syllogisms as a basic mode of argumentation in Jewish sermons—a technique that clearly did not originate in Jewish traditions.

I provide one simple example, at the beginning of a sermon by the noted Talmudist Isaac Aboab:

You who cleave to the Lord your God live (Deut. 4:4). This thesis is based upon true premises,

> which we shall state. The first is, "Whoever cleaves to God lives". The second is "You cleave to God". The necessary conclusion is, therefore, "You live". This is a syllogism of the first form.... Now the major premise I have taken can be established from (empirical) reality, for we see that the closer anything approaches God, the greater the portion of life it attains....[18)]

Although the preacher was one of the greatest Talmudists of the generation of the Expulsion, his analysis of a biblical verse as the product of an Aristotelian syllogism is obviously far removed from traditional rabbinic homiletical exegesis. The conclusion of the argument found in the verse is totally unremarkable; indeed, it is quite commonplace. But the syllogistic form of the argument indicates that this was a mode of thinking that many found convincing, and that could easily be followed in an oral discourse. The premises themselves could be established through an appeal to a philosophical text, or by biblical verses and rabbinic statements. This is clearly a new manner of preaching; it seems to be a response to the demand, recorded by Isaac Arama, for new tools to approach the Bible, because of the preaching of Christian scholars.

More surprising and more significant than the syllogisms is the appearance of the "Disputed Question" in fifteenth-century sermons, for this was a mode of argumentation derived not from Aristotelian logic but from medieval Christian scholasticism.[19)] The form is relatively simple. A theological or philosophical proposition is presented (often beginning with the word "Whether"), followed by several arguments maintaining that the proposition is untrue. Then comes a series of other arguments maintaining that the proposition is indeed true. Finally, each argument in the original set is refuted by means of philosophical reasoning. The use of this technique in sermons was somewhat controversial because of the arguments used to sustain a proposition that was eventually rejected, and the danger that the listener might remember those initial arguments and forget their rebuttal.[20)] Its appearance in Jewish sermons is therefore all the more striking as evidence of the influence of Christian scholasticism.

One form of this argument can be seen in the sermon by the late-fourteenth century Aragonese rabbi Hasdai Crescas, probably for the Sabbath preceding Passover, in which he explores the question "Whether or not the miracle creates faith in the human soul without the concurrence of the will?"[21)] Crescas gives four arguments on one side—that the will must always be involved in the attainment of faith. Then he provides four arguments on the other side: that the will is *not* involved in the process by which a miracle produces faith. This turns out to be the position Crescas accepts, and he eventually proceeds to refute the four original arguments that appeared to oppose it.[22)]

A second example comes from the circle of Crescas's disciples. Several pages of the text of one of

the sermons are devoted to the question, "Is the act performed by means of a vow and acceptance [of it as obligatory] more praiseworthy . . . [than] the very same act done without a vow and acceptance [of its obligatory nature]." Five arguments are brought for the superiority of an act performed freely without the constraint of the vow, then four for the superiority of the act in fulfillment of a vow, then five universally accepted premises, arranged in syllogisms, to prove the superiority of the act fulfilling a vow, and finally the refutation of the first five arguments purporting to sustain the antithesis.[23] Here we seem to be far closer to the disputations of the medieval universities than to the argumentation of the Tosafist Talmudic scholars of northern Europe.

VI. The Other as Model

I conclude with one final expression of this theme of openness to the Other. Some time ago I started collecting passages in which, in the context of self-criticism, particularly in sermons, Christian writers point to areas of religious life where they believe that Jews are doing better, and Jewish preachers identify those aspects of Christian behavior from which their listeners could learn. To my surprise, I discovered that medieval and early modern Christian preachers (occasionally) spoke with a grudging admiration about the Jews' devotion to the Sabbath and holy days, their abhorrence for blasphemous language and profanity, their commitment to education, and their willingness to suffer and sacrifice for their faith. As for Jewish writers, I will share just two passages, among my favorites, as they combine the element of self-criticism (as in passages cited in my lecture) with an expression of positive attitudes toward the Christian neighbors.

The first is Solomon Alami, whose critique of Spanish Jewish society following the pogroms of 1391 I cited in my lecture. At one point, he turns to behavior in the synagogue:

> Look what happens when a congregation [of Jews] gathers to hear words of Torah from a sage. Slumber weighs upon the eyes of the officers; others converse about trivial affairs. The preacher is dumbfounded by the talking of men and the chattering of women standing behind the synagogue. If he should reproach them because of their behavior, they continue to sin, behaving corruptly, abominably. This is the opposite of the Christians. When their men and women gather to hear a preacher, they stand together in absolute silence, marveling at his rebuke. Not one of them dozes as he pours out his words upon them. They await him as they do the rain, eager for the waters of his counsel. *We have not learned properly from those around us*.

Two centuries later, Saul Levi Morteira, the leading rabbi of the recently established Portuguese Jewish community of Amsterdam berated his congregation by citing and then exemplifying a statement from the Talmud, "You have followed them in their corruption, you have failed to emulate their good" (Sanh 39b):

> Look at the Gentiles among whom we live. We learn from them styles of clothing and arrogance, but we do not learn from them silence during prayer. We are like them in consuming their cheeses and their wine, but we are not like them with regard to justice, righteousness, and honesty. We are like them in shaving our beard or modeling it in their style, but we are not like them in their refraining from cursing or swearing in God's name. We are like them in frequenting underground game rooms, but we are not like them in turning from vengeance and refraining from bearing hatred in our hearts. We are like them in fornicating with their daughters, but we are not like them in conducting business affairs with integrity and fairness.[24)]

Needless to say, contemporary Christian moralists whether in Spain or in Amsterdam, painted a considerably less rosy picture of their own societies. The point here is not so much the reality of the other as the perception: there were areas at which the competition appeared to be doing better. As part of the rhetoric of rebuke, it was effective to be able to argue that, measured against the actual behavior of Christian neighbors, Jews should find themselves to be wanting.

VII. Conclusion

I hope I have succeeded in presenting an alternative to the prevalent, totally dismal picture of intergroup relations in pre-modern times. In most areas of medieval Europe, Jews were not sealed off from the world around them. Despite the occasional outbursts of persecution, despite their own hostility toward much of the Christian world, they were open to positive influences of the external, Christian culture, capable of incorporating aspects of this culture in Judaism. More than this, it might be argued that Judaism survived and flourished precisely because of this openness. Each side was capable of learning from the other, of using the other not just as a dangerous or demonic adversary, but as a challenge to creative competition in ethical and religious living.

Notes

1) See on this Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (New York: Philosophical Library,1952), 149–72, 329–55; Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963).
2) See, e.g., Alexander Broadie, "Maimonides and Aquinas", in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1997), 281–93, with bibliography of other articles on this topic (including one by Professor Harvey) on pp. 292–93); John Y. B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), esp. pp. 44–45.
3) See on this Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), chap. 8: "The Ḥasid".
4) Maimonides, *Code of Jewish Law* (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance (*Hilkhot Teshuvah*), 2:3, ca. 1180.
5) Eleazer of Worms, *Sefer ha-Roke'aḥ, Laws of Repentance* (*Hilkhot Teshuvah*), ca.1200.
6) *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: a Translation of the Principal "Libri Poenitentiales" and Selections from Related Documents*, by John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
7) Judah Hasid, *Sefer Hasidim*, cited in Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden, 1981), 83 (with prior discussion beginning p. 74).
8) Nathan of Nemirov, *Likutey Etzot, Teshuvah* A, cited in Joseph Dan, *Teachings of Hasidism* (West Orange, NJ, Behrman House Publishing, 1983), 80. Cf. Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 60–61, n. 79, with reference to a major article on the topic by Ada Rapoport Albert.
9) For a fine recent discussion of the interpretation of the "suffering servant" in Isaiah 53 as referring to the Jewish people, see Elliott Horowitz, "Isaiah's Suffering Servant and the Jews: From the Nineteenth Century to the Ninth," in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations: In Honor of David Berger*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schacter (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 419–36.
10) Zohar, *Va-Yaqhe*l, 212a; translated in *The Zohar* (London: The Soncino Press, 1984), 5 vols., 4:200–201; cf. Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (New York: Avon Books, 1979), 115–16.
11) There are many Jewish texts, both earlier and later than this, about suffering as one of the characteristics of the Messiah; see Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, pp. 104–21, especially the passages from the early medieval Midrash *Pesikta Rabbati*. In many case, the idea is that it is part of the job description: the Messiah will not be welcomed by all but will be resisted, humiliated, oppressed by some, even among the Jews. The explicit insistence that the suffering voluntarily accepted by Messiah even before he begins his earthly career diminishes the suffering of the Jewish people in history, and the association of this with Isaiah 53, is extremely unusual. This theme of vicarious atonement in Jewish understanding of the Messiah has not been extensively analysed. Cf. Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 34 (where vicarious atonement is presented as one motif of several that Moshe Idel refers to as the

via passionis in messianic thought, and Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Heb.), (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997), 17, where the suffering Messiah (but without vicarious atonement) is mentioned as one approach to the messianic character, noting that "it stands to reason that Christian sources contributed to the development of this image in medieval Jewish philosophy." Neither of these cites the Zohar passage or provides specific examples of vicarious atonement. In a long footnote of an extremely long article, Yehuda Liebes briefly discusses this Zoharic passage, recognizing the novelty of vicarious atonement and noting that the Zohar's application of verses from Isaiah 53 to this theme is "indeed like the Christian interpretation". Liebes 'The Messiah of the Zohar' (Heb.), in *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (Heb.), (Jerusalem: Israeli National Academy of the Sciences, 1982), 206, n. 406,

12) For the Christian background, see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* , vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998). On the influence on Jewish commentators, see Frank Talmage, "Medieval Christian Exegesis and its Interaction with Jewish Exegesis" (Heb.) in *Jewish Bible Exegesis: An Introduction* (Heb.), ed. Moshe Greenberg (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1983), 101–12, especially his discussion of Christian influence on Jewish exegesis, including the four levels, beginning on p. 107.
13) See on this Naomi Grunhaus, *The Challenge of Received Tradition: Dilemmas of Interpretation in Radak's Biblical Commentaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 112, where the comment is discussed not as evidence of any Christian influence but as an example of divergence between the apparently simple meaning as understood by the commentator and the rabbinic tradition.
14) Isaac Abravanel, *Perush al Nevi'im Rishonim* [Commentary on the Early Prophets] (Jerusalem, 1955), 130. This interpretation is mentioned by Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 112; but here too no suggestion of Christian influence is recognized.
15) Agobard of Lyons, *De insolentia iudaeorum*, cited in Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 127.
16) Isaac Arama, *Aqedat Yitsḥaq* (Warsaw 1883), 8a, translation in Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching, 1200–1800: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 392–93.
17) Ḥayyim ibn Musa, "Letter to His Son," translated in Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200–1800*, 392–93. Abaye and Rava were leading authorities in the legal disputes of the Babylonian Talmud.
18) Isaac Aboab, *Nehar Pishon* (Zolkiew 1806), 23a.
19) Cf. the overview by T. M. Rudavsky, "The Impact of Scholasticism on Jewish Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 345–70.
20) Thus one late fifteenth-century preacher introduced his discussion of "Whether God forgives the penitent" with a defense of the Disputed Question, a defense necessary because "whoever uses

this form is required in some way to give support for the proposition antithetical to the truth, and this may sometimes cause problems for the masses." Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200–1800*, 395–96.

21) On the formulation of this question compare *Thomas Aquinas*, Summa theologica II-II Question 6, Article 1.

22) See on this work (and other similar texts), Aviezer Ravitzky, *Rabbi Hasdai Crescas's Passover Sermon and Investigations of his Philosophical Doctrine* (Heb.), (Jerusalem: Israeli National Academic of the Sciences, 1988). When Crescas incorporated this problem into his philosophical work, *Or ha-Shem*, he eliminated the formal aspect of the Disputed Question by including only the arguments on the side he favored. Apparently he considered the Disputed Question more appropriate for a sermon than for a philosophical work.

23) The Hebrew text of this passage is in Marc Saperstein, *"Your Voice Like a Ram's Horn": Themes and Texts in Traditional Jewish Preaching* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1996), 231–38; my translation, 200–207. Ari Ackerman has recently shown that this entire passage is apparently based on a passage in Aquinas: "Zerahia Halevi Saladin and Thomas Aquinas on Vows," *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 19,1 (2011), 47–71.

24) These and other texts of this nature, both Christian and Jewish, can be found in Marc Saperstein, *"Your Voice Like a Ram's Horn"*, 45–54.