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The Resurrection of Jesus and Human Beings in Medieval Christian and Jewish Theology and Polemical Literature

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The resurrection of Jesus was a significant issue in Jewish-Christian polemical literature in the Middle Ages, though it does not appear to be the most prominent one in relation to other issues that appear in polemical texts.¹ Themes of Jesus as Messiah, his incarnation and divinity, the abrogation of the Mosaic Law—all these took center stage then and remain central in Jewish-Christian dialogue even today.² Nevertheless, the theme of resurrection was important because of its place in Jewish and Christian theology in general.

The theme of resurrection was very important for medieval Jews and Christians because of its association with the salvation question. It actually illustrates different views of salvation. In the Christian belief system, Jesus, as the Messiah, not only was the first to be raised from the dead but also was acknowledged as the primary agent of the resurrection of human beings. Those who believe this gain at least the possibility of entrance into eternal life. Everyone will rise to face final judgment, but things will go better on that day for those who believe in Jesus, the true Messiah and Risen Lord, than for nonbelievers. Jews, on the other hand, have different ideas about who will rise and who will enter into the World to Come. Generally, only the righteous will rise, regardless of their beliefs. But one thing is certain: Jews do not acknowledge that Jesus has any role in the salvation process, and therefore, his resurrection has no bearing on their theological understanding of resurrection. What is at stake in regard to the resurrection

¹ This chapter was presented as a paper at the Academy of Jewish-Christian Studies sessions, The Medieval Studies Congress, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 4th, 2006. I wish to thank professors Lawrence Frizzell and Asher Finkel of Seton Hall University, the organizers of the session, for their comments at the conference and for their subsequent comments on this chapter.

² For example, there has not been a major Christian work on contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue dealing with the resurrection issue. When Pinchas Lapidé published his *The Resurrection of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1983), he became the first Jewish scholar to write specifically on the resurrection of Jesus in the context of contemporary Jewish-Christian relations.

issue for both communities is the answer to the major question: who is the true people of God who will be raised by God at the end times?

This article will first look at intra-religious discussion among medieval Christians and Jews about resurrection in general to see how they understood it theologically in their respective religious communities. We will see that the resurrection is embodied in many other issues of theology such as the concepts of messianic redemption, eschatology and salvation. The resurrection also appears in the issues of biblical exegesis, the interpretation of biblical prophecy (hermeneutics), and the meaning of history in the context of divine revelation. We will then focus our attention on how the issue of the resurrection of Jesus appeared in medieval Jewish and Christian polemical literature, especially in the polemical works of two Spanish authors, Moses Nachmanides (1194-1270) and Alonso de Espina (d. 1464).

Medieval Christian Theology and the Resurrection of Jesus

“Jesus has been raised; hope that you will rise. He is blessed; believe also that you are blessed. He is immortal; believe that you will be immortal. He is luminous and clear; and you also are illuminated of the glory (next to Christ) and the right of the Father.”³

This theological assertion in the sermon on the resurrection of the Franciscan Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce (c. 1425-1495) summarizes the medieval Christian approach to the entire theme of resurrection – not only is the resurrection important for the person of God whose resurrection showed that he was Savior and Messiah but also its effects are important for the

³ Roberto Caracciolo, *Opere in Volgare*, ed. Enzo Esposito (Galatina: Congedo Editore, 1993), 264.

resurrection of those who believed in him.⁴ Belief in the Risen Christ was considered to be the very Christian foundation for hope in rising to new life and the enjoyment of blessed life with God the Father. He was the hope in the transformation of the human being from earthly life to the heavenly life of the blessed. The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, was the centerpiece of the Christian faith.

The medieval approach to the resurrection of Jesus was founded on the New Testament witness to Risen Christ. The Apostle Paul declared: "If Christ be not raised, our faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). Jesus' resurrection was the first-fruit of things to come in the Messianic kingdom. In the Gospel of Mark (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34), Jesus told his disciples that they would not understand who he really was until he had risen from the dead. According to the New Testament, not only has Jesus been raised but he also becomes the agent of the resurrection of all human beings. With his ascension into heaven, Jesus became the title "Risen Lord," and assumed the role of the judge of all humanity in the Last Judgment after the general resurrection of the dead that will come at the end of time. The foundation element or starting point in New Testament Christology is the resurrection of Jesus, and all other elements are based on the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead.

The doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus seems to constitute a minor focus for western medieval Christian theology as this is not the starting point of medieval theology. A survey of topics covered in the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, and the *Breviloquium* of Bonaventure reveals that these major theologians focused primarily—at least in page length—on the Trinity, creation, incarnation, sin and redemption, and the sacraments. In light of

⁴ This follows the scholastic pattern as we find in Thomas Aquinas and other medieval authors to see what effect any activity of Christ had on himself and then on the human being.

the claims Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 15, it seems strange that the resurrection of Jesus was not a more important topic for these theologians and the starting point for their theological reflection. However, for medieval theologians, all sub-categories of theology are related to one another (i.e., "the whole is in each part").⁵ The resurrection, therefore, appears as a significant element in the total theological enterprise. Theology, Christology, and soteriology were not seen as separate entities.

The resurrection of the dead usually appears in the last sections of theological treatises in which eschatology (the "Last Things") and the sacraments are discussed. Peter Lombard takes up resurrection of the dead in Book IV of the *Sentences* (distinctions 43-50). Bonaventure speaks of it in the *Breviloquium* in the context of the passion of Christ (Part IV, questions 8-10) and the resurrection of the body (Part IV, question 5).⁶ Thomas Aquinas covers it in four chapters of the *Summa Theologiae* (Third Part, questions 53-56);⁷ and the Supplement

⁵ Thomas F. O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 87. As O'Meara states: "To study, to ponder, to teach the theology of Thomas Aquinas is to see its great themes unfold, to see them illumine each other, as their patterns display his genius. These ideas offer a Christian interpretation of reality. Not a few theologians and philosophers have observed that when a system treats one area, other areas are implicitly considered. This is true in Aquinas' works: for instance, it is hard to learn about the Holy Spirit without considering human freedom, or to discuss baptism is to consider at the same time Jesus' life. Principles and key ideas appear within various topics, disclosing the networks of being and grace. The whole is in each part. What each page is about is God, nevertheless, this is a God who creates human beings, who lets creation act through its own powers, and who then shares an inner divine life with intellectual creatures." Quoted from page 87.

⁶ On Bonaventure and the resurrection of Jesus, see John Saward, "The Flesh Flowers Again: St. Bonaventure and the Aesthetics of the Resurrection," *Downside Review*, 110 (1992): 1-29.

⁷ The titles of these sections are: "Of Christ's Resurrection," "Of the Quality of the Resurrection," "Of the Manifestation of Christ's Resurrection," and "Of the Causality of Christ's Resurrection." On Thomas Aquinas and the resurrection

to the Third Part of the *Summa* deals with the resurrection of Jesus as the foundation for the resurrection of human beings during the end times.⁸ In Thomas's *Summa contra Gentiles*, a text written against all unbelievers (Jews and Muslims in particular), the resurrection is discussed in a few sections toward the end of the work.⁹

Important for our consideration is the Christian belief that the resurrection of Christ is integral to the whole process of justification, salvation, and glorification of humanity.¹⁰ To speak of the resurrection of the dead without Christ, who is the mediator between God and human beings, is theologically impossible for the medieval Christian theologian. Jesus' own resurrection and the resurrection of believers are two sides of one coin. Thomas and Bonaventure connected the resurrection to the passion of Christ as an interconnected process that leads to salvation. Thomas claimed that the resurrection is the efficient and exemplary cause of our salvation and resurrection. Christ chose to die in order to cleanse us from sin (passion) and also

of Jesus, see Jean-Pierre Torrell et al., *Le Christ en Ses Mystères: la vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Vol. II (Paris: Desclé, 1999), 537-648.

⁸ A number of questions in the Supplement of the *Summa Theologiae* (questions 75-87) deal with what happens to human beings in the resurrection. The most important issue is found in Question 75: Whether Christ's resurrection is the cause of our resurrection. On Thomas Aquinas and the resurrection, see Garlo Leget, "Eschatology," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykov (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 365-385, especially 372-375; and Pim Valkenberg, "Aquinas and Christ's Resurrection: The Influence of the *Lectura super Ioannem* 20-21 on the *Summa Theologiae*," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 277-289.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Four: Salvation*, chapters 79-95.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Supplement to the Third Part, question 76.

chose to rise from the grave in order to free us from death (resurrection).¹¹ In other terms, the passion of Christ removes evil (atonement) and is the cause of the eventual destruction of human death; and the resurrection of Christ is the cause of the resurrection of human beings and produces the beginning of new life in them (promotion of good).¹²

The Resurrection of Jesus in Medieval Christian Anti-Jewish Polemical Literature

A review of medieval Christian polemical texts against Jews shows that, while the resurrection of Jesus was not the most discussed issue, it was nonetheless significant. For example, when one reviews the substantial text written against Jews, the *Fortalitium Fidei* of the Spanish Franciscan Alonso de Espina (d. 1464),¹³ one sees the relatively minor importance to the resurrection in polemical literature. In the theological chapters four and five of Book III, "On the Jews," there are forty-eight arguments on the meaning of scriptural passages from the Old and New Testaments. Many of these arguments deal exclusively with the messiahship of Jesus. They also describe

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, chapter 79, no. 2.

¹² Thomas bases this on Romans 6:4. See Valkenberg, 58.

¹³ Alonso de Espina is an important source in medieval polemical literature because he collected and summarized many issues concerning resurrection found in previous polemical literature and his *Fortalitium Fidei* is a useful tool to discover what issues the resurrection theme elicited in the Middle Ages. He gathered many of the arguments from earlier polemical literature and synthesized them into a compendium. They are based, for the most part, on an allegorical or spiritual interpretation of passages from the Old Testament. See Steven J. McMichael, "The Sources for Alfonso de Espina's Messianic Argument Against the Jews in the *Fortalitium Fidei* ," in *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Robert I. Burns, S.J.* , ed. Larry J. Simon (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 72-95. For a detailed presentation on the medieval Christian and Jewish approach to the biblical texts concerning the Messiah, see Steven J. McMichael, *Was Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah? Alphonso de Espina's Argument Against the Jews in the "Fortalitium Fidei" (c.1464)* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

the Christian approach to the Mosaic Law, Jesus' equality with God the Father, the practice of circumcision, and the observance of the Jewish Sabbath. The resurrection theme appears to be hardly an issue at all if one looks only at the pages invested in this issue. Yet, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is interconnected with all other topics of Christian belief, especially that of the Christian belief that Jesus was the Messiah and the Second Person of the Trinity. It is this connection between Jesus' messiahship and his resurrection for the dead that shows how important the latter issue was for medieval Christian polemical writers.

De Espina clearly believed that the Old Testament taught that the Messiah was to rise from the dead. For him, the biblical texts also proved that Jesus was the Messiah, and therefore the link between the Messiah and resurrection was made in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. For these writers, a non-literal (figurative or allegorical) interpretation of the Old Testament passages provides typological ways to read Jesus and resurrection into key passages of scripture.¹⁴ The Messiah had already arrived and is now at the right hand of God the Father and will return only at the time of the general resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment (or in apocalyptic thought, he will come back to defeat the Antichrist and then gather all the faithful to himself in the new age). As we shall see, this is a rebuttal of the Jewish claim that the Messiah has not yet come and that he does not have any role in setting up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem.

One of Alonso's major concerns in his *Fortalium Fidei* is to show how the scriptural authorities or proof texts from the Old Testament foretold the resurrection of Jesus. Among sev-

¹⁴ Robert Chazan provides us with a review of this issue between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages. See Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 122-140

eral scripture passages that speak of resurrection, the principal one is Hosea 6:2: *He will revive us after two days; on the third day he will raise us up, to live in his presence.* Alonso states that "faithful Hebrews" have interpreted this text as prophesying the coming of the Messiah, rather than his resurrection. He points out that Rabbi Solomon (Rashi, 1040-1105) interpreted this text to speak of the tribulation the Jews are experiencing [presently] because of their dispersion throughout the world, and that they pray publicly and privately for their liberation through the expected Messiah. Rashi divides the three days in the following way: the first day is the time of the First Temple of Solomon and the first night the time of the "Chaldeans" who destroyed the Temple. The second day is the time of the Second Temple rebuilt by Zorobabel and the night is represented by the Romans who destroyed the Second Temple. The Third Temple, representing the third day, will be rebuilt by the Messiah which is foretold at the end of Ezekiel. Alonso considers Rashi's interpretation of Hosea 6:2 to be totally false because no third material temple will be built by the Messiah according to Christian interpretation. A correct interpretation of this passage is: *He will revive us after two days* refers to the death and burial of the Messiah himself; and on the third day he will raise us up refers to the resurrection in which human beings will be raised up for eternal life. Clearly Hosea 6:2 (and all other prophetic texts) were fulfilled in the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Another important text considered by medieval Christians to refer to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus is taken from the fifty-second chapter of Isaiah (52:13 and 15), which reads: *Behold my servant shall understand, he shall be exalted, and be raised, and shall be exceeding uplifted;* and there follows: *That one shall sprinkle many nations.* According to Alonso, the Aramaic translation has: "Behold my servant, the Messiah, will be made prosperous." The ancient Jews, from this verse until the end of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, have

explained these verses as speaking literally about the passion of the Christ. *Behold my servant shall understand*, means that he will have divine knowledge from eternity and human knowledge in time. *He shall be exalted* toward the unity of the divine substance (*suppositi divini*); *and will be raised* in his Ascension; *and shall be exceeding uplifted* when he sits at the right hand of God, the Father. According to Alonso, these various interpretations all lead to the conclusion that the Messiah was to be God, which is confirmed by Rabbi Aquiba, who said of the Messiah: "He will be exalted more than Abraham and he will be elevated more than Moses, and will be lifted on high far more than the angels." Thus it is appropriate that the verse, *That one shall sprinkle many nations* be applied to the Messiah who will cleanse humanity with his blood and baptism. These things were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Another major issue that arises based on Hosea 6 concerns what happens to the Messiah after his own death and resurrection. The Jews, according to Alonso, interpret the words in Hosea 6:2—*to live in his presence*—to mean that the messiah will sit at the right hand of God the Father after his resurrection. Investigating the Talmud and Jewish Midrashic texts, Christian polemical writers like Alonso supposed the early Jewish rabbis believed that the Messiah would sit at the right hand of God the Father. Other prophetic texts that speak of the "right hand," "right side," "the throne(s)," etc. were associated with David. Since Jewish interpretation of Hosea 6 leads them to consider other texts that speak of David, Christians conclude that this does fit a Christian interpretation of these same texts because of the early Christian association of Jesus with David. The Jewish interpretation of the Talmud and *midrashim* prevents them from seeing the true meaning of these texts—that Jesus was the Messiah, that he was to rise from the dead, and that he would sit at the right hand of God the Father.

Another major issue is the reward for following Jesus, which is the resurrection of true believers. Espina turns his attention to the prophecy contained in Isaiah 65:13-16 and 51:11-12 which speaks about the rewards for the true followers (the Christians) of the Messiah, namely, his grace in the present life and eternal glory in the future life; and the punishments for those who do not believe in the Messiah (and who are thus condemned), namely, the Jews. While true believers will experience eternal life, the persecutors of the true Messiah are destined to endure perpetual punishment in this life and eternal damnation in the future life (Amos 2:6). The focus of the argument is on the meaning of the "fourth crime of Israel" which, for our author, is the killing of Jesus of Nazareth. For killing Christ, the Jews have been punished in a threefold way: they have lost their status as the people of God; Jerusalem and the Temple now lay desolate; and Israel has turned into a wasteland and an appointed desolation.

A review of this polemical text of de Espina gives us an example of what some medieval Christians were thinking in terms of the consequences of denying that Jesus was the Messiah and that he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday morning. Such literature demonstrates that the Jewish rejection of Jesus' messiahship and resurrection shows that Jews did not know how to read their own scriptures. This not only harmed them in the present life (their subservient status) but also blinded them to their own fate in the next life, i.e., eternal damnation.¹⁵ Such

¹⁵ De Espina gives a lengthy interpretation of Isaiah 65:13-16, in which he shows how the positive statements for the "true servants" (the Christians) signify that they will be rewarded and how the negative statements for the unfaithful, the Jews, reveal that they will be eternally punished. What should clearly lead the Jews to see the association of these texts with Jesus of Nazareth is thwarted by the Jewish way of misinterpreting the scriptures they share. The use of the Talmud and midrashim by the Jews leads to their misinterpreting their own scriptures, and confirms what Jeremiah said about the Jews: you have perverted the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts (Jeremiah 23:36), and does not speak the truth. The Jews have taught their tongue to speak lies (Jeremiah 9:5). Having asserted this, de Espina can then

blindness led them to much confusion not only about the identity and role of Messiah but also about the doctrine of the resurrection. Thus they were divided about who and what would be raised in the general resurrection of the dead. They were also ignorant of who was the real agent of the resurrection, i.e., Jesus himself. From de Espina's perspective, the Jews were merely "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic." In other words, they were arguing and discussing issues among themselves that prevented them from recognizing not only their own blindness about their present status in salvation history but also about their own future status as the final age of the world came to a close.¹⁶ The present punishment for not recognizing Jesus as the Messiah was bad enough; the eternal agony for Jewish unbelief was unspeakable.

Medieval Christian polemicists such as Alonso de Espina were aware of the diversity of beliefs among Jews in regard to the resurrection, and they used this knowledge to attack Judaism.¹⁷ For example, in chapter three of Book III of the *Fortalitium Fidei*, de Espina shows how divided the Jews were among themselves regarding the existence of souls after death, the resurrection of the dead, and the identity and role of

the Messiah.¹⁸ Concerning the soul, de Espina was aware that Sadducees did not believe that souls remain after death. He was also aware that other Jews (unnamed) did believe that souls remain, but they did not believe in pain or recompense in the World to Come. Certain medieval Jews believe in the transfer of souls from one to another and from one being into another, while others hold that souls are eternal without beginning, and others hold that the souls were created at the beginning of the world.

Concerning the resurrection, de Espina presents the wide spectrum of beliefs among the Jews:

[Some Jews] say that souls will exist in another world, refined from every body by retaining the glory of God. Others hold that body and soul will be rejoined. Some Jews hold that they will eat and drink and have sons, and that everyone will eat one fish which is called Leviathan.¹⁹ And some others say that they will have enough to eat of that fish through the space of two million years, and that they will eat the feminine part of this Leviathan, which has been placed in brine for them from the creation of the world; and that they will drink wine, also

make the following observation: "Behold how clear in their books they are condemned as falsifiers and liars who have changed the word of God. It is Holy Spirit that proclaims that all things in the Talmud are lies and false so that through the word the blindness of the Jews is confounded." The Latin text reads: "Nec consensit Spiritus Sanctus quod omnia in Talmuth essent mendacia et falsa ut per verba ibidem inserta confunderetur cecitas Judeorum" (Fol. XLVrb).

¹⁶ On de Espina and eschatological/apocalyptic thought, see Steven J. McMichael, "The End of the World, Antichrist, and the Final Conversion of the Jews in the *Fortalitium Fidei* of Friar Alonso de Espina (d. 1464)," *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2006): 224-273.

¹⁷ This diversity is recounted in Ramon Llull's *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* found in *Doctor Illuminatus: A Ramon Llull Reader*, trans. Anthony Bonner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 114-115.

¹⁸ De Espina states that he is quoting from the *Libro de las batallas de Dios* (Hebrew: *Milhamot Adonay* or *Milhamot ha-sem*) written by Alfonso de Valladolid (Abner de Burgos) (c. 1270-c. 1350), which is no longer extant. On his work, see *Biblioteca Biblica Iberica Medieval*, ed. Klaus Reinhardt and Horacio Santiago-Otero (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas-Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1986), 83-88. Benzion Netanyahu states that this Third Consideration "was, it seems, taken in its entirety from the 33rd chapter of Avner of Burgos' *Batallas de Dios*. Espina indicates only the beginning of the quotation" (159). Yet, as evidenced in the Spanish text found in an article by Isidore Loeb, *REJ*, 18 (1889), 60-2, almost the whole Third Consideration is actually borrowed from Abner's *Mostrador de Justicia*.

¹⁹ The Targum to Genesis 1:21 states: "God created the great sea monsters, Leviathan and his mate, that are designated for the day of consolation, and all living creatures that creep ..." Quoted from *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, trans. Michael Maher (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 41.

being from the creation of the world, that is reserved in their grapes. Others believe that they will be without food and drink, and without any union with woman. Still others believe that there will not be a resurrection of the dead.²⁰ Many Jews believe that all will rise. Others believe that only the children of Israel will rise. Other Jews say only the just children of Israel will rise. Others believe that the just of the Gentiles will also rise. Other Jews believe that after the resurrection they will die a second time. Others believe that after the resurrection they will never die again. Others believe that after the resurrection they will be in a terrestrial paradise. Others believe that they will be in a celestial paradise.²¹

De Espina presents these various views to show that Jews are a confused and ignorant people. What he wanted to show ultimately was that the Jews were “just as sheep without a shepherd...because they have abandoned the true shepherd, whom, from his way and doctrine, they have been distancing themselves, he who was the true Messiah Jesus Christ our

²⁰These are the Sadducees. This is one doctrine of the Sadducees that the Kariates did not accept.

²¹The Latin text reads: “Alii dicunt quod anime erunt in alio mundo expoliata ab omni corpore recipiendo gloriam dei. Alii dicunt quod erunt ubi anime cum corporibus. Alii eorum credunt quod comedent et bibent et facient filios et quod comedent omnes unum piscem qui dicitur Leviathan. Et aliqui dicunt quod habebunt stasis ad comedendum in illo pisce per spacium duorum milium annorum, et quod comedent feminam huius Leviathan que est in sale posita pro eis a creatione mundi, et quod bibent vinum quod servatur in suis uvis etiam a creatione mundi. Alii eorum credunt quod erunt ibi sine cibo et potu et sine coniunctione cum mulieribus. Alii eorum credunt resurrectionem mortuorum numquam futuram. Alii eorum credunt quod omnes homines resurgent. Alii credunt quod solum resurgent filii Israel. Alii dicunt quod solum illi qui fuerunt iusti de Israel resurgent. Alii credunt quod etiam iusti aliarum gentium resurgent. Alii eorum credunt quod post resurrectionem iterum sunt morituri. Alii credunt quod post resurrectionem numquam amplius morientur. Alii eorum credunt quod post resurrectionem erunt in paradiso terrestri. Alii eorum credunt quod erunt in paradiso celesti” (Fol. LXXXra-rb).

Lord, who came to them to show them the right way lest they would perish, because he is the way, truth and life (John 14:6).”²² Instead of following the way and doctrine of Jesus Christ, the Jews wander in their blindness and infidelity while clinging to “the Law of the Pharisees.”²³

What de Espina does not report here—because he might not be aware of it?—is that Christians also had problems with the resurrection of Jesus, as evidenced from 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Timothy 2:17-18 and from the intra-Christian debates during the patristic period and Middle Ages. Medieval Christians struggled especially over the role of the body and its connection with the soul in the resurrection of the dead. None of these problems within the Christian community about the resurrection appear in this polemical literature, illustrating the main problem of the polemical mindset. It “naturally forces those engaged in it to adopt hardened positions, to avoid statements of ambiguity (even where ambiguity might exist), and to characterize their opponents in the harshest black-and-white terms.”²⁴

²² The Latin text reads: “... sicut oves sine pastore ab illo tunc quoniam dimiserunt verum pastorem quem hebebant elongantes se ab eius via et doctrina qui fuit verus Messias Jehus Christe Dominus noster qui venit eis ad ostendendum viam rectam ne perirent cum *sit via veritatis et vita*, Joannis xiiii. (Fol. LXXXrb).

²³The Latin text reads: “et extunc usque nunc credunt isti Judei in lege Phariseorum et propter talia accidentia voluuntur semper de una fide in alteram et cursunt devii et mutabiles sicut oves sine pastore ab illo tunc quoniam dimiserunt verum pastorem quem hebebant elongantes se ab eius via et doctrina qui fuit verus Messias Jehus Christe Dominus noster qui venit eis ad ostendendum viam rectam ne perirent cum *sit via veritatis et vita*, Joannis xiiii” (Fol. LXXXrb).

²⁴ Thomas E. Burman, “Juan de Segovia and Qur’an Reading in Europe, 1140-1560.” The quote comes from an earlier version of an article that Thomas wrote that is now published in his *Reading the Qur’an in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, 178-197. On the problems of the resurrection in early and medieval Christian thought, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

Medieval Jews were actually aware of their own differences in regard to beliefs about the rewards and punishments accruing from observing or transgressing the commandments. Many of these differences are listed in de Espina's presentation. For medieval Jews, holding different opinions about what was to be expected during the messianic times and in the World to Come was never considered a sign of weakness or as a lack of guidance. Maimonides, for example, listed a number of opinions concerning what good was to be expected in the World to Come (the goal), but argued that one should rather emphasize performing virtuous acts and avoiding base ones, knowing the truth, and becoming servers of God out of love (the means to the goal). Belief in the thirteen principles of faith leads to living out the commandments: "When these fundamental principles are established by a man and he truly believes in them, he then enters into the collective unit of Israel, and it is obligatory upon us to love him and to have compassion upon him and to do all that God commended us to do for one another, referring to acts of love and brotherhood."²⁵

Earlier Christian anti-Jewish writings focused on certain of these positions regarding the resurrection. For example, Christian polemicists targeted the Jewish belief that "they will be resurrected and that they will once more inhabit the earth."²⁶ This was very important to the twelfth-century Spanish Jewish convert Petrus Alfonsi.²⁷ He wondered: Will the Jews be raised with their mental powers? What is the role of the body in resur-

²⁵ Quoted from Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah: Tractate Sanhedrin*, 157.

²⁶ Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers*, 25.

²⁷ Titulus XI, Migne P.L.157, 650-56. On the issues, see Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers*, 26; Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London/New York, 1995), 100-101; Migne P.L.157, 651. On Petrus Alfonsi and the resurrection, see Barbara Phyllis Hurwitz, "Fidei Causa et Tui Amore: The Role of Petrus Alphonsi's Dialogues in the History of Jewish-Christian Debate," (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1983), 71-83.

rection? Will there be reproduction during the millennium? If so, will the children experience death or will they be immortal? Who will lead them?²⁸ Thomas Aquinas explicitly attacked the error of both Jews and Muslims who, he thought, expected eating and sexual activity in the risen state.²⁹ The questions center on the principal theme of the resurrection of the body and its rejoining the soul at the time of the resurrection. This is a major issue in the respective internal debates among Christians and Jews.

Christian authors argued against the Jewish beliefs that they will inhabit the earth after the resurrection; they will be rewarded with temporal goods; they will live this way eternally with the Messiah, who is to arrive for the first time in history and bring the Jews back to the Promised Land; they will begin to worship God once again in the Temple, which will be rebuilt by the Messiah; they will resume the same offices they executed when they were alive; the Gentiles will be subjugated.³⁰ These beliefs are problematic for a number of reasons. According to certain medieval Christian writers, Jews are never to return to the Promised Land because they have "betrayed their God and killed his son."³¹ According to de Espina, the punishment of the Jews for killing Christ is threefold: they lost their status as the

²⁸ Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers*, 26-27 and Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, 101.

²⁹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ch. 83, 316.

³⁰ The sixteenth-century author, Francisco Machado of the Cistercian Order, wrote a chapter in *The Mirror of the New Christians* (1541) entitled: "How the Jews wrongly wait for all to be resurrected and to return again to Jerusalem when the Messiah comes." This chapter summarizes the previous medieval polemical literature he was familiar with. Even though it was written after the Middle Ages, it still retains the medieval approach to this subject matter and is therefore appropriate to use in this article. See Francisco Machado, *The Mirror of the New Christians (Espelho de Christãos Novos)*, trans. Frank Ephraim Talmage and Mildred Evelyn Vieira (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1977), 310-319.

³¹ Machado, *The Mirror of the New Christians*, 315.

people of God; Jerusalem and the Temple lie desolate; Israel turned into a wasteland and an appointed desolation. The belief that the Jews will hold their previous positions of honor or leadership was considered "imbecilic and irrational."³²

Medieval Christians also argued against Jews (and Muslims) on a variety of other issues related to resurrection. According to de Espina, a major problem was that Jews "expect to be rewarded in another life with carnal lust (delight), riches and other similar things." They "are expecting a future resurrection to a carnal life and therefore they believe that the happiness of future life consists in the fullness of temporal goods and the tranquility of peace."³³

Belief in post-resurrection physical existence posed other problems. De Espina is correct in stating that certain Jews believed that they would be resurrected to a physical existence in the World to Come. But not all Jews shared this belief, as evidenced by the thought of Maimonides and those who proposed a totally spiritual post-resurrection existence. Jewish belief that the Temple would be rebuilt was also a challenge to Christians, who held that the Temple would never be rebuilt, since Jesus Christ had accomplished the one true sacrifice on the cross.³⁴ Finally, Jewish belief that the Gentiles

would eventually be subjugated and embrace the true faith did not fit into the Christian perception of the final age, in which the Jews would convert to Christianity, the true faith.

Resurrection in Medieval Judaism

Medieval intra-Jewish theological debates centered on such issues as the nature of God (existence, unity, immutability, and incorporeity), Torah, creation, prophecy, the commandments, and the final things (Messiah, resurrection, and the World to Come).³⁵ In debates about the final things, there were three interconnected ideas: the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead (*tehiyyat ha-metim*), and the doctrine of the Messiah.³⁶ Questions concerning the resurrection of the dead included the following: Will those who arise in the messianic era die again and be reborn in the World to Come (*i.e.*, will there be one resurrection or two)? Is there a difference between the messianic era and the World to Come? Will there be bodily enjoyment in the World to Come? Will the body and soul live on for all eternity? What form will the body take in the World to Come? Will everyone rise or only a select group (e.g., the Righteous of Israel)?

³² Machado, *The Mirror of the New Christians*, 317.

³³ About the Muslims, Alonso states: "Saraceni, qui expectant in alia vita in voluptatibus carnalibus et divitiis et aliis consimilibus premiari," and about the Jews, Alonso states: "Similiter Judei resurrectionem futuram expectant ad vitam carnalem et ideo felicitatem vite future credunt consistere in bonorum temporalium plenitudine et pacis tranquillitate" (Fol. XLVIra).

³⁴ The main scriptural text for the belief that a third material temple would be built comes from Hosea 6:1-3. According to de Espina, Rashi held that the Third Temple, representing the third day, would be rebuilt by the Messiah as foretold at the end of Ezekiel. De Espina considered Rashi's interpretation of Hosea to be totally false because no third material temple will be built by the Messiah. He read it thus: two days refers to the death and burial of the Messiah himself; and the third day refers to the resurrection in which human beings will be raised up for eternal life. De Espina cites the Apostle Paul's

teaching of 1 Corinthians 15:20-22: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life." This allegorical interpretation is important to de Espina because it not only confirms the resurrection of Jesus, it also contradicts one of the key elements of Jewish belief about the coming of the Messiah: that the Messiah will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

³⁵ On medieval Jewish theology in general, see Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1986).

³⁶ Louis Jacobs, *Principles of Jewish Faith: An Analytical Study* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 307.

In medieval Jewish theological reflection, resurrection of the dead is part—usually the last part—of the entire scenario of messianic redemption and Jewish theology in general. Saadia Gaon (882-942) and Maimonides (1135-1204) were instrumental in offering their view since it is rooted in the Mishnaic Code and in the Talmud.³⁷ *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* of Saadia Gaon does not begin with the theme of resurrection, but the subject takes up considerable space later in his work.³⁸ His main objective in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* was to prove the reasonableness of the resurrection of the dead in relation to Jewish tradition and revelation. It is important to acknowledge that his main focus was on the question of reason and faith and not on a response to the Christian community (especially since he lived in an Islamic environment). In other

³⁷ Y. Even-Shemu'el, *Midreshei Ge'ullah (Midrashim of Redemption): Pirqei ha-'Apocalypsah ha-Yehudit*, 2nd ed. (Tel Aviv: Mossad Bialik, 1953-54). As depicted especially in early Jewish apocalyptic literature, the resurrection comes after the entire messianic scenario that will be played out historically on the world's stage. According to Moshe Idel, these apocalyptic writings "elaborate on the signs preceding the coming of the Messiah, the wars and death of the Messiah ben Joseph, as well as the arrival and final victory of the Messiah ben David. Though written during a period of several hundred years (between the seventh and the twelfth centuries), this literature is relatively unified from the conceptual point of view. It is mythical in its approach to reality: God and the Messiah are conceived of as powerful enough to disrupt the course of nature and of history. This messianism is strongly oriented toward a redemption that will take place in both time and space, and unlike the more mystically orientated individualistic forms of redemption, it has an obvious restorative nature, one that includes the rebuilding of the Temple, the descent of Jerusalem from above, and the victory of Judaism as a universal religion." Quoted from Moshe Idel, "Jewish Apocalypticism: 670-1670," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Volume 2, *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 2000), 208-209.

³⁸ The topics covered are: the creation of the world; God's unity and other divine attributes; the commandments of God and the means of their revelation; man's freedom to either obey or disobey God; virtue and vice; man's soul and its immortality; the doctrine of the resurrection; the age of the Messiah and of Israel's redemption; reward and punishment in the hereafter; the golden mean. See Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), xxv.

words, this is an apologetic text written for the Jewish community and not a polemical work written against Christianity. His discussion of resurrection appears within a wider context of issues: the nature of reward and punishment, the nature of the soul, and redemption. Some of his main questions in regard to resurrection include: Is it reasonable to believe in the resurrection of the dead (i.e., is it necessary and logical)? What happens to the body in the resurrection? Will the resurrection of the dead happen at the time of messianic redemption or in the World to Come? Who will be resurrected?³⁹

In discussing these questions, Saadia Gaon never mentions Jesus. In fact, the resurrection of Jesus plays no significant part in any intra-Jewish discussions about resurrection and, as we shall see, it plays a minor but noteworthy role in Jewish polemical literature against Christianity. The only place in which the Gaon mentions Jesus is in a discussion about redemption. Here he argues that the Messiah did not appear during the time of the Second Temple. This means that Jesus was not the Messiah and did not bring redemption to the world. The Christian doctrine that Jesus himself is the agent of resurrection is not discussed at all. For medieval Jews, the agent of resurrection is God alone.⁴⁰ They assert that the only prophetic

³⁹ Saadia Gaon holds that only the virtuous Jews and Jewish sinners who repent will enjoy the first resurrection into the World to Come; all humankind will experience a second resurrection into the World to Come. Crescas holds that "not everyone will be resurrected. Resurrection will be limited to the completely righteous and the completely wicked of the people of Israel. The righteous will experience reward, and the wicked will be punished. The souls of persons of an intermediary status, as well as the righteous of the nations of the world, will be rewarded, but they will not merit the wondrous miracle of resurrection." Quoted from J. David Bleich, *With Perfect Faith: The Foundations of Jewish Belief* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1983), 620-621.

⁴⁰ Since Christians understand the God the Father and Jesus the Son share a divine nature, they would see that both the Father and the Son are mutual agents as far as they share the divine nature. Medieval theologians would also make the distinction between the divine nature itself (God in Three Persons) and the proper actions of the divine persons, therefore a distinctive role

figure that will appear during the last days will be Elijah, who ascended into heaven (2 Kings 2:11). He will be sent prior to the coming of the Messiah in historical time (Malachi 3:23). The day of resurrection will follow the age of the Messiah.⁴¹

The resurrection of the dead is included in Maimonides's thirteen principles of faith: "the one who denies the resurrection of the dead is denied a share in the world-to-come."⁴² The controversy that arose because of Maimonides's position—or what subsequent authors thought he was saying in his *Mishneh Torah*—certainly shows that the resurrection was very important in Jewish theology. Maimonides treats the resurrection of the dead in the context of dealing with "the problems of God's unity, the Messianic Age, resurrection, and the World to

of the One who rose from the dead, Christ, is the One who will raise all of the dead. Therefore, according to Thomas Aquinas, the efficient cause of the resurrection of human beings is Christ. See the *Summa Theologica*, III, 56, article 1. We see a parallel to this focus on Jesus in medieval art. For example, in the upper Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi, we see in the panel presenting the act of creation (Genesis 1), it is Jesus as Logos who appears as creator rather than God the Father (who is creator in earlier art).

⁴¹ Saadia Gaon, 158. "I noted also in the last of the prophecies a direct admonition in regard to the observance of the Torah of Moses until the day of the resurrection, which latter would be preceded by the sending of Elijah." This belief is founded on the prophetic text of Malachi 3:22-23. For some medieval Jews, the divinely appointed agent for the accomplishment of the resurrection is Elijah. "The resurrection of the dead will come through Elijah (Sot. lx, 15), who will likewise act as the herald to announce the advent of the Messiah (see Mal. lv, 5). The reawakened will be of endless duration...The righteous whom the Holy One, blessed be he, will restore to life will never return to their dust" (Sanh. 92a). Quoted from Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, 364. The Jews mainly objected to Christians claiming that Jesus is the agent of the resurrection—in other words, that it is through Jesus that the resurrection of bodies is to come about. Thomas Aquinas deals with this in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book Four on Salvation, chapter 79.

⁴² *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuvah 3:5. Quoted from Bleich, *With Perfect Faith: The Foundations of Jewish Belief*, 619.

Come."⁴³ He wrote about the resurrection in his commentary on the Mishnah (Tractate Sanhedrin) and in the *Mishneh Torah*. Underlying this subject in his works are the fundamental issues of the relationship between faith and rational explanation, matter and spirit, and bodily resurrection and immortality.

The major question that arose during the resurrection debate sparked by Maimonides's comments in his *Mishneh Torah*, was: What happens to the body when the soul is raised from the dead? In his main works, Maimonides held that there was a complete separation between this world (*ha-'olam ha-zeh*) and the hereafter or the World to Come (*ha-'olam ha-ba*). The reign of the Messiah was to happen in this world, and therefore was not an eschatological event as we find in Christian eschatology. The individual who dies is raised in the life to come and experiences freedom from death, evil, and the physical existence of the body. The reward based on the knowledge of God and righteous deeds on earth will be given to the soul in the World to Come. The wicked, according to Maimonides, will experience the death of their souls, and thus the wicked will experience both a bodily and spiritual death.⁴⁴

What then of the body in the resurrection process? Maimonides denies the physical resurrection of the dead, and this denial becomes the centerpiece of the intra-Jewish debate about the resurrection of the dead in the Middle Ages. As with the Gaon, Maimonides focuses on answering Jewish questions about the resurrection. He does not engage in a polemic against Christianity. Because of his position on the age of the Messiah and on the role of the body in the resurrection process, we can assume that Maimonides never had to deal with

⁴³ *Moses Maimonides' Treatise on Resurrection*, trans. Fred Rosner (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997), 15.

⁴⁴ Lea Naomi Goldfeld, *Moses Maimonides' Treatise of Resurrection: An Inquiry into Its Authenticity* (New York: KTVA Publishing House, Inc., 1986), 1-28.

the resurrection of Jesus. If the body has no existence in the World to Come, there is no relevance to the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

One of the major questions in the world of Maimonides scholarship is whether Maimonides himself wrote the *Treatise on Resurrection* in 1191 in answer to his Jewish opponents who thought that he denied the resurrection of the dead.⁴⁵ It appears that medieval Jews thought so, but there are significant differences between what Maimonides held in his major publications and what appears in this treatise. The *Treatise* states that there will be two resurrections, one in which the body will reunite with the soul during the time of redemption and the other in which the soul separates from the body to enjoy a totally spiritual existence in the World to Come.⁴⁶ Once

⁴⁵ On this issue, Lea Naomi Goldfeld argues against the authorship of Maimonides in her *Moses Maimonides' Treatise of Resurrection: An Inquiry into Its Authenticity*. Joel Kraemer holds that its authenticity is now beyond doubt; see his "Moses Maimonides: An Intellectual Portrait," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. Kenneth Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10-57. Kraemer shows that Maimonides's belief could have been associated with the Islamic environment he was living in: "Samuel ben Eli's allegation [that he denied the resurrection of the dead] could have embroiled Maimonides with the Ayyūhid political and religious authorities. The philosopher Shahāh ad-Dīn as-Suhrawardī had been executed in the same year for heresy, including the denial of the resurrection." Quoted from p. 44. Kraemer explains why Maimonides wrote this letter: "In a letter to Joseph ben Judah, Maimonides asserted that people distorted his views on resurrection. He had to convince his audience that he believed in it, and explained that resurrection is a generally accepted belief among the religious community and that it should not be interpreted symbolically. By 'generally accepted belief' Maimonides meant a commonly accepted opinion, unproven but believed by broad consensus and worthy of consent. Resurrection of the dead is a foundation of the religious law by consensus within the religious community. All who adhere to the community are obligated to believe in it, but it falls short of being a philosophical truth." (p. 45)

⁴⁶ In other words: "His *Treatise on Resurrection*, written in Arabic in 1191, explicitly affirms physical resurrection. This *tehiyyat ha-metim*, however, is to be followed by a second bodily death and eternal life of the soul in a purely spiritual 'olam ha-ba.'" Quoted from Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish*

again, the separation of the Messianic Age and the World to Come explains why the resurrection of Jesus had no impact on the intra-Jewish theology of resurrection. For Maimonides, the Messiah does not raise the dead because the real agent of resurrection is God Almighty and not another.

That which we asserted that the Messiah will not be required to perform a miracle such as splitting the sea or resurrecting a dead person in a miraculous way means that a miracle will not be asked of him since the prophets whose prophecies have been verified have foretold his advent. It does not follow from this treatise that the Almighty, at the time of His choice, will not resurrect those He wishes to resurrect, whether during the era of the Messiah or before him or after his death.⁴⁷

Since Jews focused their attention on the Messianic Age and the World to Come as two distinct periods and did not believe that the Messiah would have any role in the raising of the dead, they would not acknowledge the messiahship of Jesus and his role in the resurrection of the dead.

Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 52.

⁴⁷ *Moses Maimonides' Treatise on Resurrection*, 37. Rosner explains this teaching of Maimonides: "In the body of the *Treatise*, Maimonides states that some people are disturbed by his remark in the *Mishneh Torah* that, among others things, the Messiah should not be expected to resurrect the dead. They thought that this was a flat contradiction to his statement in the *Commentary on Helek* that resurrection is a principle of faith. But if the Messiah is not to bring the dead back to life, it does not follow that neither will God. Indeed He may achieve this at any time, whether before, after or during the lifetime of the Messiah" (p. 19). Asher Finkel claims that this is not the issue of Maimonides as he is offering a view of life after death for the individual without resurrection but as a spiritual reality. He never refers to the Messiah in his accounting of repentance as evidenced in his *Mishnah Torah*, chapter 8.

For Maimonides, the central question regarding Christians is not about how Judaism is related to Christianity but how Christianity is related to Judaism. This is so for two reasons. First, Jesus was not the Messiah. Second, Christianity itself is an instrument or forerunner of the coming of the actual King-Messiah, who will re-establish Judaism as the only religious and political institution that will rule in the age of the Messiah. Thus Maimonides sees Christianity as a “dilution” of the original revelation, and it will be corrected—brought back to pure Judaism—when the Days of the Messiah arrive. Maimonides looks favorably upon Christians who abide by the Noahide commandments. Hopefully, they will convert to Judaism by accepting the Mosaic Law.⁴⁸ In this vision of the Messianic Era, the resurrection of Jesus has no historical or theological role.⁴⁹

Many medieval Jews did not accept the rationalistic theology of Maimonides, especially when it came to the resurrection of the body. These writers held that there would be a bodily existence in the World to Come, and they based this position on biblical and Talmudic proof texts. Underlying the resurrection controversy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were exegetical methodologies and literal and non-literal interpretations of the Torah. Writers like Ramah (R. Meir ha-Levi Abulafia, c. 1165-1244) were critical of the rationalistic approach to the resurrection question, especially as evidenced in the major works of Maimonides and those who supported him.

Ramah identifies two sources of philosophical dissatisfaction with the traditional doctrine of resurrection. First is a rationalist spirituality based on a sharp body-soul

dualism: the soul (that is, intellect) is what really counts; the body is an impure impediment to perfection. Second is a tendency to extend the domain of natural causation at the expense of divine intervention or even omnipotence. These factors underlie rejection of the miracle of permanent bodily resurrection in favor of natural immortality of the soul, along the lines of the philosophers.⁵⁰

Although there were medieval Jews who held that bodily resurrection was still to be upheld and defended, there appears to have been no appeal to the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead as an extension of Jewish belief in the resurrection of the body as well as the soul coming out of a first-century Jewish context (the Pharisees and their belief in the resurrection of the body).

The Resurrection of Jesus in Medieval Jewish Anti-Christian Polemical Literature

Certain Jewish polemical authors saw the importance of the resurrection in their rebuttal of Christian truth claims. For example, a major polemical text, *The Book of Redemption* of Moses Nachmanides (1194-1270) concerns the theme of the Messiah with its connection to the theme of Jesus' resurrection. His reaction to Christian truth claims came primarily from observations concerning the interpretative authority of sacred texts, the interpretative tools used in biblical and Talmudic hermeneutics, and the proper reading of sacred history.⁵¹ The book is a reaffirmation that the Messiah has not yet come, and Israel awaits with patient hope the future redemption that the Messiah will bring. Rather than an earthly vision of the redemp-

⁴⁸ This was one of the main points of Asher Finkel's paper at the 2006 Kalamazoo Conference entitled “Rabbinic Views of Christianity and the Noahide Covenant.”

⁴⁹ This is explained in David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification*, 57-67.

⁵⁰ Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 58.

⁵¹ On this issue, see Nina Caputo, *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia: History, Community, and Messianism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

tive era, Nachmanides hopes for a more spiritual paradise.⁵² The Days of the Messiah lie in the future, since the Jews are still in exile, living among the nations (a situation that causes the Jews to sin); and they are still in a state of impurity, which will be removed once the Messiah comes, as some Jews believe.⁵³ Nachmanides was also aware that certain Jewish scholars held that the Messiah arrival was directly dependant on Israel's repentance: "Therefore, G-d prolongs it from generation to generation, even beyond the decreed end, until the coming of the proper generation which will repent, just as He has prolonged [the coming of the Messiah] from the generation of Hezekiah until the present."⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Nachmanides held out hope that the Jews will someday worship in a restored

temple and live in a re-established Israel. This "worldly" restoration is precisely what Christians disputed.

Thus, disagreement concerning the role of the Messiah set the tone for much of the polemical writings about resurrection on the part of both Jews and Christians in this era. Christians felt compelled to persuade Jews to identify the future leader/servant prophesied in the Old Testament with the Messiah. They argued that all these prophetic texts were fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jews read these same texts differently because of their different expectations regarding the role the Messiah would play in salvation history.⁵⁵ Concerning the Messiah's death and resurrection, he was projected to die a natural death. The Messianic kingdom would then live on in his

⁵² Nachmanides states: "The ultimate goal of our reward in the era of the Messiah is not the eating of the fruits of the Land [of Israel], bathing in the warm springs of Tiberias, and other similar pleasures, nor is the goal of our desire the offerings and the Service in the Sanctuary. Our reward and hope lie rather in the World to Come, in the enjoyment of the soul in the pleasure called Garden of Eden, and in being spared from the punishment of Gehenna. Notwithstanding all this, we persist in the belief in the redemption because it constitutes known truth among masters of the Torah and prophecy. With it, we strengthen [the hearts of] those who are asleep in the anguish [of the exile], and with its proofs, we shut the mouths of the heretics. We delight in its words because we look forward in our hope [to the redemption] when we will achieve closeness to G-d by being in His Sanctuary with His priests and His prophets. Additionally, [we will be closer to G-d because] we will have purity and sanctity, we will be in the Chosen Land, and His Presence will dwell with us." Quoted from *The Law of the Eternal is Perfect* in Ramban (Nachmanides): *Writings and Discourses*, Vol. I, trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, Inc., 1978), 45.

⁵³ *The Law of the Eternal is Perfect* in Ramban (Nachmanides): *Writings and Discourses*, 45.

⁵⁴ *The Book of Redemption* in Ramban (Nachmanides): *Writings and Discourses*, Vol. II, trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, Inc., 1978), 600. Yet Nachmanides reported that there was also a third opinion on this issue: "Among the sages of Israel, however there is one Sage, Rabbi Yehoshua, who concluded that even if the Israelites will not repent, they will [nevertheless] be redeemed [at the decreed end]. Quoted from page 601.

⁵⁵ Samson H. Levey provides us with a summary of Jewish belief in the Messiah in the Middle Ages: "The Messiah will be the symbol and/or the active agent of the deliverance of Israel. He will be of Davidic lineage, though he may have a non-Davidic predecessor, the Ephraimite Messiah, who will die in battle. Elijah will herald his coming and will serve as his High Priest... The Messiah will bring an end to the wandering of Israel, and the Jewish people will be gathered in from their Dispersion to their own land. The Northern Kingdom will be re-united with Judah. The drama of the Exodus from Egypt will be re-enacted; in this drama Moses may participate, made possible by a resurrection of the dead. The Messiah will live eternally. He will restore the Temple and rebuild Jerusalem, which will enjoy divine protection for itself and its inhabitants. He will have sovereignty over all the world and make the Torah the universal law of mankind, with the ideal of education being realized to the full. The Messiah will have the gift of prophecy, and may have intercessory power to seek forgiveness of sin, but will punish the unrepenting wicked of his people, as well as of the nations, and have the power to cast them into Gehenna. There will be a moral regeneration of Israel and of mankind. The Messiah will be a righteous judge, dispensing justice and equity, the champion of the poor and the oppressed, the personification of social justice. He will reward the righteous, who will surround him and eternally enjoy the divine effulgence. The essence of the Messiah will be faith in God; and he will vindicate that faith, and the faithfulness of Israel, in the eyes of all the world." Quoted from Samson H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation: The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, No. II (Cincinnati/New York/Los Angeles/Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974), 142-43.

descendants, as Maimonides held.⁵⁶ According to Nachmanides, the Messiah would be a human being (neither God nor a divine being), who would neither die nor be resurrected: "The Messiah will be endangered, will be willing to accept his death at the hands of his enemies, but will not in fact die. As predicted by Isaiah, he will be vindicated and will live to see victory and progeny in a thoroughly this-worldly mode."⁵⁷

A psychological and naturalistic reading of the Suffering Servant passages (Isaiah) led Nachmanides to conclude that Jesus did not fit the description of what the Messiah was to be and do.⁵⁸ Even though the Messiah was not required to die, if he will die then he would do so only "in the most natural fashion, after a long and distinguished life."⁵⁹ His death would come about because "the Messiah is but a king of flesh and blood" like any other earthly king.⁶⁰ Thus the death (or non-death) of the Messiah does not lead to any sort of redemptive activity or resurrection.

As for the role of the Messiah, Christians focused their attention on supernatural and salvific elements. Jewish authors, like Nachmanides and Maimonides, however, focused on what

the Messiah was to do here on earth. Nachmanides held that "when the true King Messiah will arise and succeed [in overcoming Israel's enemies, in building the Sanctuary on its former site in gathering the dispersed of Israel], *and he shall be exalted and lifted up*, then all [the nations] will at once turn and know that their *fathers have inherited lies* and that their prophets and fathers have misled them."⁶¹ Maimonides held that the Messiah was to rebuild the Temple on its proper site, gather the dispersed of Israel, and reconstitute the sacrificial rites. Maimonides did not believe the world would change: "Let no one think that in the days of the Messiah any of the laws of nature will be set aside, or any innovation introduced into creation. The world will follow its normal course."⁶² He specifically denied that the Messiah would usher in the resurrection: "Do not think that the King Messiah will have to perform signs and wonders [i.e. miracles], bring anything new into being, revive the dead, or do similar things. It is not so."⁶³ This belief was based on the rabbis' careful distinction "between the era of the Messiah and the future world, which is the world after the resurrection."⁶⁴

Conclusion

The resurrection of human beings from the dead is an important issue in medieval Jewish and Christian theology in general. Both communities found in this belief the hope that

⁵⁶ Jacobs, *Principles of Jewish Faith*, 371.

⁵⁷ Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom*, 175. Nachmanides held that the suffering servant would not "be delivered into the hands of his enemies, nor that he would be killed, nor that he would be hung on a tree. Rather that he would see offspring and live a long life, that he would be exalted, that his kingdom would be raised to heights among the nations, and that powerful kings become his booty." Quoted in Chazan, 173.

⁵⁸ Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom*, 174.

⁵⁹ Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom*, 175.

⁶⁰ Nachmanides makes this statement in front of King Jaime I of Aragon during the famous Barcelona Disputation of 1263. Quoted from *The Disputation at Barcelona in Ramban (Nachmanides): Writings and Discourses*, 672-673.

⁶¹ *The Law of the Eternal is Perfect in Ramban (Nachmanides): Writings and Discourses*, 40. Nachmanides held, therefore, a different interpretation of a key Christian Messianic proof text (Isaiah 52:13) as the Christian reading of *and he shall be exalted and lifted up* signified the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

⁶² Menachem Kellner, "Messianic Postures in Israel Today," in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, ed. Marc Saperstein (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 506.

⁶³ Menachem Kellner, "Messianic Postures in Israel Today," 506.

⁶⁴ *Ramban (Nachmanides): Writings and Discourses*, 523

eternal life with God was possible, either for all human beings or at least for a segment of humanity (the righteous). Since belief in resurrection was central to both the Jewish and Christian systems, it is not surprising that it would appear in medieval Jewish and Christian polemical literature. What is surprising is that it did not get more attention than it did. Nevertheless, this is a case in which quality is more important than quantity.

For medieval Jews, the issues of the Trinity, the Incarnation and divinity of Jesus, and his role as Messiah took center stage in polemical literature. They concentrated on rebutting these particular Christian doctrines. This did not prevent them from dealing with the resurrection of Jesus and with the other Christian doctrines of salvation and redemption based on the foundation of his resurrection. But they believed that once the former doctrines were disproved, especially the non-Messiahship of Jesus, the latter doctrines (such as the resurrection of Jesus) would become in a way non-issues. Much of their attention, then, was focused on proving that Jesus was not the Messiah and that it was impossible for him to be an incarnate divine being, thereby rendering the resurrection of Jesus devoid of any redemptive significance. It was also important for the Jews to hold that it is God alone who will raise the dead and not a human agent. The only human being who had any role in resurrection was Elijah, but even his agency was under the auspices of God's power and will.⁶⁵

A survey of the polemical literature of medieval Christians shows that they followed the pattern set by the main theological texts of the period. Most theological treatises, especially the *Sentences* and the *Summae*, begin with God (One and

Three) and work their way through Creation, the Incarnation, the Sacraments, culminating in the Final Things, which include the resurrection. Most polemical writings focus first on the Trinity and then on divinity and messiahship issues. Resurrection is embedded in sections of these texts that treat of the divinity and messiahship of Jesus, but it does not stand out in relation to these other theological issues. Christian writers were compelled first to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. Once that identity was established, they were able to demonstrate how texts showing that the Messiah was to rise from the dead were to be applied directly to Jesus. The Messiah, Jesus, who had risen from the dead, will be the agent of resurrection for human beings.

The debate about the resurrection of Jesus was not simply a matter of hermeneutics, i.e., how the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures) was to be read properly. Rather, it was a matter of vision about the final age of the world and the role the Messiah would have in it. The medieval Christian and Jewish perspectives on the role of the Messiah had direct ramifications for the future function of the earth, Jerusalem, and the Temple. Likewise, the resurrection of Jesus had ramifications for the possibility of life after death and the vision of what that post-mortem life would be like: Would it be an earthly or a heavenly state of being? Would it be a bodily/spiritual existence or exclusively spiritual existence? For Christians, the resurrection of Jesus gave them the assurance that their own resurrection to new life after death was possible, as was the possibility of salvation. For Jews, the testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures and the teachings of the early rabbis gave them assurance that resurrection and redemption were possible, at least to the righteous of Israel and the nations. The issue of Jesus' resurrection, therefore, is directly linked to two principal areas of medieval theology—eschatology and soteriology.

⁶⁵ Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, 364. The Jews mainly objected to Christians claiming that Jesus is the agent of the resurrection—in other words, that it is through Jesus that the resurrection of bodies is to come about. Thomas Aquinas deals with this in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book Four on Salvation, chapter 79.

The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, played a significant role in medieval Christian-Jewish polemical literature. We see that the subject of the resurrection still contributes to an understanding of other theological issues, especially relative to the Messiah, eschatology, and soteriology. Further research may also lead to a better understanding not only of differences but also of similarities in Jewish and Christian religious views in the Middle Ages.