

RESPONSE TO REVIEWERS

Jacob's Younger Brother: Christian-Jewish Relations after Vatican II

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It is a rare privilege for an author to encounter such generous, constructive, and insightful readings of her book. I am honored to engage in dialogue with such scholars as Gavin D'Costa, Eugene Korn, Hyacinthe Destivelle, Emil Anton, Ruth Langer, and David Meyers, who know Jewish-Christian relations, and the Jewish and the Catholic communities who perform them, like the palms of their hands.

I am deeply thankful to Gavin D'Costa, who served as my intellectual sparring partner for many years, for orchestrating this book forum and for creating a space to discuss some of the central themes of the book separately and systematically, each by a distinguished scholar whose perspective on a specific theme is especially crucial. The extremely different disciplinary contexts of the five reviewers gave me the chance to rethink the book in various ways and test my arguments and their implications in diverse intellectual environments. I am grateful for this opportunity.

Eugene Korn is setting the stage for the other reviewers' discussion of *Jacob's Younger Brother's* specific chapters by presenting a balanced overview of the book in its entirety. Encapsulating the book's main argument in just a few words, Korn recounts that "Jewish and Catholic theologies, it seems, can neither reconcile nor completely separate from each other, no matter how hard the thinkers of each faith strive to do so." Korn's words cut to the heart of the way I understand the Jewish-Christian relationship: more than the question of which side of the relationship is friendlier to the other and which is less, it is the paradoxical way in which the mutual projections of Jews and Christians are entangled, built into one another, that makes their relationship so intellectually intriguing.

As mentioned, the following reviewers focus on specific chapters of the book. Discussing *Jacob's Younger Brother's* 3rd chapter on John Paul II and the Jews, Hyacinthe Destivelle engages with the chapter's two central arguments: the first is the tension which I identified between the pope's "official" theology and another type of engagement in Jewish-Christian relations that did not emerge from finely-

articulated arguments, but from symbolic gestures, historic actions, or metaphors of particular richness. The second is the gradual, non-linear transition of John Paul II from approaching the Jews as an “intrinsic” category, that is, as part of the Church’s self, to approaching them independently of the Catholic narrative, largely in light of their discontent with being integrated into a Catholic meta-narrative. Furthermore, Destivelle reflects on this dynamic between intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions through the perspective of intra-Christian ecumenism. This perspective sheds light on the Catholic project of reconciliation with the Jews as a whole, and deserves further research.

Destivelle provides several critical insights which push me to reevaluate my original distinction between the “theological” and the “symbolic” languages of John Paul II. In light of his critique, a more accurate distinction would have been between different types of theology: The first is authoritative, formulated by verbal arguments, and carefully maintains inner-consistency, coherency, and compatibility with other prerequisites of the Catholic faith. The other is performative, symbolic, suggestive, contextual, and equivocal, often hinting at more radical implications than the first kind. It is this latter type of “performative theology” which constructs the Jewish-Christian relationship not by sophisticatedly unravelling delicate theological complications suspended between Jewish and Christian truth claims, but by operating liturgically, in such forms as prayers in Auschwitz, addresses in synagogues, notes in the Western Wall—a realm in which the *mise-en-scène* is no less active in creating the “message” than the text itself.

According to my understanding of John Paul II, the tension between these two theological realms, especially with regard to interreligious and ecumenical relations, is intentional. It is this tension which allows, on the one hand, certain Catholic circles, as well as many Jewish ones, to embrace the pope as extremely “progressive” on this sensitive point, while on the other hand, allows conservatives to trust that the Church will not be risking such central truths as the universality of Christ, the universal need for Catholic mission, or the idea that anti-Judaism is merely a distortion and not an essential part of the Christian tradition.

The fascinating connection which Destivelle makes between John Paul II’s perception of Jews as “intrinsic” to the Church and the Church’s ecumenical project is enlightening.¹ The perception of the rift with Judaism—what Barth called an

¹ See John Paul II’s address at Rome’s Great Synagogue in 1986, where he states that: “The Church of Christ discovers her ‘bond’ with Judaism by ‘searches into her own mystery’ (cf. *Nostra Aetate* [Article 4]). The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us, but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.” A fascinating formulation of this intrinsic-extrinsic ambivalence may be this paragraph in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s (rather Barthian) debate with Martin Buber: “In the light of St Paul’s teaching one is therefore prompted to ask whether the Christian who belongs *para physin* (according to Romans 11: 14), against nature, to the holy tree, might not, at some moment in his life of faith, undergo a very particular experience touching the origins and source of faith: the experience of being inwardly moved by the sap that rises from the holy root on which he is engrafted, which he must to some extent regard as different, foreign or perhaps primitive, and only ‘his own’ as a result of that indescribable experience.” See Hans

ecclesiological “wound in the body of Christ,”² as detrimental for the Christian community writ large, was one of the strongest theological forces behind the rapprochement with the Jews for many of Catholics and Protestants who pushed this project forward. Yet one may wonder why and how the ecumenical, or ecclesiological question has arguably disappeared from Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Destivelle’s comments suggest that the difficulty that Jews felt when addressed as part of an ecumenical project (for example the incorporation of the committee for religious relations with the Jews in the ecumenical secretariat), which is related to their sense of ambivalence toward being seen as “intrinsic” to Christianity, might have caused the gradual retreat of the Church from practically integrating the Jews into ecumenical initiatives and theologically considering the Jews’ ecumenical significance; that is, it contributed to a separation of the “Jewish-Christian project” from the ecumenical. From my acquaintance with the Catholic theological discourse on Jews and Judaism, the question of the Jews’ integration into the project of Christian unity has not been on the Church’s agenda for a long time.

In general, Jews prefer the category of “interreligious relations” to that of “intra-Christian relations,” since the ecumenical prism threatens to swallow them into the Christian self. This gap is certainly one of the most troubling asymmetries of contemporary Jewish-Christian relations; the innermost, most intimate motivations of Christians to come closer to Jews evoke the Jewish fears of Christian appropriation. Yet, on the other hand, as Jewish thinkers such as Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, and Avraham Yehoshua Heschel understood it, a totally “extrinsic” approach to Judaism could also contribute to the radicalization of Christian anti-Judaism, as was evident in neo-Marcionite tendencies in interwar Germany.³ To conclude, the constant tension between the intrinsic and the extrinsic Catholic approach to Jews is not entirely solvable, from either side of the fence.

The next chapter of my book, dedicated to Joseph Ratzinger and the Jews, addresses this tension from a different angle. As Emil Anton argues in his reflection on chapter 4, I found Ratzinger’s most important contribution to Jewish-Christian relations to be his unparalleled ability to integrate the questions of Jewish-Christian relations into the whole body of Catholic theology, that is, to bring the Catholic theology of Judaism into conversation with liturgy, Christology, theology of faith and reason, secularism, etc. This, as I argue in the book, is not at all a marginal achievement; on the contrary, pulling the rapprochement initiative from the important, but rather limited discourse of Jewish-Christian dialogue for whom this is the sole focus, and connecting it with other discourses and issues, seems to me the

Urs von Balthasar, *Einsame Zwiesprache: Martin Buber and Christianity*, trans. by, Alexander Dru (Harvill Press, London, 1961), 20.

² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, Part 1, Study Edition vol. 23, trans. G. W. Bromiley (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 159.

³ Christian Wiese, “Antisemitismus in der Evangelischen Theologie und Kirche: Expertise für den 2. Unabhängigen Expertenkreis Antisemitismus,” https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/themen/heimat-integration/antisemitismus/antisemitismus-expertisen.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5.

only way to achieve intellectual consistency, to solidify the Church's discourse on Judaism, and, no less importantly, to *not* leave the Jewish-Christian dialogue as an anecdotal addendum to what truly matters to the church. This is Ratzinger's unique contribution to Jewish-Christian relations, and it is completely dependent on his own prioritization of doctrinal consistency above all other considerations. Ratzinger's attitude to Jews and Judaism is motivated not by his personal relationships, nor by his historical consciousness as a German, neither by any progressive tendencies, but by his commitment to Catholic doctrine and theology in its entirety.

Nevertheless, as Anton notes, this choice is inherently tied to several difficulties—difficulties which I see as intertwined with the place of Jews within Catholic theology writ large, not just with Ratzinger's own work. Indeed, Jews often serve as rhetorical devices or figures of thought within various intra-Christian debates, serving to push a point which is only loosely related to them.⁴ We may say that Ratzinger thinks with "Judaism" as a (favorable) concept, in the context of his struggle against intellectual opponents who are no less important to him than the process of Jewish-Christian rapprochement *per se*. In this, Ratzinger continues a long Christian tradition, which historically evolved precisely because of the fact, previously stressed here: that Jews and Judaism are not only separate entities but also rhetorical devices, literary constructions and figures of thought which are "intrinsic" to the Christian tradition. This makes the task of negotiating between the internalized Jews and actual Jews a constant Christian challenge. Ratzinger participates in this tradition, perhaps in a less apologetic way than most of his Catholic colleagues. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the "instrumentalization" of Jews and Judaism in Ratzinger's thought does not entail anti-Judaism, but, in fact, a resistance to anti-Jewish tendencies. This does not make Ratzinger's approach less instrumentalizing, of course, but it does make it less anti-Jewish, which is not a small thing to ask—and perhaps the only thing one should.

In his reading of my chapter, Anton identified the double-edged nature of my argument. Nevertheless, he evaluated my chapter as, ultimately, more critical than laudatory, arguing that my "conclusions *follow the spirit of public opinion*: Ratzinger was a 'hidebound conservative,' 'out of touch,' 'obsessed with matters of doctrine,' etc." I am not sure what in the chapter made the impression that I personally identify with Ratzinger's Catholic liberal and mostly German critics (being neither a Catholic, nor a German, nor a theologian of any camp), but I can say confidently that what interested me mostly was indeed the tension between Ratzinger's intellectual project and its highly critical reception, a reception which, in my analysis, was less based on Ratzinger's ideas, and more on Ratzinger's theological medium. I strove to understand, in both the chapter on Ratzinger and in the previous one on John Paul II, not only the different positions of those leading Catholic figures with regards to Jews and Judaism (which I at least tried to represent fairly), but also to see what these ideas "do" in the world. From this perspective, I think that John Paul II's performative theology was better received

⁴ On Jews as figures of thought in intra-Christian debates see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014).

in both Jewish and Catholic circles than Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's systematic thought. This does not imply that I disapprove of Ratzinger's ideas or his choice of medium. In fact, I do not.⁵

This brings me to the last point—though ending here does not do justice to many important and inspiring insights in Anton's review. In what Anton identified as my "overly negative judgment" of Ratzinger's attitude to Jews and Jewish-Christian dialogue, he was puzzled by the absence of mention of Jewish figures who had applauded Ratzinger's contribution to Jewish-Christian relations. One prominent example which Anton gave was that of the late Shimon Peres, a dominant Israeli politician and former president of Israel. I am unsure why the position of an Israeli politician and diplomat with no special interest in Jewish-Christian relations should change my evaluation of Ratzinger's theology, whether or not it was indeed as negative as Anton understood it to be. Considering statements of Jewish politicians while evaluating a pope's contribution would be as problematic here as the mention of Golda Meir in "We Remember, A Reflection on the Shoah" from 1998, where her applause for Pius XII was raised in his defense against some critical historians. I do not doubt the sincerity of either Peres or Meir, but I do think that the positions of politicians are—and should remain—part of a certain discourse which has very different roles and aims than the academic and historiographic discourse of scholars. The common denominator of "Jewishness" or "opinions of Jews" does not justify conflating these discourses nor make the discourse of politicians authoritative for any scholar, Jewish or other.

Other than that, I am eager to learn more from Anton on Ratzinger's approach to interreligious relations, and to discussing how Jewish-Christian relations fit into his greater vision for interfaith relations.

While David Meyer admitted that reading chapter 7, on Christianity as reflected in the Kook school of Religious Zionism in Israel, was a painful experience, I am delighted that his review of the chapter turned from bitter to sweet. Meyer's thoughtful review reopens the grave and eternal question of coping with the difficult sources within our traditions, by casting a direct gaze at both the obstacles and the possibilities that the current cultural and political environments in which we live pose to our hermeneutical horizons, that is, to the evolution of the Jewish tradition, to Judaism, and to our own Jewishness.

As an alternative to the total negation of Christianity which is present within religious Zionist theology, Meyer turns to Jewish thinkers who not only held a "positive" opinion about the Christian religion, but were willing to take lessons from Christianity in order to cope and orient their Judaism under changing historical circumstances. Meyer turns, first, to Ernst Simon's classical essay which takes inspiration from Christian models in order to equip Judaism with tools for facing

⁵ I found Ratzinger's theology of the relationship between the Christian tradition and the enlightenment especially interesting and insightful for non-Christian readership. The fruit of this interest is the first article on Ratzinger which was ever published in Hebrew, see my "Diokan ha-mevaker ke-ish knessia: Joseph Ratzinger ve-ha-katolizatzia shael ha-proiekt ha-moderni," "A Portrait of the Critic as a Churchman: Joseph Ratzinger and the Catholicization of the Modernity Project," *Theory and Criticism* 52 (2020): 139-164.

the challenge of the Jewish state. He then mentions Nicholas De Lange's fascinating reference to the gospel as a source of orientation to post-holocaust Jewish thought. Meyer then follows Simon's and De Lange's footsteps in suggesting that today, we can find help not only in Jewish sources, but also in Christian sources, for the task of "tempering the excessive messianic expectations" prevalent in certain forms of religious Zionism. At times, Meyer suggests that the gospel's "cooling" effect goes even farther than the midrash and the Talmud's tempering words.

Meyer's suggestion makes sense not only on the theological level, but on the historical level as well, since Judaism is always in a process of negotiation, borrowing and adopting ideas from Christianity, covertly or overtly.⁶ Indeed, notwithstanding their overt rejection of everything Christian, the rabbis of the Kook school themselves learned a thing or two from Christian "hard supersessionism" and turned those lessons against their Christian rivals. Yet Meyer's suggestion that the gospel can be helpful in "tempering excessive messianic expectations" strikes me as important on another level too; if there has been one persistent theme in Jewish-Christian polemics throughout the centuries, it was the question of the imminence of redemption. The Jewish side in the debate—for example, Nachmanides in the Barcelona Disputation—took the "anti-messianic" position, that is, pointed to the paradoxes arising from reading redemption into the current historical moment, which is still burdened by the unredeemed nature of suffering, enslavement, and injustice.⁷ As is apparent from Meyer's proposal, there seems to be a reversal of roles between the Jew and the Christian on this matter: the contemporary Christian, sobered by the lessons of their recent past, has already internalized the unruly nature of history, and is now warning the Jew from being carried away by messianic enthusiasm and ascribing redemption in a time and a place which are still full of suffering. While both traditions contain moments of excessive messianism alongside moments of sobriety and postponement, it is the design of their relationship which makes the pendulum continue swinging, with each of them serving as the anti-messianic witness to the other's enthusiasm.

Stressing the spiritual and ethical threats which the occupation of 1967 pose for the Jewish tradition, Meyer suggests that the Kook school's antagonism toward Christianity is, in fact, "collateral damage of the Zionist fall into the perils of idolatry." In other words, Meyer argues that it is the excessive attachment of religious Zionism to the land of Israel, and its sanctification of the State, of sovereignty, even of supremacy, which entails as a by-product an anti-Christian approach. Kookist

⁶ The paradigmatic study on the influence of the encounter with Christianity on Rabbinic thought is Israel Yuval's *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁷ "The Disputation of Barcelona (1263): the Hebrew Report of Moshe Ben Nachman," http://israel613.com/books/RAMBAN_DISPUTE_E.pdf. See also Daniel Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 9.

anti-Christian theology, according to this reasoning, is a somewhat contingent outcome of a much bigger problem.

While I agree with Meyer that the religious Zionist political-theological focus on the land and the State of Israel is closely linked to the group's antagonism toward Christianity, I would like to speculate on whether it is possible to reverse the cause and the effect, and see the unwarranted focus on the land as collateral damage of centuries of Jewish-Christian animosity, and not animosity as the collateral damage of the land focus. As the rabbis of the Kook school admit themselves, the Jewish State reverses one of the most determinate factors of Jewish existence in Christian lands: being a minority under a Christian majority. This sociological fact was historically accompanied by resonating theological overtones that endowed the Jews' numerical and political inferiority with providential meanings that had to do with their disfavor in the eyes of God. If the diaspora within Christendom was at the core of the Judeo-Christian tension, it should not come as a surprise that the State of Israel, which is often seen as a refutation of the eternal exile prophecies, is also imbued with Judeo-Christian resonances, to the point that any theologization of the land necessarily brings to the fore sources which were at the heart of the age-old Jewish polemic against Christianity. In other words, I am suggesting to alternate between the cause and the effect: instead of seeing the religious Zionist polemical approach toward Christianity as a consequence of the religious Zionist theologization of the Land of Israel, we could see the religious Zionist theologization of the Land of Israel as a consequence of the traditional polemic with Christianity. The idea of a Jewish return to Eretz Israel—the heart of the Zionist project—has been a theological category in the Jewish-Christian polemic from the outset, so that the anti-Christian polemical aspect of Zionist Land theology is not just its symptom, by its inherent facet.

Obviously, this is a matter of interpretation and cannot be “proven” historically; but I see this hermeneutical option as interesting since it gives more space to the relationship with Christianity as penetrating into the heart of the Jewish tradition's grappling with an ever-changing history.

I am grateful to Ruth Langer for her meticulous reading of, and constructive comments on, chapter 8. I am especially thankful for the opportunity to revisit some of the structural choices I made not only with regard to this specific chapter on Modern Orthodoxy in America and beyond, but to the project as a whole. In the limited space I have here to respond to Langer's criticism, I prefer to focus on the more paradigmatic comments toward the end of her review and leave the discussion of the way I chose to represent specific institutions, careers, or figures, for another occasion.

Langer rightly points out that the book's focus on the Jewish-Orthodox discourse on Christianity does not take into account the entire scope of Jewish engagement in Jewish-Christian dialogue. Of all Jewish denominations, the Orthodox community was the one least involved in dialogue over the past decades—a fact that makes its juxtaposition with a much-larger Catholic community eager to ameliorate its relationship with the Jewish world disturbingly a-symmetrical. Moreover, the fact that the main Jewish actors who were and still are central in

promoting Jewish-Christian dialogue, from Michael Signer to James Rudin to Langer herself, are not the central protagonists of this book, but rather figures who are almost anonymous in the realm of Jewish-Christian relations, such as Shalom Mashash or Ury Cherki, seems to add to this asymmetry.

For these reasons, those who look for an introductory read on Jewish-Christian dialogue would not find it in *Jacob's Younger Brother*, which has no intention of covering the development of Jewish-dialogue as a whole, neither to estimate the outstanding achievement of Jewish-Christian rapprochement, nor to provide an account on the global Jewish engagement in the process.

Framing the book as I did was based on what I identified as a major lacuna—or, indeed, of several lacunae—in the study of contemporary Jewish-Christian relations. As a historian, I am admittedly suspicious of success stories, not because there are no successes, but because successes are fragile, they are never linear, and they always come at a cost. The commonly held narrative on Jewish-Christian reconciliation after the Holocaust—by all means a success story—was yet to receive this sort of critical historiographical attention, which will highlight not only its solid building blocks but also its soft spots and scaffolding, in other words its failures, its prices, its compromises, and its reception in the greater religious communities. Importantly, this sort of framing (which is explicated in the book's preface) does not imply an irresistible urge to “deconstruct” Jewish-Christian dialogue and expose it as a façade, but rather, to analyze an incredibly complex process through which very old traditions are renegotiated and reinterpreted, at times radically, within extremely different contexts. The thriving of Jewish-Christian dialogue in certain circles, especially in the United States, is only one part of the story—a part which, I believe, others are better qualified to tell. Resistance and antagonism toward dialogue are another part, hesitation and compromise yet another. Since Jewish-Christian relations involve interaction between two enormous worlds, and not between two groups of scholarly experts, I found the immense gaps and discrepancies between them no less interesting than the commonalities and the language they share.

As I mentioned in my preface to *Jacob's Younger Brother*, Orthodox Judaism is in fact an obvious point of comparison to Catholic Christianity, in several ways, because of the similar commitments of Catholics and Orthodox Jews to their respective traditions. This similarity seems important enough to me to justify juxtaposing two very different communities against each other, while exploring the profound asymmetry which characterizes many of their other aspects. The discussion of the chief rabbinate-Vatican dialogue in chapter 8, which Langer criticizes as presenting a false symmetry, is a salient example: the chief rabbinate was chosen by John Paul II as a dialogue partner precisely because it seemed to represent an authority similar to that of the pope—though in fact it does not, in almost every sense. The chief rabbinate is chosen to mobilize the Jewish tradition toward reconciliation and dialogue, though the motivation of the rabbis to initiate such mobilization is all but limited, and emerges from radically different interests than the pope's. In the end, the dialogue which becomes possible between these extremely different institutions under these conditions is rather thin, diplomatic in its

orientation, and invests no less energy in the question of what should *not* be addressed. It is precisely these awkward situations which make the Vatican-Chief Rabbinate dialogue so interesting, and so instructive for understanding the almost unbridgeable challenges in bringing these two worlds of meaning, with their entangled but radically different histories, to converse with one another.

Once again, I would like to thank the editor and the five authors for posing these pointed questions and challenging me to refine, correct, and improve my thesis. Their insights will surely accompany me in my future work, and I cherish their generosity.