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Like Us in Sin: A Freudian Reading of Jesus's Jewishness[1]

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Introduction

This paper explores the role that a sense of guilt, and in particular Jewish guilt, has played in the theological relationship between Jews and Christians. It does so through uncovering a disparity between the Jewish and the Christian traditions with relation to the intersection between Jesus's Jewishness and Jesus's innocence. Using some of the dynamics in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, I argue that a "classical" Jewish understanding of Jesus as a Jew is essentially bound up with the perception of Jesus as an equal member of a guilty community, that is, as a sinner. This is a perspective that stands in tension with the foundational Christian dogma that Christ, a Jew, was "like us in all things, except for sin." After discussing this basic tension through a Freudian lens, I turn to analyze the post-Shoah process of Jewish-Christian reconciliation. I argue that there, too, the question of Christ's innocence, which remains at the heart of the relationship, is renegotiated through the renewed emphasis on Christianity's own Jewishness, and especially the Jewishness of Christ. Toward the end of my article, I pose questions about the current, post-October 7 moment in the history of Jewish-Christian relations, and its reallocation of those questions of sin, guilt, and Jesus's Jewish identity.

Two Jewish Jesuses

Notwithstanding the complexities of their relationship, both Judaism and Christianity have always understood that Jesus was a Jew. And yet, they were both ambivalent toward this Jewishness of Christianity's messiah. Throughout most of history, Jesus was, for Christianity, a Jew only in terms of his ethnicity, "according to the flesh." He was overwhelmingly understood as a Jew who overcame Judaism, and the Jews were his enemies. Beyond sparse and marginal notions throughout the Christian tradition over the centuries, it was only in the wake of the Shoah that

[1] I am grateful to the editors and the project's group members for their valuable comments on previous versions of this article. Special thanks go to Faydra Shapiro and Jay Geller for engaging with my paper and providing constructive insights.

Christianity came to refer to Jesus's Jewishness as a positive characteristic and develop the idea in a theological way.

However interpreted, Christ's Jewishness has been clearly asserted as an essential part of his human nature.[2] The full humanity of Christ has been a central Christian dogma. Like every man, he was born of a woman's womb. Like every man, he suffered and died. Indeed, The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that Christ "in every respect has been tested as we are" (Hebrews 4:15), but with one singular exception: "yet without sin."[3] The dogmatic formulation of Christ's humanity apart from sin is articulated in the Chalcedonian Creed: "He is like us in all things, except for sin"[4] to be affirmed and expanded at the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes:*

> The Son of God... worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted with a human will, and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.[5]

Christ is human in all things apart from sin because, from a Christian perspective, it is his own sinlessness that allows for his sacrifice to effectively atone for the sins of his fellow humans.[6] In this way, his crucifixion could not have been a punishment for a crime he has committed but was rather a free gift that enabled humans to be absolved of their guilt.[7]

The Jewish tradition, too, clearly accepted Jesus's Jewishness. Yet, as in the Christian case, throughout most of its history Judaism did so only half-heartedly. While Christians had a hard time contending with Jesus's Jewishness due to their ambivalence towards the Jews and their rejection of Jesus, Jews had a hard time

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[2] The physical locus of Christ's humanity and his Jewishness is in his penis, itself a major theme in Renaissance art. The circumcision of Jesus—narrated in Luke 2:21—is also an artistic theme. The challenge of interpreting Jesus's circumcision not as the practice of a Jew "under the law" but as a volitional forerunner to Christ's Passion received significant exegetical effort. See Leo Steinberg *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

[3] See also 1 Cor 5:21; 1 John 3:5; 1 Peter 2:22 and Heb 7:26.

[4] Council of Chalcedon (451), Definition of the faith, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum04.htm.

[5] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, CH I: 22, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

[6] See, for example, John of Damascus, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* III: 1: "But it behooved the Redeemer to be without sin, and not made liable through sin to death, and further, that His nature should be strengthened and renewed, and trained by labour and taught the way of virtue which leads away from corruption to the life ..."; Thomas Aquinas, ST III q. 15: "In His temptation and passion Christ has succored us by satisfying for us. Now sin does not further satisfaction, but hinders it, as has been said. Hence, it behooved Him not to have sin, but to be wholly free from sin; otherwise, the punishment He bore would have been due to Him for His own sin." The sinlessness of Christ is a complex theological concept and I will not get into it here. See, for example, the entry "Sinlessness of Christ" in Martin Davie et al., *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, Second Edition (Downers Grove: AVP Academic, 2016), 843-4.

[7] Theologically speaking, guilt is the objective state of having sinned: "The fact and/or awareness of having done wrong and so being culpable" see Gerald O'Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 99.

admitting it as a result of their ambivalence toward Christianity and its perception of Jesus as messiah and Son of God.

While admitting Jesus's Jewishness, Judaism stringently denies Jesus's sinlessness—this pillar of Christian doctrine—as part of its rejection of the main theological narrative of Christianity. On the rare occasions where Jesus is mentioned in Talmudic and other early rabbinic texts,[8] he is clearly presented as a Jew, but a bad one, a sinner. He is accused of having "practiced sorcery, incited [people to idol worship], and led the Jewish people astray" (Bavli 43a); he is described as a heretic and an apostate [for example Berakhot 17b (minor); Tosefta Sanhedrin 10:11]. In some uncensored versions of Bavli Gittin 56b, when Jesus is summoned by Onqelos to tell him about his post-mortem fate, Jesus even says of himself that he is "a transgressor of Israel": "*poshe'a Israel ani*" [**פושע ישראל אני**].

These depictions are usually read as tools mobilized to exclude Jesus from the normative Jewish community. In other words, Jesus's putative sins are used to indicate an evasion, or a constraint to his Jewishness, as if implying: he *is* Jewish, but as a criminal and a sinner he doesn't really belong, such that his Jewishness stands in opposition to his sin. We would not be remiss in suggesting that one might read the rabbinic criticisms of Jesus in line with the Christian formula: "*He is like us [Jews] in all things, except for sin."*

Yet we might recall that sin in no way stands in opposition to Jewishness and does not exclude one from the Jewish community, as clearly indicated by the well-known formula "**ישראל אף על פי שחטא ישראל הוא**", "Though an Israelite had sinned, he remains Israel."[9] The Jewish perspective does not render Jesus's sin as compromising his Jewishness. Therefore, rather than challenging Jesus's Jewishness, the Jewish claim regarding Jesus's sinfulness should be regarded as a polemic specifically against the Christian conception of Jesus as impeccable, not against his perception as a full member of the Jewish community.

We can thus say that the Jewish Jesus of the Jews is a sinner, while the Jewish Jesus of the Christians is without sin, because of the unity of his human and divine natures. Jesus, in other words, can be a sinless (Jewish) man only if he is also God. This distinction between the two traditions is expressed, for example, in Benedict XVI's dialogue with Talmudic scholar Jacob Neusner in *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*.[10] Reading Neusner's puzzlement over Jesus's self-exclusion from the norms of the community, Benedict claims that precisely as part of the Jewish community Jesus can be either a sinner who transgresses the community's norms, or God. Thus, the Jewish community takes him to be a sinner, and the Christian, to be God.[11] In

[8] See Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[9] On the genealogy of this dictum, and particularly the way in which Rashi used it to halakhically define Jewish converts to Christianity in the Middle Ages see Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (New Jersey: Behrman House, 1982), 67-72.

[10] Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

[11] Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth, vol. 1, From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration, trans. A. J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 102-118.

this sense, the Jewish denial of Jesus's divinity—the *sine qua non* distinction between Judaism and Christianity—thus obliges the Jewish insistence on Jesus's human sinfulness. This illuminates the issue of sin as a crucial intersection dividing the Jewish take on Jesus's Jewishness from the Christian. The Jewish acknowledgment of Jesus's Jewishness is entangled with a rejection of his Christian dogmatic status as a man without sin, and, through this, with a denial of the possibility of absolution, that is, the famous Jewish "no" to Christ's sacrifice. Being Jewish, seen through this prism, means the sustaining of guilt, rather than the possibility of being washed clean of sin.

Interestingly, this difference between Judaism and Christianity with regards to issues of sin and guilt has been most extensively explored by a staunch atheist, in a work which has long been rendered worthless for our understanding of history, and irrelevant for Jewish-Christian relations: Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. Freud's *Moses* was mocked as a speculative and unscientific exercise already in his own time. Completing the piece close to the end of his life, this essay has been considered by some as evidence to the dwindling intellectual faculties of a delusional old man. Moreover, philologists and biblical scholars were quick to expose the various lapses and stretches of the work, showing that it lacks a solid scientific basis as a historiographic account.[12]

So, why Freud? And why *Moses*? Notwithstanding its obvious and manifold flaws, Freud's work has inspired a wide and interdisciplinary range of interventions in the history and theory of religion. As Egyptologist and religion scholar Jan Assmann has argued, Freud's "conscious anachronism is the unmistakable sign that we are moving in the space of memory rather than history. Therefore, Freud's Moses is within the scope of mnemohistorical research,"[13] that is, it is an account of what cultures remember and how. Moreover, Freud's work opened a critical path to the understanding of the place of generative violence at the root of religion and culture,[14] and of monotheism in particular.[15]

Most importantly for our purposes, however, is the fact that Freud, after all, is an expert on guilt, and on the means to cope with it as driving forces behind broad civilizational processes.[16] I believe that the issue of processing guilt is a crucial one for understanding the complex dynamic of Jewish-Christian relations throughout history, and it is especially pertinent for the reconstructing of this relationship in the aftermath of WWII. I will therefore revisit Freud's *Moses* as a basis for an

[12] Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1988), 647-651.
[13] Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*: *The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 148-9. Freud was indeed aware of the fallacies of his methodology, therefore treating the work as "a historical novel." See Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 643.
[14] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), 204-216.
[15] Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian,* 211-213. See also his *The Price of Monotheism,* trans. by Robert Savage (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010).
[16] Freud elaborates on this in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

analysis of the Jewish-Christian dynamic in a specific—and unique—period in history.

Moreover, I write this essay as an Israeli in the wake of October 7th, when the Jewish community is torn by internal controversies surrounding the morality of the war Israel waged in Gaza at the same time as it undergoes a momentous surge in antisemitism accusing Jews of the most hideous crimes. This, too, makes Freud's *Moses* relevant, since it was precisely this essay where Freud articulated his understanding of both antisemitism and Jewish guilt, as this guilt is sensed, experienced and perceived both externally, by Christians and other non-Jews, and internally, by Jews themselves. My appeal to Freud, in other words, is a preliminary attempt to find language for the drama of Jewish-Christian relations which is unfolding in front of our eyes, a drama that seems to have awakened many of the suppressed and not yet fully resolved tensions that characterized Jewish-Christian relations of earlier times.

Freud's Moses

Freud published *Moses and Monotheism* in 1939 after his flight from Nazi-occupied Vienna to London. Fearing that psychoanalysis would be rendered leprous due to its Jewish father, Freud was especially hesitant to publish this specific piece, which stands as his most overtly Jewish work and which deals directly with the question of antisemitism.[17] He was especially nervous about tensions with the Austrian Catholic establishment, of which some members had already expressed their profound discontent with his unconcealed atheism and psychoanalytic genealogies of religion.[18] After neglecting the monograph for some time, London provided him the conditions to publish it. *Moses and Monotheism* stands as Freud's last full-length theoretical piece. He died a few months after its publication.

Moses and Monotheism builds on Freud's previous work, *Totem and Taboo* (1913), in which he famously depicts the origins of civilization in the act of patricide: the sons of a tyrannical patriarchal ruler who keeps the females to himself murder him in order to liberate themselves from his relentless grip. And yet simultaneous with the joy they experience in freeing themselves from the father's tyrannical rule and the ability to share his power, they also experience an overwhelming sense of guilt for the terrible deed they have committed. This ambivalence both towards the father and towards their own crime is, for Freud, an irresolvable psychic reality which propels forward human civilization.

Obviously, Freud's perception of guilt does not cohere with the theological idea of being in an objectively "defective state in which a sinner finds himself as a result of his sin."[19] Rather, the sense of guilt is, the way he puts it in *Civilization*

[17] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale, 1991).
[18] Gilad Sharvit, *Dynamic Repetition History and Messianism in Modern Jewish Thought* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press), 222.
[19] Louis Bouyer, *Dictionary of Theology,* trans. by Charles Underhill Quinn (New York: Desclee Co., Inc., 1965), 198.

and Its Discontents, the product of "the tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it."[20] Freud rejects concepts such as "conscience," that is, an inner or "natural capacity to distinguish good from bad." Rather, the super-ego is an internalized civilizational "agent" of an external authority, which dictates for the individual what may put them in tension with the external expectations on them, that is, with society's moral codes.[21] Nevertheless, unlike the inner drama of the individual who may feel guilty even if the fantasy of transgression only crossed their mind, rather than was actualized, in *Totem and Taboo* and in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud insists that an act of murder has indeed occurred, and has been a generative moment for society's formation.

Moses and Monotheism builds on the pre-historical and semi-mythical *Totem and Taboo* to provide an imagined account of the formation of both Judaism and Christianity, as well as the profound and everlasting tensions between them. In Freud's provocative explanation, Moses was not a Hebrew but an Egyptian, one who followed an Egyptian monotheistic religion. This religion, according to Freud, did not take root in Egypt and was about to be abolished with the reinstatement of the old Egyptian gods. To prevent this monotheistic religion from extinction, Moses thus adopted "a certain people in Egypt who were then in a low state of civilization," probably slaves, and instructed them in his monotheistic religion. Yet in Freud's vision, Moses's monotheism was a hard religion; it was "a rigid monotheism on the grand scale," spiritual, abstract, and imbued with stringent moral imperatives. The "savage Semites" who followed Moses despised the lofty demands of their new faith and found them impossible to observe.[22] In a reenactment of the "primal crime" in *Totem and Taboo*, they revolt against Moses and murder him, in an effort to liberate themselves from his legalistic rule. Here, too, the murder is experienced with great ambivalence – the Hebrews both admired and hated Moses, and their violent revolt against him led them to a sense of guilt, one that was too grave to confront directly. The memory of the act was therefore repressed, and the Israelites returned to practice sensual idolatry.

Freud's account of the immediate aftermath of the murder does not concern us here. What is important is that generations passed before the repressed guilt found its way back to the surface, in the form of a voluntary (or compulsive) Jewish return to the coercive practices of their murdered leader, the very same practices from which they sought to release themselves through that murder. Here Freud relies on a Lamarckian theory of inherited memory: though repressed, the sense of guilt for the original deed was transmitted across generations and became the basis of the Israelites' obsessive adherence to a strict monotheism. In the Jewish imagination, the memory of Moses had merged with a figure of a Law-giving, jealous and stern Father-God, of whom the Jews proudly saw themselves as elected children. The

[20] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. by James Trachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), 70.
[21] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 71.
[22] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. by Catherine Jones (New York: Vintage Books, 1939), 58.

imageless legalism, rationality, and self-restraint of Moses' original Egyptian monotheism became, according to Freud, distinguishing characteristics of the Jewish religion to this very day. This was the result of a repressed sense of irresolvable guilt which was internalized without ever having been consciously admitted, yet all the while constantly being processed. The Jews, in other words, have proudly constituted themselves as an eternally-guilty community, responsible for their ambivalence toward a coercive father-God who chose them of all peoples.

"The direction of this father religion was thus fixed for all time," Freud asserts, "but its development was not thereby finished."[23] The old hostility toward the father, which had propelled the Israelites to rebel against Moses in the first place, now evoked a terrible sense of guilt. Yet, on the other hand, the pressure of Judaism continued to burden the Jewish community, evoking the old hatred toward the father which had originally led to his murder. "In the religion of Moses itself," argues Freud, "there was no room for direct expression of the murderous father hate."[24] And yet the relentless commitment to the father was difficult to sustain without ambivalence:

> The people met with hard times; the hopes based on the favor of God were slow in being fulfilled; it became not easy to adhere to the illusion, cherished above all else, that they were God's chosen people. If they wished to keep happiness, then the consciousness of guilt because they themselves were such sinners offered a welcome excuse for God's severity. They deserved nothing better than to be punished by him, because they did not observe the laws; the need for satisfying this feeling of guilt, which… was insatiable, made them render their religious precepts ever and ever more strict, more exacting, but also more petty … The origin, however, of this ethics in feelings of guilt, due to the repressed hostility to God, cannot be gainsaid. It bears the characteristic of being never concluded and never able to be concluded with which we are familiar in the reaction formations of obsessional neurosis.[25]

However, since guilt for the murder of the primordial father was the driving force behind civilization as a whole and not only Judaism, the compulsive Jewish reaction was not the only route to cope with that feeling of guilt. In Freud's vision an alternative reaction emerged among the Jews, eventually transgressing the boundaries of their ethnic community. This was Christianity. "It was in the mind of a Jew, Saul of Tarsus, who, as a Roman citizen, was called Paul," Freud argues, "that the perception dawned: 'It is because we killed God the Father that we are so unhappy…'"[26] Yet the Christian response was no less ambivalent than that of Judaism, and the confession of guilt came with its immediate negation: "'we have been delivered from all guilt since one of us laid down his life to expiate our guilt,'"

[23] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 172.
[24] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 172.
[25] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 173.
[26] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 174.

proclaims Freud's Paul.[27] Thus where the Jews' mechanism for internalizing guilt was their sense of chosenness and a relentless loyalty to the impossible demands of their murdered father, Christians have exchanged this sense of chosenness for a release from guilt and from the stringent ritual laws which accompanied it, through the absolution provided by Christ's perfect sacrifice.

Yet the universal civilizational trait that Freud names "the ancient ambivalency in the father-son relationship" finds a unique expression in Christianity just as it does in Judaism:

> Its main doctrine, to be sure, was the reconciliation with God the Father, the expiation of the crime committed against him; but the other side of the relationship manifested itself in the Son, who had taken the guilt on his shoulders, becoming God himself beside the Father and in truth in place of the Father. Originally a Father religion, Christianity became a Son religion. The fate of having to displace the Father it could not escape.[28]

In his depiction of the relationship between these two distinct civilizational grapplings with primordial guilt for the patricide, Freud explains that the Jews are those who did not accept the expiation offered by the sacrifice of the guiltless Son: "only a part of the Jewish people accepted the new doctrine. Those who refused to do so are still called Jews."[29] This, of course, has significant implications for the question of antisemitism. For Freud, the Christian deicide charge against the Jews is not a baseless accusation: the very adherence of Jews to their Judaism implies, in his eyes, their ongoing guilt for the murder of Moses, the Father of the people who underwent a process of divinization. In Freud's words:

> The poor Jewish people, who with its usual stiff-necked obduracy continued to deny the murder of their "father," has dearly expiated this in the course of centuries. Over and over again they heard the reproach: "You killed our God." And this reproach is true, if rightly interpreted. It says, in reference to the history of religion: "You don't admit that you murdered God"… Something should be added—namely: "It is true, we did the same thing, but we admitted it, and since then we have been purified."[30]

Within Freud's psychohistorical typology, the core of the Jewish tradition lays precisely in its relentless rejection of the expiation of guilt. The Jewish people is a guilty community, which makes the very idea of a Jew who is "without sin" a *contradictio in adjecto,* and one who absolves others of their sins, even more so. According to this logic, the insistence in rabbinic literature on Jesus as a *poshe'a*

[27] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 174.
[28] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 175.
[29] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 176.
[30] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 115.

Yisrael—a transgressor of Israel—may be understood not as a denial of his Jewishness, but rather as its very condition. Within a civilizational logic shaped by the internalization of guilt, Jesus cannot be reclaimed as a Jew by Jews unless he also participates in the guilt that constitutes the collective.

On one hand, Freud judges both religions as illusions, reducing them to very specific strategies to cope with some primordial guilt. On the other hand, both Judaism and Christianity appear in *Moses and Monotheism* as two ideal types for civilizational movements that transcend the boundaries of the two specific religious communities. Freud makes clear that history in general is an arena where repressed guilt is due to return time after time, leading to additional and inevitable catastrophic bursts of violence, which will in turn lead to additional circles of repression and externalization, self-accusation and Othering. Indeed, civilization is seen as precisely this interim between catastrophes, the frameworks of meaning with which humans can connect between past traumas and the new traumas they will eventually bring upon themselves. As Gilad Sharvit argues:

> History is the realm of the return of the repressed, in which, murder after murder, humanity re-experiences the trauma that started history. The murder of Moses is not an isolated event in world history, but one in a series of murders of fathers that started with the murder of the first father of the primal horde and continued with the killing of Moses and later of Christ.[31]

Freud thus proposes an eternal return to the crime scene—indeed to the crime itself—an endless reenactment of the crime, not only symbolically but also concretely; history is altered through bloodshed, and the bloodshed will inevitably recur. Human beings are "crime returners," **שבי פשע** in Hebrew (Isa. 59:20), in the double sense of repenting of their crimes and repeating them, a cyclical attempt to atone, to be purified of the primal guilt, to be redeemed from sin—a cycle fated to end in a new crime, **חטא על פשע**, crime upon sin (Job 34:37). In Sharvit's words:

> Repetition in Freud's version ruptures history. The killings of fathers create episodes or different chunks of history that start with a killing and end with a killing. Instead of a concept of homogeneous time, history is disintegrated by repetition, composed of separate histories. In each such history, the murder of the father that initiates the period creates different, distinct social and religious organizations. Life within one of Freud's histories has a certain logic, which the next period forcibly alters.[32]

To conclude this section, Christianity and Judaism represent, for Freud, two ideal types of coping with guilt which constitute two civilizations. Judaism is the internalization of guilt, while Christianity is saved from guilt by the sacrifice of the Son. What they have in common, according to Freud, is that both communities

[31] Sharvit, *Dynamic Repetition*, 215.
[32] Sharvit, *Dynamic Repetition*, 218.

have designated the Jews as guilty: the Jews have experienced themselves as such ever since they killed Moses and developed their coping mechanism which included their self-accusation for every misfortune suffered,[33] and the Christians recognized the Jews as those who refused Christ's sacrifice, killed Christ and the prophets and never repented.

Interestingly, both the Jewish and the Christian mechanisms in Freud's theory insist on the Jewishness of Jesus. In Freud's perception of Judaism, Jesus is a member of the guilty community of the sons who have killed the father and continue to rebel against him after his death. Yet for Christianity too, Christ's belonging to the community of the sons, i.e., to the people of Israel, is important precisely because it is only the sacrifice of a son (that is, a member of Moses's elected community, a Jew) that can atone for the sons' killing of the father and release the entire community of brothers from their original guilt: "A Son of God, innocent himself, had sacrificed himself, and had thereby taken over the guilt of the world". Jesus was indeed a Jew, but because he had no sin, because he was different than the rest in this regard, he was able to save them: "It had to be a son, for the sin had been murder of the Father."[34] The Jewish Jesus is thus a focal point in both of these engagements with guilt, and yet the gap between them must remain, according to Freud, for Judaism to remain Judaism and for Christianity to remain Christianity.

After the Holocaust: A Reallocation of Guilt

Freud, as mentioned, published *Moses and Monotheism* in 1939 and died shortly thereafter. He did not live to conceptualize the next great bloodshed, the greatest in the history of his people. As if by Freud's invitation, Dan Diner has named the Holocaust a *zivilizationsbruch,*[35] a civilizational break, a term which aptly places it as an outstanding example of Freud's concept of history as a series of epoch-making events of violence, and of civilizations as the specific forms of processing these traumas. As such, the sense of guilt attached to the Shoah has had extraordinary dimensions, which led to the development of new coping mechanisms, in a way that impacted both Judaism and Christianity, as well as the relationship between them.[36]

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[33] Here it is worth mentioning the commonality between Jews and Christians in understanding the destruction of the Temple and the Jews' exile as a punishment for Jewish sins; while Christians have argued that this was a punishment for the rejection and crucifixion of Christ, Jews have argued for a different set of sins but agreed that "due to our sins we have been exiled from our Land" (*mipnei hataeinu galinu me-artzenu*). See on this polemic, Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 31-33.

[34] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 110.

[35] See Dan Diner, ed. *Zivilisationsbruch: Denken nach Auschwitz*. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988).

[36] See in this regard Katharina von Kellenbach's work on theologies of guilt, specifically *The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-War Lives of Nazi Perpetrators* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) and "The Purification of Memory: Guilt as Ferment, Leaven, Compost," in *Satisfactio. Über*

What, then, would Freud have said about the postwar incarnation of Jewish-Christian relations? Where would he have placed it in the eternal, yet ever changing history of what he called "Father-Son ambivalency"? While risking in reproducing myself the disavowed speculations of this rejected father, I will now attempt to offer a Freudian interpretation of the post-Shoah Jewish-Christian reconciliation.

As the Christian churches in Europe sought to reexamine their relationship with Jews and Judaism, they have been forced to wrestle with several forms of the question of guilt, and of inherited, collective guilt, more specifically. First, there was the so-called 'Deicide charge,' that is, the idea that the Jews are collectively guilty for the crucifixion. This idea, existing at least from the 2nd century onward – if not from the blood cry in Matthew 27:25, "His blood be on us and on our children"[37] – has now been presented by prominent observers as one of the central facilitators of antisemitism; the culpability of Jews, as a group, for the murder of Jesus was the beating heart of what Jules Isaac termed *l'enseignement du mépris*: the Christian "teaching of contempt" against the Jews. Pioneering efforts to cultivate Jewish-Christian dialogue and recruit Christianity as part of the 'solution' in the fight against antisemitism have dedicated considerable attention to this deep-rooted Christian accusation in an attempt to uproot it from theology and popular Christian imagination, or at least to mitigate it considerably. "Avoid presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of Jesus upon all Jews or upon Jews alone," reads "The Ten Points of Seelisberg,"[38] the product of one of the very first dialogical conferences in postwar Europe, issued by the International Council of Christians and Jews in August 1947 in an urgent plea against antisemitism. "It was only a section of the Jews in Jerusalem who demanded the death of Jesus," the document continues, "and the Christian message has always been that it was the sins of mankind which were exemplified by those Jews and the sins in which all men share that brought Christ to the Cross."[39] The World Council of Churches, too, declared in 1961 that: "In Christian teaching the historic events which led to the Crucifixion should not be so presented as to fasten upon the Jewish people of today responsibilities which belong to our corporate humanity and not to one race or community." Famously, the deicide charge was one of the most contested issues at the Second Vatican Council. After facing considerable resistance, a moderated version of the renunciation of the Deicide charge finally found its way into the final version: "True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their

(Un)Möglichkeiten von Wiedergutmachung, ed. Julia Enxing and Dominik Gautier (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019), 238-251.

[37] See Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007).

[38] International Council of Christians and Jews, "The 10 Points of Seelisburg," 1947. https://www.jcrelations.net/article/an-address-to-the-churches-seelisberg-switzerland-1947.pdf

[39] Jehoshua Ahrens, *Gemeinsam gegen Antisemitismus - Die Konferenz von Seelisberg (1947) revisited die Entstehung des institutionellen jüdisch-christlichen Dialogs in der Schweiz und in Kontinentaleuropa* (Berlin: LIT, 2020). The idea that the guilt for the Crucifixion is shared by humankind and should not be attached to Jews alone received a doctrinal articulation in the Catechism of the Council of Trent. www.saintsbooks.net/books/The%20Roman%20Catechism.pdf, Article IV, "Reasons Why Christ Suffered."

lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today."[40] These efforts have indeed borne fruit: within a few decades after the Holocaust, it had become no longer acceptable, at least in the West, to speak of collective Jewish guilt for the crucifixion.

Importantly, this alleviation of Jewish guilt came hand in hand with a growing acknowledgment of Christian guilt. Historians and theologians began to probe to what extent generations of Christian teaching were responsible for the development of antisemitism, and, as a by-product, for facilitating the destruction of Jews on European soil. If the deicide charge was both false and detrimental to the Jews, then the guilt for conceptualizing, preserving and spreading it fell on Christian shoulders.[41] At the same time, the question of actual Christian behavior vis-a-vis the destruction of European Jewry—whether it was the silence of Pius XII or the complicity of the Protestant churches in Europe[42]—heavily burdened the discourse within and about the churches and their heritage. Historiographies of the Holocaust, antisemitism, and Christian anti-Judaism have encouraged Christians to account for the dark parts in their recent past as in their older traditions. Moreover, a variety of sources have depicted antisemitism as a sin: "antisemitism is a sin against the Holy Spirit," Karl Barth writes in *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day*[43] Or, in the words of the World Council of Churches from 1948: "Antisemitism is a Sin against God and Man."[44]

The renunciation of the deicide charge was therefore not merely an absolution of guilt, but also, significantly, its reallocation: the Jewish guilt for the murder of God has been replaced with the Christian guilt for the murder of the Jews.[45] Before turning to consider this reversal through a Freudian lens, we must attend to another

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[40] There was notable reluctance on the part of some bishops and observers at the Second Vatican Council to this statement, some for theological reasons and others for political ones. See Giovani Miccoli, "Two Sensitive Issues: Religious Freedom and the Jews," in *History of Vatican II: Church as Communion: Third Period and Intersession, September 1964-September 1965*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A Komonchak, vol. 4 (Maryknoll, NA: Orbis, Peeters, 2003).

[41] This reversal is perhaps hinted at in Jacques Maritain's *Mystery of Israel* where he refers to Leon Bloy's comment that "the veil," to which Saint Paul refers and which covers the eyes of Israel, is now passing "from the Jews to the Christians." See "The Mystery of Israel," in *Ransoming the Time,* trans. by Harry Lorin Binsse (New York: Gordian Press, 1972), 176.

[42] The controversy over the way Christian leaders, institutions and individuals have contended with the Holocaust burst into being with Rolph Hochhuth's play, *Der Stellvertreter*, in 1963.

[43] Karl Barth, "Die Kirche und die politische Frage von heute," in *Eine Schweizer Stimme, 1938-1945*, (Zürich: Theologische Verlag, 1985), 90.

[44] WCC, "Concerns of the churches - The Christian approach to the Jews," Amsterdam Assembly, 1948, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/concerns-of-the-churches-the-christian-approach-to-the-jews

[45] von Kellenbach explores the tensions between German and Christian guilt in *The Mark of Cain*. The question of the appropriateness of ascribing punishment to Jews for the crucifixion has preoccupied Catholic thinkers such as Jacques Maritain, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Augustine Bea. See for example Augustin Bea, *The Church and the Jewish People*, trans. Philipp Lopez (New York: Harper and Row 1966), 91-93; Jacques Maritain, *On the Church of Christ: The Person of the Church and Her Personnel*, trans. Joseph W Evans (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 173.

element which gained prominence in the post-Shoah Christian discourse on Judaism—the discovery of Christianity's own Jewishness.

As Christians began to seek out elements in their own traditions which might help to vaccinate them against antisemitism, one of the central strategies mobilized was the emphasizing of Christianity's Jewish roots. As we read among the ten points of Seelisberg: "Remember that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother of the seed of David and the people of Israel…" [point 2]; "Remember that the first disciples, the apostles and the first martyrs were Jews," [point 3] and with negative language: "Avoid speaking of the Jews as if the first members of the Church had not been Jews." *Nostra Aetate* also reads:

> The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "… theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's mainstay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

Moreover, gradually, an emphasis was put not only on the Jewish kinship of the early Christian community, but also on the Jewishness of the Christian faith. Even Paul, who was only recently still read as the man who 'converted' and broke with Judaism, has been re-situated in his Jewish context thanks to the fruitful exchange between biblical scholarship and Christian theology that now dared to read Christian sources as part and parcel of their Jewish milieu.[46] Yet this was also an emphasis with far-reaching political reverberations: if the churches that supported Nazism made an encompassing effort to purge Christianity of its Jewishness (*Entjudung*),[47] an anti-Nazi Christianity must conversely immerse itself deeply in its Jewishness.

Together with these developments, New Testament texts which had been previously interpreted as anti-Jewish slanders, now came to be viewed as intra-Jewish controversies, such that they ought not be interpreted as an essentialization of Judaism or of Jewish guilt, but rather, as passionate brotherly quarrels among the like-minded.[48] In other words, what was once read as a Christian attack on the Jewish Other was now understood as prophetic self-critique (thus also absolving the Christian reception of these texts as antisemitic).

We can now consider these transitions within the Christian discourse together: the renunciation of Jewish guilt, the admission of Christian guilt, and the discovery of Christianity's own Jewishness. Thinking with Freud, we may argue that the Judaization of Christianity and the internalization of guilt were, in fact, two sides of the same coin. In a way, by rendering itself guilty, Christianity has rendered itself

[46] On this see the "New Perspective on Paul" movement, and the work of E.P. Sanders, Krister Stendhal and James Dunn. Out of this developed the "Paul Within Judaism" movement particularly through the work of Mark Nanos.

[47] See Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[48] See the work of J. Louis Martyn, AJ Levine, and Paula Fredriksen, scholars on the Gospels.

Jewish, and vice versa. Christians, by acknowledging their guilt for not recognizing their indebtedness towards Jews and perceiving them as enemies, became Jewish precisely by internalizing their guilt for the murder of their fathers in faith instead of outsourcing it to the Jews "outside."[49] This was a move parallel to the one Freud describes as the structural pattern of the Jewish tradition: the internalization of guilt for the murder of Moses, to the point of identifying with his hard commandments and suppressing the profound ambivalence which led to his killing at the outset. In this sense, Christianity's "Judaization" did not exactly mean the absolution of Jewish guilt, but rather, making Jewish guilt "one's own," internalizing the Jews and their existential guilt, rather than Othering them.

Jesus the Jew(s)

And yet, there was one point in which the Judaization of Christianity did not take full form vis-à-vis the question of guilt. Unsurprisingly, this was to be found in the matter of Jesus's sinlessness. As we've seen, the Jewishness of Jesus was broadly acknowledged after the Shoah and came to be accepted with much less ambivalence within the Christian milieu. Yet the doctrine regarding Christ's impeccability would come to have profoundly significant implications in relation to the transitions in the allocation of guilt described above.

In Freud's theory, the rejection of Christ's sinlessness was a central pillar of the Jewish tradition, because the internalization of guilt requires the rejection of its alleviation by exporting it to a third party, that is, a rejection of the idea of an atoning sacrifice. At face value, the post-Shoah Christian renunciation of the deicide charge – the alleviation of Jewish guilt, the internalization of Christian guilt, and the Judaization of Christianity – all point to a Christian adoption of the Jewish civilizational pattern of internalizing guilt. Yet internalizing guilt (or, as it were, taking the Judaization of Christianity in the Freudian sense to its conclusion) means rejecting the liberation from guilt that Jesus offers.

This tension, I suggest, between the Judaization of Christianity's coping with guilt and the doctrine of Christ's sinlessness, was processed by Western Christianity along the following lines: by declaring Christ's Jewishness, the Christian community did not—indeed, could not—adopt the Jewish view on Jesus's Jewishness and did not render him guilty as an equal member of the guilty community. On the contrary, it began to perceive the Jews as sinless like Christ. In other words, instead of Judaizing Jesus, Christian thought began to 'Jesusize' the Jews, who came to be seen, we might say, as "like us in all, apart from sin." Indeed, it became clear that viewing the Holocaust as a punishment was gruesome and grotesque and that Nazi extermination had nothing to do with any kind of Jewish behavior.[50] Yet

[49] Christian violence towards the Jews can be regarded, through the Freudian lens, as both patricide and fratricide; it is "patricide" inasmuch as Christianity is the religion of the Son, which seeks to obfuscate the religion of the Father from which it has emerged. Yet it is "fratricide" in the sense that Jesus was the Jews' brother, belonging, like them, to the guilty community of Moses' murderers.

[50] See my *Jacob's Younger Brother: Christian-Jewish Relations after Vatican II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2022), 51-60.

these rejected ideas of Jewish guilt and punishment were not replaced with notions of moderate, or 'normal' human sinfulness, that is, the acknowledgement that Jews were imperfect human beings who did not deserve to be abused and murdered; after what had happened, it was too difficult to acknowledge the Jews as guilty of anything. And so, rather than being 'innocent' in the simple sense, the sense of not 'earning' the violence perpetrated against them, the Jews were transformed into a people held to be radically innocent, beyond even the capacity to sin. Jews were now endowed with a uniqueness which no other people enjoyed—they were transformed from the greatest sinners imaginable to a saintly, martyred community.[51]

This rejection of Jewish sin came hand in hand with extensive analogical work which linked Auschwitz and the crucifixion, further enhancing in the Christian mind an elevation of the Jews to the level of a saintly community, not guilty like everyone else but rather innocent as the *agnus dei*, an ultimate sacrifice, a holocaust offering without blemish. The persecution of the Jews was the Golgotha of the modern world, said Jacques Maritain in his "*Le mystère d'Israël*," later reiterated by John Paul II at his visit to Auschwitz in 1979,[52] and the Shoah was "the crucifixion of the Jews," as named by Franklin Littell. The Christian and the Jewish readings of Isaiah 53 were thus reconciled by these Christian readers, instead of being seen as contradictory; the Jews themselves were God's suffering servant, explained Alice and Roy Eckardt.[53]

Moreover, the catastrophe of the Jews was seen as an essential sacrifice, since it was the sine qua non that enabled the West to finally repent and renounce its antisemitism. The Holocaust was a terrible tragedy, but it healed the world of the sin of chauvinism and exclusivism, and in a certain sense, we can say it was necessary for the West's moral salvation. The Jews were thus not 'just' integrated into an egalitarian new West; their own catastrophe was its harbinger.[54]

The 'Christianization' of the Shoah was itself a theme of importance during the 1970s and the 1980s, when Jews protested against the co-optation of their tragedy into a Christian meta-narrative.[55] And yet, what was stressed in these debates

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[51] This has been exemplified by the canonization of Holocaust victim Edith Stein. This Catholic move has received lots of criticism for the Christianization of Jewish victimhood, yet the specific problem of referring to Jews as saints has not been stressed separately.

[52] www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790607_polonia-brzezinka.html

[53] This theme reoccurred in artwork, too, for example in a sculpture by Canadian-Israeli Evangelical artist Rick Wieneke posed at the entrance of Birkenau, the suffering of the victims of the Shoah and the suffering Christ are intertwined. See https://fountainoftears.org/

[54] I have further developed this point in "Conflicting Catechisms: Christian Ambivalence and the Antisemitism Debate," *Political Theology* 25 (2024): 759-779. https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2024.2430763

[55] This is a strong theme in the work of Emil Fackenheim, from as early as "Jewish Faith and the Holocaust: A Fragment," *Commentary*, August 1968. https://www.commentary.org/articles/emil-fackenheim-2/jewish-faith-and-the-holocaust-a-fragment/
Perhaps the most famous public case demonstrating Jewish concerns about the Christianization of the Shoah is that of the Auschwitz convent controversy and the extensive protests against the Carmelite convent there (1984-1993). Another astute critique of this issue was Richard Rubenstein, as indicated in his reported dialogue with Dean Heinrich Grüber in *After Auschwitz*.

was the problematic nature of appropriating Jewish memory by coloring it with Christian symbolism, the fact that endowing the Shoah with redemptive meaning ends up justifying it in one way or another, or simply the bad taste of theologizing the suffering of others.[56] The Jewish critique, however, did not revolve around the question of Jewish sin. Neither Jews nor Christians seem to have recognized the particular problematics involved in the excessive purgation of the Jews and their disproportionate moral admiration.

Can we blame Christians for valorizing, even sanctifying, the community to which they sinned in the past, rather than seeing the Jews as guilty, but not *that* guilty? Should they have said to their Jewish counterparts: you are guilty, but just like the rest of us, who have persecuted you through the ages? We should recall that the Freudian dynamic requires a suppression of the ambivalence towards the father, and his complete admiration as perfectly good rather than as a complex figure who raises an urge for rejection. Possibly, it was precisely a process of this sort that occurred in the Christian approach to Jews and Judaism. Jews, on the other hand, being finally successful in having their Christian counterparts understand that they are not as bad as they held them to be, did not invest much energy either in communicating to Christians that they are not as good as the Christians now thought they were, but sinners like everybody else. Accustomed to being seen as the worse sinners of all, they did not readily identify the danger rooted in being seen as without sin.

This inversion of the basic dynamic between Jews and Christians was extremely demanding for both communities. It required the Christian community to internalize its guilt toward the Jewish people without ever completing its repentance.[57] On the other hand, it required the Jews to pose to their Christian allies as a virtuous, even morally impeccable community, the exact opposite of everything the Jews were thought to be throughout Christian history. Yet this was even more of a challenge in light of the fact that a parallel, and extremely different Jewish project was underway; the Zionist experiment and the foundation of the State of Israel meant renouncing any claim for moral superiority and dipping Jewish hands in the bloody territorial waters of the Leviathan – the violence which is inherent to the nation-state. This seems to be exemplary of Freudian ambivalence– at one and the same time, Jews sought to overcome their slaughtered, blameless fathers who perished in the Shoah, give up their election to this perfect collective and start a new, liberated life, while at the very same time indebted to their slaughtered ancestors, aspiring to maintain their ultimate morality, and submit themselves under their moral yoke. This inner-Jewish tension was, and still is, certainly puzzling also for the Christian observers.

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[56] See Adam Gregerman, "Interpreting the Pain of Others: John Paul II and Benedict XVI on Jewish Suffering in the Shoah," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48:4 (2013): 443-446; Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other,* eds. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (New York: Routledge, 1988), 156-167; Barbara Meyer, *Jesus the Jew in Christian Memory: Theological and Philosophical Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[57] See von Kellenbach's concept of "composting guilt," in "The Purification of Memory," 238-251.

The Return of the Suppressed

It is too soon to judge the consequences of Hamas's brutal massacre in the south of Israel on October 7, 2023, and the devastating war Israel has waged on Gaza in its wake, for our common civilization. If we go a step further with Freud, this moment in history is the next constitutive bloodshed, the next violent trauma which transforms our communal strategies for coping with guilt, the guilt that remains the universal driving force behind all human civilizations. As we are still very close to the catastrophe, it is hard to say what will be the civilizational mechanisms that enable us to cope, and what will differentiate our ways of coping, as Jews and Christians. Moreover, it is now impossible to even pursue this line of thought further without integrating a third party, Islam, into the Freudian equation. Indeed, Jews in the Christian perspective have wavered between being regarded as traitorous 'Judases' and after the Shoah as sinless 'Christs,' and Christians moved between seeing Jesus as murdered by Jews to seeing Jews as murdered by Christians. Similarly, Muslims, too, are today arousing Jewish-Christian moral imagination by appearing on the historical stage at one and the same time in the form of brutal terrorists who rejoice in murdering and raping, and in the form of innocent civilians, women and children, caught in the relentless fire of the IDF's warfare and killed *en masse* without any fault of their own.

This state of affairs has brought the old Jewish-Christian questions that constitute our civilizations right back to the surface, into our global discourse, and especially into the ever-conflicted Abrahamic triangle. What do Christians do right now with their own guilt vis-a-vis the Jews? Do they internalize or externalize it? Where are the Jews placed right now, in the Christian imagination, between Jesus and the crying masses, "his blood be on us and on our children"? What do Jews do with Jewish guilt? Do they deny and suppress it? Do they disproportionally inflate it? Or both? And how does the Jewish-Christian complex play out in Muslim consciousness? How do the different parties distribute the guilt for the ongoing bloodshed among them?

And, finally, who might be sufficiently without sin to judge the situation properly?