



CHICAGO JOURNALS



Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages

Author(s): David Berger

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (Jun., 1986), pp. 576-591

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of the [American Historical Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1869132>

Accessed: 30/03/2012 10:10

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press and American Historical Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to The American Historical Review.

<http://www.jstor.org>

AHR Forum
Mission to the Jews and
Jewish-Christian Contacts in the
Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages

DAVID BERGER

SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS has been a principal objective of Christianity since its infancy. Nevertheless, after the initial Jewish rejection of the Christian message, the expansionism of the church was directed mainly toward the pagan world, and it is by no means clear that even those patristic works that were directed *adversus Judaeos* were marked by realistic missionary objectives.¹ Jews, moreover, were granted unique toleration in Christian Europe on the theological grounds that they served, however unwillingly, as living testimony to Christian truth and that their conversion at the end of days was required by biblical prophecy. At the same time, no one doubted that the acceptance of Christianity by individual Jews was devoutly to be wished. Thus, at its core, the fundamental theory governing Jewish status in early medieval Europe was marked by tension and ambivalence—a result of the contradiction between the theoretical goals of a universal Christian mission and an argument for toleration that came close to discouraging Jewish conversion.

Christian polemic against Jews is a crucial genre for the study of missionary intentions, and the theoretical tension that I noted is clearly reflected in the assessment of that literature in the standard study of Jewish-Christian relations before the First Crusade. Bernhard Blumenkranz devoted much of his *Juifs et Chrétiens dans le monde occidental, 430–1096*, to the issues of polemic and mission.² On the one hand, he indicated that pre-crusade polemic against Jews was intended for Christian disputants in a context that did not involve a direct and immediate mission.³ On the other hand, he stressed the persistence of the missionary ideal as a motive for polemical activity: Christians were impelled by a natural desire to persuade others of the truth, by the aspirations of believers in a majority faith to make that faith the exclusive one, and by the great Christian expectation of seeing all humanity “assembled under the scepter of Christ.” To a significant degree,

¹ See David Rokeah, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in Conflict* (Jerusalem, 1982), 40–48. Also see my brief discussion in David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1979), 4–5.

² Blumenkranz, *Juifs et Chrétiens dans le monde occidental, 430–1096* (Paris, 1960).

³ *Ibid.*, 75. On Blumenkranz’s complex position, see, especially, note 72, below.

then, Blumenkranz perceived pre-crusade literary polemics as the result of a missionary objective.⁴

If this assessment of the relatively sparse polemical literature written before 1096 is sound, the much richer material from the following century should reflect a similar motive. But, even if one remains skeptical about a significant missionary impulse in the early period, a number of considerations require a fresh and careful look at the possibility of missionary objectives in the elusive twelfth century. First, the resurgence of polemic, which produced almost twenty works from the late eleventh through the twelfth century, suggests *prima facie* a more aggressive Christian attitude toward conversion of Jews. Second, we know that mission to the Jews had become an important goal of many Christians by the mid-thirteenth century,⁵ and the suddenly numerous polemical works of the previous century are a tempting and reasonable place to look for the roots of this phenomenon. Third, the widely admired First Crusade, with its bloody attempt at the forcible conversion of the Jewish communities in the Rhineland, could have been responsible for placing mission to the Jews on the agenda of a newly expansionist and assertive Christendom, and the upsurge of anti-Jewish works could be understood as a product of that expansionism. Finally, the crucial turning point in the Christian attitude toward mission to Islam occurs in the twelfth century. Benjamin Z. Kedar's recent study of this question has pointed to an utter indifference to converting Muslims during the early Middle Ages that gave way by the mid-twelfth century to a strong feeling that they should be made Christian. From that point on, there appears to have been little question of the desirability of mission, and the controversy was confined to the debate between advocates of force and of persuasion.⁶

This question is but one aspect of the broader challenge that the twelfth century has posed for Jewish historians. The early Middle Ages, with the exception of Visigothic Spain, were a period of relative peace and opportunity for Europe's Jews. Only in the eleventh century did some distinct signs of deterioration in their status begin to emerge, although questions remain about both the extent and the cause of that decline.⁷ The century culminated, of course, in the crusade, and by the late thirteenth century the Jews of Northern Europe were subject to expulsions

⁴ *Ibid.*, 67–68, 152, 216.

⁵ Although I have some reservations about Jeremy Cohen's conclusions concerning the shift from tolerance to intolerance of Jews in the thought of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century friars, his thorough description of their missionary objectives is correct. See Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982). For my review, see *AHR*, 88 (1983): 93.

⁶ Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims* (Princeton, N.J., 1984), esp. 57–74.

⁷ See Lena Dasberg, *Untersuchungen über die Entwertung des Judenstatus im 11. Jahrhundert* (Paris, 1965). Compare the remarks of Amos Funkenstein; "Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages," *Viator*, 2 (1971): 377. Also see Gavin Langmuir, "From Ambrose of Milan to Emicho of Leiningen: The Transformation of Hostility against Jews in Northern Christendom," *Gli Ebrei nell'Alto Medioevo, Settimane di Studio*, 26 (Spoleto, 1980): 313–68; and Avraham Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz HaRishonim* (Jerusalem, 1981), 12–13, 163. Compare the remarks in my review; *Tarbiz*, 53 (1984): 480. Also see Robert Chazan, "1007–1012: Initial Crisis for Northern European Jewry," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 39 (1972): 101–18; and Kenneth R. Stow, *The "1007 Anonymus" and Papal Sovereignty: Jewish Perceptions of the Papacy and Papal Policy in the High Middle Ages* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1984).

and persecution. Can a more or less straight line be drawn from the First Crusade to the expulsions, or was it only in the thirteenth century that relatively new forces emerged that moved the history of medieval European Jewry toward its tragic denouement? In the twelfth century, the Second Crusade swept through the Rhineland, the ritual murder accusation was born, and yet the Jewish community continued to function in a hostile but relatively stable environment. From a cultural perspective, the period was one of dazzling achievement. Even the acute contemporary observer would not have seen a people poised at the edge of a precipice.⁸

With regard to the question of mission, the historiographical problem posed by the twelfth century emerges in all of its tantalizing ambiguity in an intentionally cautious and ambivalent formulation by Salo Baron. "In the Roman and Byzantine empires, and even in western Europe before the age of the Crusades, the numerous tracts 'Against the Jews' primarily had Christian audiences in mind. Now, on the contrary, the Church viewed the apologetic literature as but another weapon in its march toward world domination. The new offensive, seized particularly by the preaching orders, also infused new vigor and introduced novel facets into the polemics which, together with the vastly expanding missionary sermons and oral disputations, tried to persuade the Jews of the 'foolishness' of their stubborn perseverance."⁹ At first, this passage suggests that a change in Christian attitude occurred at the beginning of "the age of the Crusades," but almost immediately the emphasis shifts to "the preaching orders," which belong to the thirteenth century. Once again, the twelfth century is left in a sort of limbo. Was it a watershed in the use of polemic as a weapon in the church's "march toward world domination," or does this questionable distinction belong to the age of the friars?¹⁰

I believe this question can be answered unequivocally. Despite the proliferation of Christian polemics in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, the evidence is overwhelming that these works were not rooted in a new or continuing missionary impulse. An examination of the reasons that polemicists gave for writing their tracts reveals a remarkable need to apologize for engaging in an activity considered improper on ideological grounds, and, even when there is no apology, hesitation, or refusal, the reasons given almost invariably do not include the idea that Christians should attempt to proselytize Jews.

If this conclusion is correct, then two potential explanations for the upsurge of Christian polemic remain. First, the primary impulse for this literature may have come from outside the arena of Jewish-Christian relations and resulted, instead, from the overall cultural renaissance of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. Since no Christian engaged in a careful examination of the sacred texts and doctrines of Christianity could have avoided a confrontation with Judaism,

⁸ For a vigorous argument that 1096 was not a watershed in Jewish history, see Robert Chazan's *The First Crusade and European Jewry* (forthcoming).

⁹ Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (2d edn., New York, 1965), vol. 9, p. 101.

¹⁰ Amos Funkenstein did not take a clear position on this question in his studies of twelfth-century Christian polemic. See "HaTemurot BeVikkuaḥ HaDat shebein Yehudim LeNozrim BaMeah HaYod-Bet," *Zion*, 33 (1968): 125–44, and "Basic Types," 373–82.

apologetic writings could have been an inevitable consequence of an internal Christian dynamic.¹¹

On the other hand, the impetus for these works may lie in Jewish-Christian interaction of the most vibrant sort. There is no longer any question that some Jews in Northern Europe were involved in discussions of biblical and other issues with Christian scholars.¹² The polemical literature contains considerable evidence that ordinary Jews and Christians held lively, informal debates about sensitive religious matters, and the authors of Christian polemics speak of the need for a response to aggressive Jewish questions. Such debates no doubt predated the High Middle Ages, but they may well have intensified as a result of the growing intellectual sophistication engendered by the cultural revolution that transformed both Jewish and Christian society in this period. The renaissance of the High Middle Ages surely facilitated the literary expression of these confrontations by both sides. The Christian assertions that Jews posed provocative questions with frequency and vehemence must be taken seriously. Christians were not confronting Jewish missionaries, but they faced a genuine, vigorous challenge from a proud and assertive Jewish community.¹³

ELEVENTH- AND TWELFTH-CENTURY CHRISTIAN intellectuals had profound reservations about mission to the Jews. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this position is the outright refusal of Adam of Perseigne (d. 1203) to accede to a friend's request that he write an anti-Jewish polemic. First, it seemed to him that his friend was motivated more by the desire to dispute than by zeal for the truth; second, Christians, he believed, should not be contentious on general principles (2 Tim. 2: 23–24). Third—and for us most important—the Jews would remain blind and hard-hearted “until the fulness of the nations will come in” (Rom. 11:25). The famous verse from Romans, then, predicts the futility of missionary efforts and may even intend to discourage them; Jewish conversion is reserved for the *eschaton*. Later, Adam added a further consideration: Christians should not pollute themselves with discussions of falsehood but should study Christian doctrines with pure heart and hands and simple eyes.¹⁴ Since Adam could have written a brief compendium of standard anti-Jewish arguments with little more effort than it took him to write this letter, I doubt that he was concocting excuses for a refusal motivated by laziness; this is a genuine, antimissionary ideology.

In one of the earliest polemics of the period, hesitation is followed by acceptance of responsibility. Peter Damian (d. 1072) mentioned Jewish conversion as a reason

¹¹ At one time, I regarded the influence of internal Christian developments as slightly more central to the upsurge in polemic than I do now. See my brief remark in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 16.

¹² For an important summary of the evidence, see Aryeh Grabois, “The *Hebraica veritas* and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century,” *Speculum*, 50 (1975): 613–34.

¹³ I discuss the state of this question later in this article.

¹⁴ Adam of Perseigne, *Epistola ad amicum*, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (hereafter, *PL*) 211: 653–59. It bears noting that Adam considered a bad Christian worse than a Jew, who acted in ignorance; *ibid.*, 657, 659. This reference should be added to Jeremy Cohen's valuable discussion of the question of Jewish ignorance and culpability in Christian thought. See Cohen, “The Jews as the Killers of Christ in the Latin Tradition, from Augustine to the Friars,” *Traditio*, 39 (1983): 1–27.

for writing polemic, but almost as an afterthought following an exhortation to concentrate on more important things than arguing with Jews. Damian was responding to a request from a churchman named Honestus to provide material refuting Jewish arguments, and he began by suggesting that, “if you wish to be a soldier of Christ and fight for him courageously, then take up arms . . . against the vices of the flesh, the contrivances of the devil—an enemy who will clearly never die—rather than against the Jews, who will soon be virtually destroyed from the face of the earth.” Nevertheless, he agreed to provide the material because it was disgraceful (*inhonestum*) to remain silent while Christianity was insulted, such silence could arouse doubts in Christian minds, and, finally, Jews might be converted by well-presented Christian arguments.¹⁵ A reluctant missionary indeed.

Peter of Blois (d. 1200) provided an even stronger prolegomenon before finally acquiescing and writing his polemic. He addressed the work to a Christian who complained that he was surrounded by Jews and heretics and was unequipped to answer the tricky arguments raised by the Jews in their disputations. It was unwise, Peter said, for someone without good polemical aptitude to debate with a heretic or a Jew; such disputes, in fact, tended to turn the inexperienced Christian into a heretic himself. And it was surely absurd to debate a subject like the Trinity. In effect, Peter argued that Christians need not worry about educating the heretic or Jew: beasts were not permitted to touch Mount Sinai, and pearls were not to be cast before swine.¹⁶ Moreover, if one defeats an enemy of the cross in debate, he will in any event not convert in his heart. As for the Jews, they cannot be converted because God has set them an end that cannot be advanced. One might, it is true, make an occasional convert, but the rest will persist in their stubbornness.¹⁷ Apparently, the missionary enterprise was not sufficiently justified by the handful of souls that might be saved.

Peter, of course, did relent and write polemic, and suspicious historians may be tempted to conclude that this introductory show of reluctance is a disguise for missionary zeal. In determining twelfth-century attitudes toward mission, however, what he wrote is decisive, and underlying motives are of secondary significance as signposts of future developments. In a sense, the point would even be strengthened, since Peter was apparently embarrassed to be pursuing an objective that any Christian would have been expected to applaud. It seems probable that discouraging mission to the Jews was an ideology that arose as a rationalization to explain centuries of relative indifference to Jewish conversion or

¹⁵ Peter Damian, *Antilogus contra Judaeos*, PL 145: 41. See my discussion in “St. Peter Damian: His Attitude toward the Jews and the Old Testament,” *Yavneh Review*, 4 (1965): 83–84. Blumenkranz’s references to this work illustrate his tendency to emphasize missionary motivations. He first cited Damian’s hope for conversion, two pages later he indicated the rather different need to assist Honestus, and considerably later he referred to the *Antilogus* without qualification as a “missionary work”; *Juifs et Chrétiens*, 69, 71, 153.

¹⁶ In light of the context of this phrase in the Gospels, its use as an argument against preaching to Jews is painfully ironic.

¹⁷ Peter of Blois, *Contra perfidiam Judaeorum*, PL 207: 825–27.

even as a direct reaction to protracted Jewish stubbornness. Nevertheless, the reluctance to proselytize among Jews remains both surprising and significant.

Peter relented, he said, because the request came from a person beset (*obsessum*) by Jews and heretics. A similar defensive motive is proffered in an anonymous twelfth-century polemic whose author maintained that he wrote for simple people and in simple faith, not for the sake of dialectical disputations. Jews, he said, should not be able to mock Christian ignorance (*imperitia*)—those Jews “who taunt [*insultant*] us all day and say with Goliath, ‘Choose someone from among you who will engage in a one-on-one battle with us.’”¹⁸ Similarly, Walter of Châtillon introduced his polemic with the remark that the Jews “not only fail to acquiesce in the truth of the new grace but even, like retrograde planets, attempt to oppose the firmament of our faith and pose objections to Christians from the authority of the Pentateuch. Hence, mindful of their ignorance [again, *imperitia*, this time about the Jews], we decided to write a book with arguments so compelling that even . . . [an] ass will not be able to contradict them.”¹⁹ Once more a defensive motive appears. Whether the conditions described by Peter, Walter, and the anonymous author of the *Tractatus* reflect historical reality is an issue to which I shall presently return, but the reiteration of such defensive claims underscores the absence of explicit missionary goals.

Rupert of Deutz (d. 1135), like Adam and the two Peters, wrote in response to a request. Rudolph of St. Trond, at that time abbot of St. Pantaleon in Cologne, is reported to have had frequent contact with Jews, and he not only requested Rupert’s polemic but subsequently wrote a letter asking for material that would demonstrate the triune God and the incarnation and discuss the evidence from Gen. 49:10.²⁰ Rudolph may have been interested in mission, but Rupert, who did not accede to the request immediately, would not have written polemic on his own initiative.²¹

In addition to Peter Damian’s *Antilogus*, the other anti-Jewish polemics written in the eleventh century also contain motives that have little to do with mission. Fulbert of Chartres maintained that his intention was to speak of the errors of

¹⁸ *Tractatus adversus Judaeum*, PL 213: 749. The effectiveness of Jewish debaters is also attested in Bartholomew of Exeter’s unpublished “Dialogus contra Judaeos” (early 1180s), which warns against engaging in public controversies with them. At the same time, Bartholomew remarked (if only in a subordinate clause) that “we hold discussions with them for their own salvation.” There is, then, a missionary intention blunted by fear of the consequences of disputation. For the relevant passage, see R. W. Hunt, “The Disputation of Peter of Cornwall against Symon the Jew,” in R. W. Hunt *et al.*, eds., *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke* (Oxford, 1948), 147–48.

¹⁹ Walter of Châtillon, *Tractatus sive dialogus contra Judaeos*, PL 209: 424–25.

²⁰ “Ein Brief des Chronisten Rudolph von St. Trond an Rupert von Deutz,” *Neues Archiv*, 17 (1892): 617–18. This letter influenced the writing of *De glorificatione Trinitatis* and perhaps part of *De gloria et honore Filii hominis*. See J. H. Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983), 246–47, 354–55; and G. Niemeyer, ed., *Hermannus quondam Judaeus opusculum de conversione sua*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Quellen zur Geistgeschichte des Mittelalters*, vol. 4 (Weimar, 1963), 5 n. 3, and 41–43. Rudolph’s letter sounds like the request of a man who had read Fulbert of Chartres’s *Tractatus contra Judaeos*, which deals precisely with the topics specified, and found it inadequate in real discussions with Jews.

²¹ Rupert of Deutz, *Anulus sive dialogus inter Christianum et Judaeum*, in M. L. Arduini, *Ruperto de Deutz e la controversia tra Cristiani ed Ebrei nel secolo XII* (Rome, 1979), esp. 184. The work is also in PL 170: 559–610.

nonbelievers in general; he began with Jews because they agreed with Christians in their monotheistic faith and disagreed with respect to several clearly defined issues: the Trinity, the divinity of the Messiah, and whether or not he had come.²² Gilbert Crispin introduced his enormously influential disputation by saying that it reflected amicable discussions that he had had with a Jewish acquaintance who came to him frequently on business and other matters, at which times they conversed about the Scriptures and issues of faith. He did note that a Jew present at such discussions converted and became a monk, but he seemed to regard this as something of an unanticipated bonus rather than the purpose of the conversation and gave no indication that his book was to be used in any special effort to convert Jews.²³

In the following century, an author once thought to be William of Champeaux produced a sharper version of Crispin's disputation and introduced a reference to missionary intentions into his paraphrase of Crispin's introductory passage. "I was acquainted with a certain Jew because of a business affair; as time passed, I was moved by love to urge him frequently to abandon Judaism and become a Christian."²⁴ Although this work does not, of course, reflect a real experience, the author's remark is not insignificant, but his assertion is limited to a specific Jew whom he was allegedly motivated to convert because of personal friendship. No interest in a broader mission is either stated or implied. At the end of a work directed mainly at Christian heretics, Alan of Lille appended a chapter on the Jews also derived largely from Crispin. In this case, the structure as well as the content make it abundantly clear that the author, who also added a chapter on Islam, did not write out of a missionary zeal directed at Jews.²⁵

Similar attitudes appear in two early twelfth-century polemics concerning the incarnation. Odo of Cambrai addressed his work to a monk who had been present at a lecture by Odo on the incarnation and had urged him to put it in writing. Odo was finally persuaded to do so, but, before he wrote his book, he had a discussion on the subject with a Jew. Consequently, it seemed appropriate to Odo to record his remarks in the form of a dialogue. "Now, then, I invoke the Holy Spirit so that whatever inspiration it gave me for the purpose of convincing a Jew it might give me once again for the instruction of a faithful monk."²⁶ Odo then described how the Jew Leo visited him after his midday nap and initiated the discussion that he recorded. Once again, the question of historicity can be postponed; the immediate point is that Odo proffered no missionary intention at all and explicitly directed

²² Fulbert of Chartres, *Tractatus contra Judaeos*, PL 141: 308.

²³ *Gisleberti Crispini disputatio Judaei et Christiani*, ed. Bernhard Blumenkranz (Utrecht, 1956), 27–28. The work is also in PL 159: 1005–36.

²⁴ Pseudo-William of Champeaux, *Dialogus inter Christianum et Judaeum de fide Catholica*, PL 163: 1045. On the tone of this work, see Israel Lévi, "Controverse entre un Juif et un Chrétien au XI^e siècle," *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 5 (1882): 244.

²⁵ *De fide Catholica contra haereticos*, PL 210: 305–430, bk. 3, PL 210: 399–422. See my "Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben: A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Polemic," *Speculum*, 49 (1974): 34–47; and M. H. Vicaire, "'Contra Judaeos' méridionaux au début du XIII^e siècle: Alain de Lille, Evrard de Béthune, Guillaume de Bourges," in M. H. Vicaire and B. Blumenkranz, eds., *Juifs et judaïsme de Languedoc* (Toulouse, 1977), 269–87.

²⁶ Odo of Cambrai, *Disputatio contra Judaeum*, PL 160: 1103.

his work to a Christian audience motivated by a desire to understand the incarnation.

Guibert de Nogent's *Tractatus* on the incarnation *contra Judaeos* was actually directed against a count of Soissons who, Guibert said, cultivated the views of Jews and heretics. To Guibert, it was tolerable when someone who never accepted Christianity rejected it; the Jews, after all, grew up with this attitude, implanted in them since their forefathers crucified Jesus. What was intolerable was for people who called themselves Christians to attack the faith. To make matters worse, the count dared to proclaim nefarious ideas that Jews themselves were afraid to utter aloud. The Jews, in fact, considered him insane, because he extolled their sect while ostensibly following Christianity.²⁷ Although Guibert said that four years after writing the book he used it to strengthen the faith of a Jewish convert, there are no missionary overtones whatever in the reason he gave for its composition. The Jews, in fact, are used almost as a foil for the real object of Guibert's attack, and the implication is that he would not have written to expose the longstanding errors of a tolerated Jewish community.

Even the three polemics by pre-thirteenth-century converts to Christianity do not reflect the systematic missionary zeal that we might expect. The work by "Samuel of Morocco," though it deals with some broader issues, is couched as an explanation of the exile addressed to a Jew named Isaac, and it is hard to decide whether the work is a polemic with a limited missionary purpose or an *apologia pro conversione sua*.²⁸ Petrus Alfonsi explicitly described the dialogue with his own former Jewish persona as a reaction to attacks questioning the motives and sincerity of his conversion,²⁹ and the fascinating little book by Herman of Cologne is an autobiographical account of his experiences on the road to conversion rather than a true polemic.³⁰

A final work that fits this pattern is essentially *sui generis*. Peter Abelard wrote a dialogue involving a philosopher, a Christian, and a Jew in which the relevant discussion takes place between the Jew and the philosopher, not between the Jew and the Christian. The irenic tone as well as the structure make it improbable that missionary zeal was Abelard's reason for writing.³¹

The overall impression gained from these works is not merely that they fail to explicate a missionary intention. If the absence of proselytism were the only common feature, one might assume that the motive to convert was so integral to polemic that the authors took it for granted. Instead, work after work presents ideological reservations about mission, reluctance to engage in debate, defensive

²⁷ Guibert de Nogent, *Tractatus de Incarnatione contra Judaeos*, PL 156: 489–90; and *De vita sua*, PL 156: 949–50.

²⁸ The work of "Samuel of Morocco" may well be a pseudepigraph of the fourteenth century. See M. Marsmann, *Die Epistel des Rabbi Samuel an Rabbi Isaak: Untersuchung und Edition* (Siegen, 1971). The epistle also appears in PL 149: 337–68.

²⁹ Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus Petri, cognomento Alphonsi, ex Judaeo Christiani, et Moysi Judaei*, PL 157: 535–672, esp. 538.

³⁰ Niemeyer, *Hermannus quondam Judaeus opusculum de conversione sua*.

³¹ Peter Abelard, *Dialogus inter philosophum, iudaeum, et christianum*, ed. Rudolf Thomas (Stuttgart, 1970), 44–85. Richard of St. Victor's *De Emmanuele* was directed against Andrew of St. Victor's Judaizing commentary on Isa. 7:14 and is surely not a missionary tract. See PL 196: 601–66.

explanations for writing polemical works, and justifications based on the need to combat heresy and to instruct a Christian audience—all of which point to a striking lack of interest in a missionary program. Either mission was a secondary motive or not a motive at all or else these authors felt uncomfortable asserting it. In either case, the ideology they expressed—at the very minimum—attached little importance to conversion of Jews.

There are, however, three twelfth-century works that contain signs of things to come. The first, emerging from the school of Abelard, is known for its striking use of Hebrew as a tool in the debate with Jews, but, in light of the objectives of earlier polemics, the motive it suggests for disputation is at least equally interesting. Sometime between 1139 and 1148, an obscure cleric named Odo wrote the *Ysagoge in theologiam*. In the introduction to the section on Jews, he made the following assertion: “For if it is proper for us to exhort those who are fashioned in the faith to live better, surely we should recall the Jews from their erroneous, disbelieving sect.”³² If such an attitude were common, this would have been an utterly routine sentence. The editor of the *Ysagoge*, for example, wrote that “the conversion of the Jews was one of the great preoccupations of Christian intellectuals in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,” and Odo was a participant in this movement.³³ In fact, a statement like this before the middle of the twelfth century was not routine but sharply polemical; it was a pointed *a fortiori* argument directed against the then-dominant view of the upper clergy that efforts at conversion of Jews were improper or unimportant.

The later attitude of aggressive mission to the Jews is adumbrated with particular clarity by Peter the Venerable. The reader of the prologue to his polemic finds himself in a different, unfamiliar world. No hesitation here, and no apology. How can Jews, he wrote, alone in all the world, deny Jesus? They are stiff-necked, without celestial or terrestrial glory, but, if they convert, they, too, can be saved.³⁴ Later in the work, Peter expressed doubts about his prospects for success. With the arrogance and belligerence typical of this polemic, he noted that his arguments from both authority and reason would satisfy any human being, but he was not so sure that Jews, whose reason appeared “extinct” and “buried,” could be called human beings and not animals.³⁵ Whatever the tactical wisdom of his denunciatory tone, and whether or not Peter ever had contact with his prospective converts, there is in his work at least some expression of a hope of conversion.³⁶

Finally, later in the century, we come to an author whom we might well expect to find in any list of exceptional figures: Joachim of Fiore. Nevertheless, not all of his discourse is exceptional. Joachim began with the familiar assertion that response to the Jews is necessary because otherwise one gives occasion to the

³² *Ysagoge in theologiam*, ed. Arthur M. Landgraf, *Œuvres théologiques de l'école d'Abélard* (Louvain, 1934), 126–27. Also see Avrom Saltman, “Ha-Ysagoge shel Odo—Shitah Ḥadashah Ba-Pulmus Ha-Anti-Yehudi,” *Biqqoret U-Parshanut*, 13–14 (1979): 265–80.

³³ *Œuvres théologiques*, xlvii.

³⁴ Peter the Venerable, *Tractatus adversus Judaeorum inveteratam duritiem*, PL 189: 507–09.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 602.

³⁶ It may be more than coincidence that both Odo and Peter, who were interested in genuine mission, used tools borrowed from the Jewish armory—in the first case linguistic and in the second talmudic.

enemies of Christ to insult the faith and confuse the simple believer. He went on, however, to a consideration peculiar to his own well-known speculations about the imminence of a new age. An additional reason for the work, he said, was his feeling that the Jews would soon experience the divine mercy as the time of their consolation and conversion arrived.³⁷ At that time, all Jews would convert. Joachim, however, wanted some to see the light just before the period of general salvation, and he broke into prophetic exhortation: "And now, O Jewish men, hear my voice this day, and do not persist in hardening your heart."³⁸

These exceptions are few in number, and there is less to them than meets the eye. The relevant section of the *Ysagoge in theologiam* is a manifestly atypical work by an insignificant author, and Joachim of Fiore is a profoundly idiosyncratic figure whose position on Jewish conversion flows precisely from his most important idiosyncrasy. As for Peter the Venerable, his bitter pessimism about the prospects of persuading the Jews drastically tempers the impression of missionary zeal that his remarks may create, and the *Tractatus* remains far more a work of denunciation than of mission.

In the thirteenth century, sentiments for proselytism continued to grow, and ultimately they prevailed. Peter of Cornwall's disputation, completed in 1208, describes at great length his successful effort to convert a Jewish acquaintance, although, as in the reworking of Crispin's polemic, the object of this effort is a single individual.³⁹ In the 1230s, William of Bourges wrote that, shortly after his conversion to Christianity, he was urged to use his knowledge of Hebrew to compose a work to refute the Jews. After all, Jesus himself fought against both Sadducee heretics and other Jews, and, if Christians truly love him, they should do battle against his enemies. Ominously, William's proof text is "Shall I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?" (Ps. 139:21).⁴⁰ Whether the motivation was hate or love, by the mid-thirteenth century a Christian campaign to convert the Jews was gathering momentum,⁴¹ and the theoretical desirability of such a program was not again seriously questioned until modern times.

THE POLEMICAL WORKS THAT I HAVE EXAMINED do more than reveal the absence of a missionary ideology; they also make assertions about frequent discussions between Jews and Christians at and especially below the level of the upper clergy. Such information, if authentic, is of extraordinary historical value. Assessing authenticity is, of course, no easy task. We are dealing in many of these instances with a literary genre of fictitious debate, which led one scholar to regard virtually

³⁷ Joachim of Fiore, *Adversus Judaeos di Gioacchino da Fiore*, ed. Arsenio Frugoni (Rome, 1957), 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 85–89. The points in this paragraph were made by Frugoni in the introduction to his edition (pp. xxxii–xxxvii). I hesitate to include Hildebert of Lavardin's short sermon "Against the Jews Concerning the Incarnation" among these exceptional polemics, despite its apostrophe to the Jews urging their conversion. The entire work is a few paragraphs long, was delivered to a Christian audience, and merely lists a handful of the standard verses on the incarnation with virtually no argumentation. See *PL* 171: 811–14.

³⁹ The prologue to Peter's *Liber disputationum contra Symonem Iudeum* was published by Hunt; "Disputation of Peter of Cornwall," 153–56.

⁴⁰ Guillaume de Bourges, *Livre des guerres du Seigneur*, ed. Gilbert Dahan (Paris, 1981), 66, 68.

⁴¹ Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*.

all of the major polemics besides Crispin's as possessing "no historical interest."⁴² There are, however, ways of evaluating this evidence.

First, the requests for polemical material were genuine. It would require a perverse level of skepticism to assume that Adam of Perseigne invented a request so that he could explain why he turned it down. Peter Damian's entire personal history and psychology indicate that he was sincere in asserting that one should concentrate on battling the vices of the flesh and that his reluctant agreement to enter the lists against the Jews resulted from a letter of request.⁴³ In Rupert's case, a somewhat later request from his correspondent exists. One cannot be certain about Peter of Blois, but the evidence in the other cases places the burden of proof on the skeptic. It appears that the lower clergy, precisely because of greater contact with the outside world, felt a need for works that would assist them in the religious discussions that were apparently a common feature of everyday life.

The evidence, moreover, does not allow the assumption that these discussions were necessarily initiated by proselytizing Christians. The assertions of Jewish aggressiveness in the works of Peter of Blois and Walter of Châtillon and in the anonymous *Tractatus* may be exaggerated, but they would constitute silly, almost self-defeating bombast if they did not have some basis in reality.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the testimony in these polemics is borne out to a striking extent by thirteenth-century Jewish works. Whether Jews or Christians initiated these exchanges, the indications are overwhelming that they were real and frequent. The nature of some of the arguments as well as circumstantial evidence support this conclusion.

The most detailed account of a Jewish-Christian debate in a Christian work is that of Herman of Cologne. Here a Jewish youth in early twelfth-century Germany listens to a Christian sermon that describes Jews as animals who understand only the letter of the law, in contrast to Christians, who are human beings who use reason to understand the spirit of the law.⁴⁵ He is directly exhorted to give up the heavy yoke of the Mosaic law and take up instead the easy burden offered by Jesus (Matt. 11:30),⁴⁶ and at one point he initiates a conversation with no less a figure than Rupert of Deutz himself.⁴⁷ Local churchmen provide him with books, and he maintains that he succeeded in teaching himself Latin so that he could read

⁴² Lévi, "Controverse," 239.

⁴³ See my discussion in "St. Peter Damian," 83.

⁴⁴ The remarks by Peter and the author of the *Tractatus* were noted by Lévi, and many historians have cited Louis IX's comment that a Christian layman approached by a Jewish polemicist should respond by stabbing him. See Lévi, "Controverse," 238. Also see my brief discussion in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 22–23. Compare the somewhat weaker impression given by Peter Damian that Honestus was confronted by a Jewish challenge, and see Bartholomew of Exeter's comments cited in note 18, above. Guibert's remark that the Jews hardly dared whisper what the count of Soissons said aloud does reflect some Jewish caution, but it must also be read in light of Guibert's strategy to use the Jews as a foil for the heretical count.

⁴⁵ Niemeyer, *Hermannus quondam Judaeus opusculum de conversione sua*, 74. This image appears in the work of Walter of Châtillon and, more clearly, in the polemic of Peter the Venerable. Also see my "The Attitude of St. Bernard of Clairvaux toward the Jews," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 40 (1972): 103.

⁴⁶ Niemeyer, *Hermannus quondam Judaeus opusculum de conversione sua*, 75. Such an argument by Christian missionaries may have partially inspired and surely lent force to the Jewish contention that conversion to Christianity proved nothing more than the convert's desire to experience the pleasures of the flesh; *Nizzaḥon vetus*, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 206, and, in the Hebrew section, 144.

⁴⁷ Niemeyer, *Hermannus quondam Judaeus opusculum de conversione sua*, 77–83.

them.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, he insists that what really clinched his decision to convert was his observation of the prayerful devotion of simple nuns.⁴⁹ The strong impression that emerges from his work is not that of an intellectual poring over sophisticated tracts or even disputing with people like Rupert; rather, we see a Jew who maintains regular, intimate contacts with ordinary Christians and lower clergy and who is eventually won over to the dominant religion by an accumulation of such experiences. Although Herman reported that a Jew chastised him for excessive association with Christians,⁵⁰ the impression of frequent religious discussions between ordinary Jews and Christians is by no means negated by the undeniable fact that Herman went too far. The atmosphere of the memoir is compelling.

The reality of such contacts emerges from a number of other Christian works as well. Rudolph of St. Trond, the abbot who requested Rupert of Deutz to write his polemic, is reported to have “frequently held mild discussions with Jews without disputation or reproach; rather, he softened the hardness of their heart by stroking and massage. . . . For this reason they loved him so much that even their women came to see him and speak with him.”⁵¹ The general tone and content of Crispin’s disputation has convinced most scholars of its essential authenticity as a work arising out of friendly, informal meetings between the author and a Jewish acquaintance.⁵² Odo of Cambrai’s assertion that he had an unplanned discussion with a Jew is highly plausible because he has another explicit motive for writing his work: the addressee, as we recall, had requested that he record his lecture on the incarnation.

Moreover, Odo’s polemic ends with a fascinating sentence that suggests not only the reality of such discussions but also their context. “These . . . are the reasons that I gave the Jew concerning the coming of Christ, having been forced to dispute all the more subtly by certain Christians who took the part of the Jew.”⁵³ Thus, as in Crispin’s case, there was an audience, and here some Christians attending were prepared to challenge the arguments of the Christian protagonist. Even if these Christians were advocates of an explanation of the incarnation that differed from Odo’s, such intervention would be inconceivable in a debate whose serious goal was the conversion of the Jew. These confrontations were ultimately very serious indeed, but the atmosphere appears to have been one of a duel of wits—almost a form of intellectual entertainment.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 107–08.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵¹ *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium*, quoted by Niemeyer, in his introduction to *Hermannus quondam Judaeus opusculum de conversione sua*, 5 n. 3.

⁵² In composing such a work, an author naturally expands and “improves” the discussion; hence, certain implausibilities in the exchange do not in themselves undermine the likelihood of an encounter, and even R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, who expressed serious reservations about the recorded disputation, did not doubt Crispin’s statement that he held amicable discussions about religion with a Jewish acquaintance. See Werblowsky, “Crispin’s Disputation,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 11 (1960): 73. The reworking of Crispin presents a fictitious exchange, and I would therefore treat it more cautiously than did Aryeh Grabois, who said that the work “clearly attests” frequent, informal meetings among intellectuals. Nevertheless, the author’s assertion that he had such discussions, even though it too is borrowed from Crispin, presumably reflects a milieu in which such a report would sound plausible. See Grabois, “The *Hebraica veritas*,” 634.

⁵³ Odo of Cambrai, *Disputatio contra Judaeum*, PL 160: 1112.

Guibert's polemic, which does not reflect a real confrontation, ends with a miracle story also pertinent to this discussion. He heard an account of a disputation in a home (*in quadam domo*) in which a cleric was unable to contest the perfidious bombast of a Jew, so the cleric offered to hold the burning part of a firebrand in order to prove his position. The Jew made no effort to dissuade him, and the cleric grabbed hold of the flame and did not burn. The Jew marveled but was nonetheless not impelled to convert.⁵⁴ The miracle here is not especially miraculous, and the story could be true. Even if it is not, however, it suggests that such discussions were routine.

Finally, both Peter of Blois and the author of the anonymous *Tractatus* proffered practical advice on pinning down the slippery and elusive Jewish disputant, who was likely to change the subject whenever he encountered difficulty.⁵⁵ Once again, works that do not record actual disputations suggest that Jews and Christians expected to confront one another in the field of religious combat.

Thus far, I have examined only Christian works, but the impression created by those works is confirmed by Jewish polemics as well. This literature does not begin until the late twelfth century, and one of the earliest works, authored by the southern French polemicist Jacob ben Reuben, reports an encounter whose essential historicity has never been questioned.⁵⁶ The tone is cordial, the arguments rigorous, and the agenda—which includes a discussion of the book of Matthew—unusually broad. In the thirteenth century, Meir of Narbonne recorded what were surely genuine exchanges with influential Christians on sensitive questions,⁵⁷ and Moses of Salerno described philosophical discussions of unusual sophistication with Italian churchmen.⁵⁸ These were not formal disputations of the sort that were held in Paris and Barcelona; Jacob, Meir, and Moses described what were for the most part informal discussions that took place in the course of everyday life.⁵⁹

Finally, there is fascinating and somewhat problematical evidence from northern Ashkenaz in Joseph Official's *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*⁶⁰ and the anonymous *Nizzahon vetus*.⁶¹ On the one hand, the sharpness of some of the exchanges in these

⁵⁴ Guibert de Nogent, *Tractatus de Incarnatione contra Judaeos*, PL 156: 528. For an eleventh-century proposal to prove Christianity through ordeal by fire to an audience of similarly unimpressed Muslims, see Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, 45.

⁵⁵ Peter of Blois, *Contra perfidiam Judaeorum*, PL 207: 870; and *Tractatus adversus Judaeum*, PL 213: 749.

⁵⁶ *Milhamot HaShem*, ed. Judah Rosenthal (Jerusalem, 1963), esp. xxii, 4–5.

⁵⁷ *Milhemet Mizvah*, Biblioteca Palatina Parma, MS. 2749. A substantial part of the manuscript was transcribed by William Herskowitz. See Herskowitz, "Judaean-Christian Disputation in Provence as Reflected in Milhemet Mitzva of R. Meir HaMeili" (D.H.L. dissertation, Bernard Revel Graduate School, Yeshiva University, 1974). On Meir's work, see Siegfried Stein, *Jewish-Christian Disputations in Thirteenth-Century Narbonne* (London, 1969). Also see the studies by Robert Chazan in *Harvard Theological Review*, 67 (1974): 437–57; *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 45 (1974): 287–305; and *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 41–42 (1973–74): 45–67.

⁵⁸ *Ta'anut*, in Stanislaus Simon, *Mose ben Salomo von Salerno und seine philosophischen Auseinandersetzung mit den Lehren des Christentums* (Breslau, 1931).

⁵⁹ It is worth noting that in the Barcelona disputation of 1263, Nahmanides commented that "there is not a single priest or child" who does not ask the Jews about Ps. 110. See *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1963), vol. 1, p. 317.

⁶⁰ Joseph Official, *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*, ed. Judah Rosenthal (Jerusalem, 1970).

⁶¹ See *The Jewish-Christian Debate*. The *Nizzahon vetus* was also edited by Mordechai Breuer; *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* (Jerusalem, 1978).

works invites skepticism about their authenticity. Once again, however, the atmosphere of constant interaction is compelling, and it is almost inconceivable that these accounts are not essentially authentic. Most of the arguments are introduced by phrases like “a certain *cordelier*” or “a certain apostate asked.” Specific priests are identified by their towns, and arguments are placed in specific settings.

Moreover, the aggressiveness of the tone of both works makes it difficult to reject Christian assertions that Jews often initiated debate. It is true that one of the most distinguished students of this literature has urged us to differentiate between “audacity in confronting Christianity” and the initiation of disputation,⁶² and in some instances this is a useful caveat. But the assertiveness of the Ashkenazic polemics must undercut skepticism about the validity of Christian reports concerning Jewish initiatives. Jews who urged their readers to tell Christians that Jacob sat on a cross,⁶³ who reported (falsely or not) that a Jew urinated on a cross in the presence of a churchman and then produced a clever justification,⁶⁴ who clearly suggested to their readers that they raise embarrassing questions with Christians⁶⁵—Jews who said such things and more cannot be assumed a priori to have shrunk from initiating religious discussions with Christian acquaintances. Even if the authors—despite the plain meaning of their exhortations—expected discretion from their Jewish readers, all readers would not have obliged. In short, the existence of such polemics practically guarantees that Jews who took them literally would act on their advice, and, while the worst excesses of these works may never have been translated into practice, it is hard to deny that a number of readers would have been impelled to challenge Christians to defend their faith. There were, of course, cautious Jews,⁶⁶ but bold, even reckless, disputants, especially in northern France and Germany, appear to have constituted far more than a lunatic fringe.

Even Jewish familiarity with Christian books often resulted from these discussions since the access of Jews to such works normally came through Christians who owned them. Herman of Cologne was given Latin books, and Jacob ben Reuben said that his Christian friend gave him a work that apparently was—at least in part—a polemical anthology.⁶⁷ Although sections of some Jewish polemics appear to have been composed to refute written Christian exegesis,⁶⁸ most of the points were debated in lively and frequent discussions.

⁶² Frank Talmage, *Commentary*, June 1975, p. 23.

⁶³ This is a delicate paraphrase of the original. See *Nizzahon vetus*, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 59, and, in the Hebrew section, 20.

⁶⁴ Joseph Official, *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*, 14. There is some ambiguity in the story as to whether the Jew was aware that the Christian would see him.

⁶⁵ See *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, sects. 156, 161, 188, 206, 210, 229.

⁶⁶ The most striking example of a cautious polemicist is Solomon de' Rossi. See Frank Talmage, “Christianity and the Jewish People,” in his *Disputation and Dialogue* (New York, 1975), 240. Here Solomon's position is presented as more or less typical. Also see *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 21–22, and n. 55. In addition, it should be kept in mind that the greatest figures of medieval Jewry, at least in the period with which we are concerned, did not write polemical works. (Nahmanides' coerced involvement in Barcelona is, of course, not germane to the present discussion.)

⁶⁷ See my discussion in *Speculum*, 49 (1974): 36–37, 46–47.

⁶⁸ When Jewish works, for example, refute Christological interpretations that are found only in Christian commentaries and not in polemics, we have reason to suspect that the Jewish authors got the information from a literary source, and a systematic investigation along these lines may well prove rewarding. For a clear-cut passage of this sort, note the probably interpolated section in the Munich manuscript of the *Nizzahon vetus* on Psalms, with its explicit references to Christian translations and to

It is difficult to characterize with precision the current state of scholarship on this question. Some skepticism remains about Jewish initiation of debate.⁶⁹ But scholars who have concentrated on the northern Ashkenazic polemics have found it difficult to discount an impression of authenticity, whatever the degree of their reservations on matters of detail,⁷⁰ and this impression is consistent with the general picture reflected in other Jewish sources from Northern Europe.⁷¹ Students of Christian polemic in the High Middle Ages have remarked very briefly on the existence of a genuine Jewish challenge,⁷² and here, too, the study of nonpolemical Christian sources confirms the impression of significant interaction.⁷³ My review of polemic—despite the limitations and inevitably skewed emphasis of the genre—underscores that debate was a central phenomenon in the social and intellectual life of medieval Ashkenazic Jewry. While evidence of extensive debate decidedly does not demonstrate that other developments in the cultural history of Ashkenazic Jews were influenced by Jewish-Christian contacts (particularly since the greatest rabbis were not polemicists), the instinctive resistance that many historians still feel when such assertions are made should be diminished.

One more important point. Jewish aggressiveness and even Jewish initiative do not constitute a Jewish mission. There is no indication that Jews engaged in religious discussions with Christians with the realistic expectation of converting

the *glossa* and its concentration on exegesis that no sensible Christian polemicist would have emphasized. See *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, sects. 131–41. The extent to which Jews could have read Latin works depends, of course, on their knowledge of Latin, and, although almost all of the authors of polemical works surely read Latin, we cannot be certain about other Jewish intellectuals. For an argument that the Paris disputation of 1240 was conducted in Latin, see Ch. Merchavia, *HaTalmud BiRe'i HaNazrut* (Jerusalem, 1970), 245. Grabois's assertion that "Rashi attested that he studied Christian biblical exegesis" is much too strong. Of the two authorities that Grabois noted, Y. Baer presented very little evidence for his assertion that "we may assume that Rashi knew Latin and read widely in Christian works," and E. Shereshevsky explicitly conceded that there is no definitive evidence that Rashi read Latin. See Grabois, "The *Hebraica veritas*," 632; Baer, "Rashi VeHaMeziut HaHistorit shel Zemanno," *Tarbiz*, 20 (1950): 326; and Shereshevsky, "Rashi and Christian Interpretations," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 61 (1970–71): 76–86.

⁶⁹ Talmage, *Disputation and Dialogue*, 240; and *Commentary*, June 1975, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Zadok Kahn, "Le livre de Joseph le Zélateur," *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 1 (1880): 222–46; and 3 (1881): 1–38, esp. 34; Ephraim Urbach, "Etudes sur la littérature polémique au moyen âge," *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 100 (1935): 50–77, esp. 60–64; and Mordechai Breuer, *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*, 20–21. Also see my discussion in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 20–23.

⁷¹ See, especially, Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (New York, 1960), 98–100. Also see Grabois, "The *Hebraica veritas*." For a vigorous argument, based primarily on Jewish exegetical material, for Jewish-Christian intellectual contacts, see Elazar Touitou, "Shitato HaParshanit shel HaRashbam al Reqa HaMeziut HaHistorit shel Zemanno," in Y. D. Gilat *et al.*, eds., *Iyyunim BeSifrut Hazal BaMiqra U-veToldot Yisrael: Muqdash LiProf. Ezra Zion Melamed* (Ramat Gan, 1982), 48–74.

⁷² Peter Browe assessed the situation particularly well. See Browe, *Die Judenmission im Mittelalter und die Päpste* (Rome, 1942), 113, 60–64. Also see Hunt, "Disputation of Peter of Cornwall," 147; and Dahan, *Livre des guerres du Seigneur*, 33–34. Blumenkranz's discussion of "la mission juive" deals mainly with an earlier period; *Juifs et Chrétiens*, 159–211. As I noted, Blumenkranz ascribed a significant missionary motivation to Christian polemic in his period. Elsewhere, however, he argued that the extent of what he described as Christian defense literature demonstrates that Jews must have pursued missionary activity; *Juifs et Chrétiens*, 209. In light of his position on the missionary objectives of Christian polemic, this last argument is almost puzzling, and the book, which remains of the first importance, tends to overstate the missionary intentions on both sides.

⁷³ See Grabois, "The *Hebraica veritas*." Polemical sources are dealt with only in the two concluding paragraphs; *ibid.*, 633–34, esp. 624.

them. Both the Talmud and the status of medieval Jewry militated against such a program, and the occasional evidence of Christian converts to Judaism does not begin to demonstrate a concerted Jewish effort to attract proselytes.⁷⁴ Jews challenged Christians as an expression of pride—to raise their own morale and to discomfit their opponents. Joseph Official wrote “to reveal the shame” of Jewish apostates.⁷⁵ The author of the *Nizzahon vetus* completed his advice to polemicists by promising that “then you will find the Gentile thoroughly embarrassed; indeed, he will be found to have denied [Christianity’s] central dogmas, while all Israel ‘will speak lovely words’ (Gen. 49:21).”⁷⁶ A chastened Gentile with an enhanced respect for Jews and Judaism—but a Gentile nonetheless.

THE ABSENCE OF A CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ideology and the presence of frequent Jewish-Christian confrontations establish the likelihood that eleventh- and twelfth-century Christians wrote polemics not out of missionary objectives but largely in response to requests generated by a genuine Jewish challenge. There is, however, a more profound relationship between the disinterest of the upper clergy before the thirteenth century in converting Jews and the existence of lively, regular, often friendly debates between Jews and Christians, which were sometimes begun by the Jewish participant. The tone of these informal contacts and the Jewish willingness to initiate them were possible precisely because the church was not yet deadly serious about the aim of conversion. For Jews, the enjoyment was drained out of these contests in the face of a concerted, formalized Christian mission, and it became foolhardy and dangerous to seek confrontation. During the course of the thirteenth century, the gradual transformation in the Christian position was not immediately reflected in Jewish behavior, and, even later, the spirit never completely departed from Jewish polemicists. Nevertheless, by the late Middle Ages the tone is profoundly different; one begins to see the defensiveness, nervousness, and demoralization of a worried community. Jewish polemic was never the same again.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Wolfgang Giese’s vehement argument for “intensive Jewish propaganda and missionary activity” is based solely on the existence of Christian converts to Judaism and the efforts made in church councils to limit contacts between Jews and Christians because of the Jews’ corrupting influence. See his “In Iudaismum lapsus est: Jüdische Proselytenmacherei im frühen und hohen Mittelalter (600–1300),” *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 88 (1968): 407–18. Also see Baron’s remark that “medieval Jews had long given up any missionary aspirations”; *A Social and Religious History*, 23.

⁷⁵ Joseph Official, *Sefer Yosef HaMeggane*, 15. See Hos. 2:2.

⁷⁶ *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 169, and, in the Hebrew section, 108.

⁷⁷ The changes in Jewish polemic do not, of course, result solely from increased Christian proselytizing and persecution. Most late medieval Jewish polemic comes from Spanish Jewry rather than from areas where Jewish aggressiveness is most clearly attested in the earlier period. For the decline in polemic and the growing isolationism in the Ashkenazic orbit in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, see Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, chaps. 11, 12. On Spain, see the striking personal testimony of an obscure participant in the Tortosa disputation; Frank Talmage, “Trauma at Tortosa: The Testimony of Abraham Rimoch,” *Medieval Studies*, 47 (1985): 397. I am grateful to Moshe Idel for bringing this last reference to my attention.