

However, all is not lost through the death: "The resurrection of Jesus is affirmed as following upon His murder" (p. 295). What is the point of a resurrection if Jesus simply grew old and happily died the "good death"? His resurrection becomes meaningful only in view of his murder, for it becomes a liberating act that breaks with society. "*The resurrection can only be the fruit of insurrection*" (p. 295). But to place this resurrection within the context of theological negation is to impose a reading of the pollution system upon Mark's text, and this negates the debt system upon which Mark was originally written.

In concluding his study, Belo makes an interesting observation. There is a new generation appearing who claims to be Marxist *and* Christian. "The claim to be both Marxist and Christian implies that the claimant has leaped over the wall that separated the two, just as in their day Paul and Mark leaped over the wall of hatred that separated Jews and Pagans" (p. 297).

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Berger, David. *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus*. Judaica, Texts and Translations, 4. Philadelphia, Pa.: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979. xviii + 422 pp. + 164 pp. of Hebrew text. \$20.00.

The *Nizzahon Vetus* ("Old Book of Polemic") is a late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century anthology of Jewish arguments directed against Christian doctrine, practice, and exegesis, probably written by a German Jew. In this impressive publication, David Berger not only provides a highly readable English translation of the Hebrew text (here edited with critical apparatus), but also a useful introduction surveying the nature of the Jewish-Christian debate in the Middle Ages, describing the social, political, and economic contexts of late medieval polemics, and briefly discussing the evidence for authorship, provenance, and dating of this important and highly aggressive example of Jewish disputation. Throughout the introduction and in his detailed commentary on the text—which reveals a commanding knowledge of both the Jewish polemical literature and standard medieval Christian exegesis—Berger never fails to inform and to discuss issues central to both Judaism and Christianity.

As Berger notes, medieval "Jews were convinced that some of the central articles of faith professed by Christians were not only devoid of scriptural foundation but were without logical justification as well . . ." (p. 13). Christian trinitarian arguments were especially attacked as being irrational. Other Christian beliefs and practices were scrutinized as based

on a misunderstanding of Scripture (e.g., the "christological" interpretation of key OT texts), or condemned as immoral (e.g., priestly celibacy). The arguments included in the *Nizzahon Vetus* range in approach and tone from the careful and well-reasoned to the sarcastic and abusive. Such arguments clearly had their effect. Berger suggests that the necessity of answering Jewish challenges to Christianity contributed to the development of Christian theology, especially in discussions of such basic issues as the Trinity and the Incarnation.

The divinity of Jesus of Nazareth was, as one would expect, particularly opposed by Jews. One way in which the *Nizzahon Vetus* seeks to undermine Christian positions is to deny the power and effect of Christ's miracles. For example, it argues that the miracles of Jesus were "done by magic," which he must have learned while in Egypt (p. 64). It also points out that the miracles of Jesus were minor in comparison with those of the OT prophets. Examining NT miracles, the *Nizzahon Vetus* points to OT marvels that preceded and even out-miracled those of Jesus, suggesting quite rightly that miracles alone do not prove divinity (pp. 199-200). But, as Berger suggests in his commentary, such arguments had two sides. Christian polemicists such as Peter the Venerable and others could distinguish between the miracles of the prophets, which were dependent upon the power of God, and those of Jesus, performed through his own power (p. 324). Such arguments reveal the complexity of the debate between Christian and Jew in the Middle Ages, a complexity that Berger carefully delineates in this study.

Of particular interest are the Jewish attacks against the medieval Christian rejection of the ritual law and against the "new" Christian rituals such as baptism and confession. Concerning the sabbath, for example, the Jewish polemicist accuses Christians of breaking the commandments of God by not resting on the seventh day. He sweeps aside the Christian argument that the day of rest was changed to Sunday: "You might then argue that the one who was hanged [i.e., Jesus] changed the Sabbath to Sunday, which you call *Dominica*; nevertheless, by the fact that you do work on the Sabbath, when God commanded you not to work, you violate and contradict the words of Moses. Furthermore, even according to your view that the Sabbath has been transferred to Sunday, why don't you stone those who violate it as the Israelites, commanded by God, did in the desert to the man found gathering sticks on the Sabbath?" (p. 45).

The polemic similarly attacks Christians for eating swine flesh (p. 211) and for the practice of baptism, especially infant baptism (p. 171). It also insists that the increasingly important Christian practice of confession is wrong. In arguments somewhat typical in their ranging from the absurd to the carefully reasoned, the *Nizzahon Vetus* on the one hand charges that

the practice of confession is merely a way for licentious priests, who "wallow in fornication," to learn "which women are having extra-marital affairs," whereas on the other hand it points out quite soberly that "only God himself can pardon and forgive" and that even "the greatest of the prophets [Moses] did not have the power to pardon and forgive . . ." (pp. 223-224).

One of the major difficulties existing in the Middle Ages that complicated the Jewish-Christian debate involved conflicting hermeneutics. Jews repeatedly cited Christian ignorance of textual context and attacked the typical allegorical reading of the OT whereby historical characters and events were interpreted as prefiguring or symbolizing Christ, the church, or Christian virtues. Thus one can understand the frustration of Jews faced with self-serving Christian interpretations based essentially on the principle that whenever "Israel" in Scripture is condemned it refers to the Jews, whereas whenever it is praised it refers to the Christian church. The Jewish exegetes asked for consistency in approach and some sense of textual evidence for interpretations. The *Nizzahon Vetus*, for example, refutes the Christian identification of the term "Zion" with "Ecclesia" (see Isa 51:3) by asking, "what does Zion have to do with Christendom?" (p. 113). Essentially, the polemic demands a literal reading of the OT texts.

Nevertheless, when it suits the argument, Jewish interpreters could also provide elaborate and far-fetched allegorical interpretations of their own. Commenting on Deut 12:31, which refers to those abhorrent to the Lord who burn their sons and daughters for their gods, the *Nizzahon Vetus* states: "Burning refers to the priests and nuns who burn up in their lustful desire but are unable to consummate it; this is the sort of burning which is an abhorrent act that the Lord detests." The argument is at least in part dependent upon popular rumors concerning the supposed immorality of the monastic orders—rumors continued later in Protestant anti-Catholic polemic. But particularly interesting here is that the argument continues by quoting the NT: "Moreover, it is written in their own book of errors that Paul said, 'It is better to marry than to burn' [1 Cor. 7:9], and so you can see that adultery is called burning" (p. 70). Here clearly it is the Jewish polemicist who lifts a text out of context, turning for ammunition even to the Christian Scripture. The passage indicates how inflamed the debate became in the high Middle Ages. As Berger notes, Christians searched the Talmud and Jews the NT for their own purposes, manipulating each other's sacred literature: "On the one hand, that literature was subjected to a vigorous critique; on the other, it was exploited to disprove the beliefs of its own adherents" (p. 30).

Useful explanations of these and many of the other arguments advanced in the *Nizzahon Vetus*, along with possible sources and analogues

and references to Christian arguments, are provided in Berger's highly helpful commentary on the text. The reader is also assisted by an analytical table of contents, an extensive bibliography, and indexes to biblical citations and to topics, sources and authors. Five appendixes provide further and more detailed examination of such issues as "The Use of the Plural in Reference to God," "The Law as Allegory," and "The Christian Exegesis of Genesis 18."

This fascinating book, by providing a modern edition and translation of a key text, focuses on a facet of church history relatively unknown to most Christians, yet of crucial importance to our understanding of medieval doctrine, exegesis, and culture. Theologians interested in some historical perspective on Jewish and Christian beliefs, historians concerned with the social and religious situations of medieval Jewry, and even literary historians interested in the backgrounds of medieval legends (e.g., the tale told by the Prioress in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* that Jews conducted ritual sacrifices of Christian children) will find *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* challenging and thoughtful. As Berger notes, "The array of arguments in the *Nizzahon Vetus* is almost encyclopedic, and the book is therefore an excellent vehicle for an analysis of virtually all the central issues in the Jewish-Christian debate during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries" (p. 36). That it is, but because of Berger's impressive scholarship, the "Old Book of Polemic" becomes an excellent vehicle for a much broader understanding of the Middle Ages, both Jewish and Christian.

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Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1979. 688 pp. \$28.50.

It seems that about every decade a monograph appears which threatens to alter the direction of a discipline. Childs's *Introduction* is such a work. The method it advocates may significantly influence exegetical work on the OT in the 1980s.

Calling his method the "canonical analysis/method," Childs takes as his starting point the final, or canonical form, of the received Hebrew text. This final form is given priority because it preserves the full witness of the encounter between God and Israel, and has been transmitted by and shaped religious consciousness of both synagogue and church for two millennia. The canon principle shifts the emphasis away from historical