

CHAPTER 2 THE PAN-EUROPEAN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

ECCLESIASTICAL POLICIES (Policies of the Church)

The growing Jewish population in Medieval Latin Christian Society challenged the religious doctrine of tolerance towards the Jews. The teachings of Augustine had an explanation for the past and a vision for the future, but were not very concerned with present issues. However, Church policy had to deal with the Jews in the here-and-now, with their needs and the dangers they might cause the Church. And while society evolved, the Church's policies towards the Jews also changed.

From early on, Church policy fluctuated between protecting and limiting the Jews. Between 1000-1500 the focus gradually shifted towards stricter policies, more limitations and an increased effort to convert the Jews.

Constitutio pro Judeis (an Edict to Protect the Jews) provided the most basic protection, namely prohibiting forced conversion. It also included the protection of physical rights: Jews could not be hurt, killed or robbed. Synagogues and cemeteries were to be left alone, as well.

Did the church leadership act on their promise of protection? Did they intervene when they were faced with violations of Jewish rights? In many cases, yes. Jews often filed complaints with church leaders, sometimes even with the pope, about dangers they faced. Often the religious leaders intervened on the Jews' behalf, especially when they felt the danger had been a result of (distorted) Church policy. For example, crusades and moneylending issues were two reasons that often caused the Church to intervene on behalf of the Jews.

The First Crusade and later ones did not include any specific anti-Jewish rhetoric. However, fanaticism among the population resulted in unanticipated attacks against Jews in the Rhineland from crusading groups that were not under the control of the Church. The church leaders in these areas tried to protect the Jews, but only with limited success.

As the Second Crusade was being prepared in the 1140s, there were reports of anti-Jewish violence. Bernard of Clairvaux argued for maintaining Jewish security, primarily based on the Augustinian teachings. He had four arguments, two Scripture-related and two based on reason. As God himself had already decreed the punishment of exile for the Jews because of their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, Bernard argued that human revenge would be interfering with God's plan. As an argument based on reason, Bernard argued that Jews could not be compared with the Muslim enemies. The Muslims had attacked the Christians first. He said if the Muslims were docile like the Jews they would not have been attacked and since the Jews were living quietly under Christian rule they should not be

treated violently. Finally, Bernard urges Christian crusaders to remember the words of the apostle Paul that they received the law and the promise from the Jews and that Jesus was Jewish.

Despite the strength of Bernard's argument against violence toward the Jews, violence continued to be preached in the Rhineland, specifically by a Cistercian monk named Ralph. Bernard eventually went to the Rhineland and ordered Ralph back into his monastery. The Jews of the Rhineland were very thankful for Bernard's efforts to help them. This was expressed by Ephraim of Bonn who wrote a chronicle about the violence against the Jews in the beginning of the Second Crusade. He specifically mentions Bernard as someone who played a key role in minimizing Jewish death in the Second Crusade. As we shall see later, the leadership of the Church, and of the German Empire and the German Jewish leaders worked together to protect Jewish life during the beginning of the Third Crusade.

However, Jews still suffered under unofficial crusades that erupted from time to time. For example, in Western France in the 1230s, anti-Jewish violence led the Jews to ask for help from Pope Gregory IX. He responded immediately by sending moving letters to the French Church leaders urging them to intervene on behalf of the Jews.

In the late twelfth century (1100s), the Church paid much attention to the new Jewish career of moneylending. Rulers used the Church's many anti-interest laws as an excuse to abuse Jewish moneylenders. Jewish community leaders approached the Church to protest these instances of mistreatment. Church leaders responded positively and tried to ensure that their anti-interest laws did not lead to further mistreatment of Jews.

An especially touching letter of protest against Christian cruelty came as a response against the interest-free loaning movement of the French crown and the government during the 1230s. Pope Gregory IX wrote to the leaders of the Church in France, describing in great detail the violence and abuses associated with the interest-free loaning efforts. According to the Pope, Jewish moneylenders are imprisoned and painfully tortured. They are forced to give up the money that is owed them by contract and even their principle loan is denied them. Moreover, they are forced to pay ransom in order to be released from jail and cruel torture. The genuine interest-free efforts of the church had been, according to the Pope, abused for the cancellation of honest debts and for inhumane torture of Jews. The Pope concludes by urging the Church leaders of France to interfere on behalf of the suffering Jews, to stop the physical torture, and to insist upon the honoring of rightful contracts. Once again special compassion was espoused to Jewish suffering that was the result of a movement that the Church itself had set in motion.

Now let's focus on the other half of the Church policy, namely that of restricting certain Jewish behavior and religion, and protecting Christians from Jewish influence. Because Judaism and Christianity were so closely related, and because Christians held some Jewish scriptures very sacred, the Church saw the Jewish people as posing a threat to the Christian people. Although the Jews, as a minority, were much more likely to be swayed by the more powerful and

dominant Christianity, the Church was nonetheless afraid that Jews could seduce the Christians to convert to Judaism. During the early ages of Christian rule, protecting Christians from Jews had meant, not allowing a Jew in position of power over a Christian, as that might allow Jewish religious influence. For that reason, the church had outlawed all Jewish power in antiquity, and these prohibitions were maintained throughout the Middle Ages as well.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as the Jewish community grew, the Church became more concerned about possible Jewish influence. A process of social segregation unfolded, both because of Christian policy, and the wish of the Jews themselves.

As the population of Jews increased, the Church grew more and more concerned. The prospect of possible Jewish influence was worrisome and the Church took action. One example was Pope Alexander III's Third Lateran Council of 1179, which "prohibited Christians from living and working in Jewish or Muslim homes." Christian employees as well as Jewish and Muslim employers were affected by the prohibition. Specifically, the Church did not allow Jews and Muslims to keep Christian servants in their homes, and any Christian who disobeyed was faced with excommunication.

The next step towards segregating the Jews was even more drastic. In the year 1215, Pope Innocent III assembled The Fourth Lateran Council. This council stated that in some regions under the rule of the Church, Jews and Saracens do not wear separate clothing. As a result, Christians sometimes "mistakenly had intercourse with Jews or Saracens". Therefore, in order to avoid such confusion and be condemned with sin, the Council demanded that all Jews and Saracens must be distinguishable by their clothing in all lands controlled by the Church. This was a drastic act that set the Jews apart. Jews became easily identifiable as "Jews" at all times.

As the Jewish community grew, the Church became more and more worried about possible Jewish blasphemy against the Christian faith.

An intensification of the Church's concern for Jewish blasphemy was brought about by Nicholas Donin, a convert from Judaism to Christianity. Donin claimed that the Talmud was despicable and should be banned from Christian society. His first arguments are not available to us. The earliest evidence is a series of letters from Pope Gregory IX in 1239. The letters, sent to both secular and religious authorities throughout western Christendom, contain serious charges. They argued that the Talmud dismisses the Holy Bible as divine and presents it as a human work, that the Talmud contains unspeakably horrible material, and that the Talmud is the main reason why the Jews refuse to accept the Christian truth. As a result, the Pope requested the books of Jews confiscated by Dominicans and Franciscans of the capital city.

A great number of quotations taken from the Talmud, which were judged to be blasphemous against the Christian faith were translated into Latin in Paris. The translations were arranged into a series of charges against the Talmud, and in 1240 a panel of judges was brought together to hear the case. The prosecutor was Nicholas Donin. Four northern-French rabbis acted as witnesses for the

defense. Only two records of the court proceedings still exist: The first is a description in Latin of the supposed confessions of two of the rabbis, and the second is a Hebrew description of the trial. As one might expect, each source gives an extremely different account of what happened.

At the end of this court case, the Talmud was found guilty, and sentenced to be burned in a public fire. This happened in a major gathering place in the middle of Paris in the year 1242. The loss of these precious manuscripts had a detrimental impact on the Jews, who considered the texts to be holy. Also, it confirmed for the Christians that the Jewish religion was hostile to Christianity.

What about the aftermath of this traumatizing measurement? Firstly, we know that after the burning of the Talmud, the Jews continued to defend themselves through serious negotiations. At the same time, the office of the Pope was conflicted between members of the clergy with competing positions on the Jewish issue. Furthermore, the northern-French Church was committed to its extreme stances vis-à-vis the Jews. Two years after the burning of the Talmud event took place, a new pope, Pope Innocent IV continued to encourage anti-Talmud laws throughout the French kingdom.

Three years later, Jewish leaders approached Pope Innocent IV. They argued that, while Jews were given the right to live according to their own religion within Christian society, banning the Talmud was equivalent to prohibiting Judaism. In 1247, in response to this plea, Pope Innocent IV requested that the Talmud issue be reopened. However, the reexamination of the Talmud in Paris did not result in how Pope Innocent IV intended: the Talmud was not returned to the Jews in France. But Pope Innocent IV did allow certain tolerable sections of the Talmud to be returned to Jews. The decision of Pope Innocent IV to return non-offensive portions of the Talmud became the norm for the Church in most western Christian societies.

Over time, more regulations were put in place to prevent Jewish influence on Christians. We already saw how the removal of Jewish influence evolved, at one point, to prevent contact between Jews and Christians, and to place Jews in a lower status. The idea of a possible Jewish threat now led to restrictions within non-religious areas of life as well. Limitations were introduced in new territories of Jewish involvement such as moneylending, a practice that had started in the northern regions of Europe, later to extend to the older settlements in the south.

Jewish moneylending had become very useful in the twelfth century with northern Europe's growing economy. The Church however, had grown in strength as well and was pushing to reform society according to its ideals. One of its goals was to put a stop to Christians lending money to other Christians at interest.

Deuteronomy 23:20 states that one may not charge interest. In the 12th and 13th century the Church tried hard to implement that prohibition and persuade Christians to not take interest. At the same time, Jews and Christians also relied on the next verse (Deuteronomy 23:21) which states "*You may charge interest on loans to foreigners*". It was this sentence that was the basis for Jewish moneylending. Both Jews and Christians understood this verse to allow charging interest to people of

different faiths, such as Jews to Christians and vice versa. Therefore, when Christians needed money, Jews loaned them the money as they could charge them interest since they belonged to another religion.

Just like the Church was especially sensitive when Jews suffered as a result of its own measurements, so too was it especially worried about Jewish abuses that were enabled by the policies of the Church. Because Jewish moneylending was largely created by the Church's opposition to Christian moneylending, soon enough the leadership of the Church focused on problems connected to this new Jewish business.

Jewish moneylending sparked issues. Complaints arose. Some Christians deposited sacred objects with Jews as security against their loans, which caused concerns that Jews would mistreat these objects. When lands were used as deposit, in case of foreclosure, these lands became Jewish possession, depriving the Church of income through tithing.

The Church had special concerns about Jewish loans to crusaders. Ephraim of Bonn claims that the king of France canceled debts owed to Jews but that is not unlikely. However, Pope Eugenius III, at the beginning of the Second Crusade, did absolve crusaders from their obligation to pay interest. This was a perk for crusaders and a major loss for the (mostly Jewish) money lenders.

Pope Innocent III went a step further in supporting the crusaders. Even oaths to pay interest were annulled for those who joined the crusade. Also, if paying back the principle owed to Jews was a problem, it could be put off for the duration of their absence.

Over time, the Church's concerns with Jewish money lending went beyond the areas of sacred objects, Church income and the welfare of crusaders. Where the Church before had taken measures to protect Christians against Jewish harmful influence in the religious realm, it now strove to protect them against material harm caused by money lending.

The Church made rules about who can borrow from Jews and what they can offer as a safety deposit. There was a rule which prohibited Jews from charging high interest rates. This rule was enacted at the Fourth Lateran Council. It stated that the Church must take control of the interest rates or else the Jews will rob the Christians of all their wealth. As a measure of protection, any Christian who was charged a high interest rate by a Jew could report the Jew who would be banned from having any professional relationships with Christians, until he pays back the excessive interest income.

There are some interesting aspects to this order from the Forth Lateran Council. First, the goal of protecting endangered Christians is clear, but the solution is unusual. Usually, when laws were issued against the Jews, the Church leaders would ask the secular authorities to enforce them. Here however, social isolation was the punishment for Jews who charged excessive interest. The reason for this strange punishment seems clear. Since Jewish moneylending was profitable to the secular authorities, they could not be relied upon to enforce the limitation on Jewish interest. It is telling that, after ordering isolation of

Jews who charged excessive interest, the Council's decree asks the secular authorities not to turn against the Christians who would file complaints against Jewish moneylenders.

Churchmen had different views regarding Jewish moneylending. The official position of the Pope was to merely limit Jewish moneylending, which was a mild position compared to later measurements. In the late 12th century, some preachers demanded that Jews end their moneylending altogether, or else be removed from Christian society. This resulted in several expulsions of Jews from certain areas in northern France. In mid-13th century, King Louis IX of France ordered the Jews to end moneylending or leave the country. Many Jews chose to leave. By the end of the 13th century, the Jewish "crime" of lending against interest was used to justify massive expulsions of Jews.

The treatment of Jews by the Church involved both protection and limitation. Even as the population of Jews grew, the aim to protect Jews remained, but limiting the Jews became a higher priority. Restrictions of the past were more strictly enforced and new areas of Jewish life became subject to regulation. In addition, there was a third aspect to the Church's approach, namely the wish to convert the Jews.

Missionizing among Jews made sense for many reasons. Christianity had taken over Roman society through missionizing, which had created a drive to win ever more converts. Also, Jews seemed an appropriate target, since they already believed in (part of) the Bible. However, medieval churchmen knew that missionary activities among Jews had been quite unsuccessful from the start. Even Jesus' outreach had had little impact! Given the small size of the Jewish population, targeting other communities would have seemed a better option. But failure to convert Jews did not stop churchmen, in fact, it pushed them even more to continue, in the hopes of reaching an historic breakthrough. By the 13th century, there already was a group of Jewish converts who were passionate about bringing Christianity to Jews.

Before the year 1000 we don't see much effort to convert the small Jewish community in western Christian lands. But as the Jewish population grew, and the Christians became militarily more self-secure, missionizing among the Jews increased. By the middle of the twelfth century, the first Jewish anti-Christian polemics appeared in western Christendom, which indicates that Christian pressure was increasing, requiring Jewish responses. One such polemical tracts, the *Milhamot ha-Shem*, by a Jew named Jacob ben Reuben, was written in the context of a friendship between the author and a Christian cleric. When the Christian cleric urged his Jewish friend to recognize the Christian truth and convert, the Jew concluded that there was need for an overview of Christian arguments and Jewish answers.

By the middle 13th century, the Church had developed a formal policy of missionizing among Muslims and Jews. Schools for language training were created so Christian preachers could study the religious literature of Muslims and Jews. Muslims and Jews were forced to listen to conversion sermons. These forced sermons became a part of Jewish life, first in southern Europe and later elsewhere. These sermons were felt as a serious danger by the Jewish leaders.

A significant event in this missionizing campaign occurred in Barcelona, in 1263. The leaders of the Dominican Order convinced the king of Aragon, James I, to sponsor a debate between the Christians and the Jews. The Christian side was represented by a convert, Paulo Christiani, while the Jewish side was represented by Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides), the esteemed rabbi of Gerona. The debate was constructed in highly biased manner; the Christians carefully laid out rules that would ensure their victory.

The rules dictated that the debate was to be based only upon rabbinic texts. These rules would prevent the Jews from citing the Bible or using reason-based argumentation to support their points. Friar Paul's main goal was to use the rabbinic texts to prove major Christian truths. The four main truths to be proven were: 1) That the Messiah had already come 2) That the Messiah was both divine and human 3) That the Messiah was meant to suffer and die 4) That Jewish laws and rituals were nullified after the arrival of the Messiah. By using rabbinic sources to back his claims, Friar Paul put the burden of proof on the Jews. The Jews could not challenge Christian beliefs, they could only attempt to prove that the rabbinic texts do not support these beliefs. By contrast, the Christians had the opportunity to seriously undermine the foundation of Judaism.

We have two accounts of the four day Barcelona disputation. The Christian one, in Latin, declares Christian victory over the disgraced Jewish spokesman. The other, written in Hebrew by Rabbi Moses ben Nahman himself, depicts him proving every Christian argument wrong. He describes himself arguing for the rationality of Jewish views and the irrationality of Christian beliefs. He describes the friar as inept and the king as decent and relatively objective. The king could not declare the rabbi victorious, but he did send him away with money and honor.

However, both accounts seem exaggerated. On the one hand, there are no signs of conversions to Christianity after this exchange. Instead, the disputation made Christians realize that Friar Paulo's arguments had their shortcomings. But at the same time, the rabbi did not totally demolish the friar either, as is evident by him winning the support of King Louis IX for another confrontation. Also, after the debate, the rabbi's writing-up of his arguments shows that he found it necessary to explain the Jewish arguments, thereby perhaps implying an imperfect victory.

After 1263, Friar Raymond Martin wrote a missionizing manual called the *Pugio fidei* (meaning *Identification of Faith*). He had learned Arabic and Hebrew fluently in the new language schools. With a team of researchers, he searched through rabbinic works, translated them into Latin, and organized them into a set of arguments with the purpose of proving Christian doctrines. The *Pugio fidei* used rabbinic sources much more comprehensively and with more understanding than Friar Paulo had done.

Efforts to convert the Jews continued all through the Middle Ages. New Jewish converts to Christianity played an important role in this, but they were surely not the only ones involved. As we saw before, the disputation in Barcelona had brought about no conversions at all. A century and a half later, another such convention was held in Tortosa, and the tactic was similar; the Christian side was led by a recent convert and the argumentation focused on rabbinic sources to prove the Christian faith. But in

contrast to the one in Barcelona, the Tortosa disputation took place during a critical time for Spanish Jews, shortly after 1391, when they had gone through a wave of violence, destruction, and massacre. Many despairing Jews had converted to spare their lives. In addition, this disputation lasted two years in comparison to Barcelona's four days. As a result, many Jews of Tortosa gave up resistance and converted.

Intensified missionizing was the last major move of the Medieval Church towards the Jews. It was inspired both by the increased military approach of the medieval Church and growing Jewish community within western Christendom. To an extent, trying to convert the Jews to Christianity fulfilled a major Christian duty, namely sharing the truth with others. In some way, converting the Jews would be a peaceful but radical solution to the "Jewish problem". It would eliminate all Jewish threats and at the same time serve as evidence of Christianity.

IMAGERY OF JUDAISM AND THE JEWS

One more example of Church influence on Jewish life was the picture that was painted by leaders of the Church of Judaism and the Jews. Of the three ways that the Church impacted on the Jews, doctrine – as we saw before – was the least subject to change. Policy was somewhat more flexible, as it evolved with time. Imagery (the way Jews were perceived) was the most changeable of the three and the one that the Church had to least influence on. The image that Christians had of Jews was more different from place to place and from time to time than were the doctrine of the Church and the policy of rulers. Nonetheless, even though the Church authorities had only limited influence on what people thought about Jews, it is still relevant to look at what the imagery of Jews was that they presented.

The way Jews had been portrayed in older sources, was quite diverse. The Gospels and the writings of Paul offer intensely negative images besides here and there positive statements about Jews. Paul seemed to have been quite ambivalent about Jews and Judaism. As we saw before, this ambivalence came up again in the teachings of Augustine. As a result, both the leadership of the Church and the common Christian believers had a lot to draw upon when thinking about their Christian neighbors.

Judaism and Jews are themes that often showed up in the preaching of the medieval clergy. A feature of sermons is that it often tends towards exaggeration, in order to captivate the audience. So, if we study sermons about Jews, we often find a lot of extreme statements (such as how dangerous Jews are), and not much moderation. On the other hand, sources that come from the central agencies of the Church often inclined towards moderate and rational statements. When even sources relating to the pope are rich in statements on Jews that are unrestrained, we may conclude that these statements reflect widespread popular perceptions.

The most prominent image of Jews was that they denied Jesus as the Messiah. According to the Gospels, this had led to the Crucifixion. The Roman authority had wanted to release Jesus, but the Jews had insisted on his crucifixion and death. This idea of Jewish hostility was the most basic of Christians'

perceptions of Jews throughout the ages. As we have seen, the explosion of anti-outsider sentiment unleashed by the call to the First Crusade brought out an urge for revenge in certain circles against the Jews.

We remember the opposition of these views by Bernard of Clairvaux at the beginning of the Second Crusade. The Crusade is essentially a military expedition taken by European Christians in order to recover control of the Holy Land from the Muslims. Even though Bernard criticized the popular crusader thinking, he did not challenge the views people had of Jews being enemies. In fact, he accepted these views and ideas, but also insisted that God had already punished the Jews by exiling them forever. Given this punishment of being exiled, crusaders had no right to seek revenge on Jews. Bernard notes in his statement that medieval Jews resigned themselves to living peacefully in Christian society, even though the heirs of their ancestors opposed both Christ and Christianity. If the Muslims were willing to be this subservient, there would be no need for crusading. Peter the Venerable of Cluny, who was the same age as Bernard, did not share the same sense of Jewish docility, or obedience. On the eve of the Second Crusade, Peter had sent a letter to the King of France, suggesting that the Jews of the 12th century were just as hostile as their ancestors. Peter wrote in this letter that Jews were finding ways to be disrespectful towards sacred figures and objects of the Christian faith. While Peter deliberately avoided anti-Jewish violence as the appropriate response to the apparent Jewish opposition, he did urge that the Jews should be forced to pay the price of the crusade as a punishment for their ongoing hostility to Christianity and Christians.

While notions of historic Jewish opposition must be fully anticipated in writings by the pope and the government of the Roman Catholic Church, the growing sense of current Jewish hostility is shocking. We return once more to the powerful and innovative Pope Innocent III. We have noted his policy toward the Jews, and now we must discuss his contribution to the imagery of the Jews. We have already noted his addition of a new opening and closing to the traditional *Constitutio pro Judeis*, or the Constitution for the Jews: "Although the Jewish perfidy is in every way worthy of condemnation," an unusually harsh way of describing Judaism as a perfidy, or deceit. Also, the closing of the Constitution states the existence of Jews who plot against Christians and their faith, with the statement that Jewish plotters are not allowed to be enjoy the protection provided by the *Constitutio*.

Innocent's further letters included many anti-Jewish statements. In a 1205 letter to the King of France, Innocent begins by acknowledging the acceptability of Jewish life under Christian princes in Christian society. However, he states, "princes who prefer the sons of the crucifiers, against whom the blood cries to the Father's ears, to the heirs of the Crucified Christ." In this statement, he complained against royal and baronial favoritism towards Jews, depicting them as "sons of crucifiers." Innocent's letter reflects intense and hostile Jewish imagery which was likely to arouse anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians.

Innocent's sense of the Jews as present-day enemies to Christians and Christianity is reflected in another letter sent later to the archbishops of Sens and of Paris. In this letter, Innocent speaks poorly of Jews again, and specifically notes Jewish behaviors in northern France, along with the royal and baronial

favoritism of Jews. He starts the letter by focusing on how certain Christians accept Jews, “who by their own guilt are consigned to perpetual servitude, because they crucified the Lord, although their own prophets had predicted that he would come in the flesh to redeem Israel.” Muslims – according to Innocent – rebuked the Christian world for tolerating the Jews under these circumstances. Nonetheless, this is the nature of Christian saintliness. In the face of such saintliness, “the Jews should not be ungrateful to us and should not pay back Christian favor with insults...” However, Jews do in fact show that they are ungrateful. Innocent’s letter reads, “While they are mercifully admitted into our intimacy, they threaten us with that retribution that they are accustomed to give to their hosts, in accordance with the proverb, ‘like a mouse in a pocket, like the snake around one’s loins, like the fire in one’s bosom.’” This imagery of Jews changes them from historical enemies to acute, present-day dangers. This important change of imagery took place all across western Christendom, beginning during the 12th century. It seems that during this transformation of the Jewish imagery, Pope Innocent III was not the actual innovator. In fact, he was the follower of an existing trend. Nonetheless, the pronouncement of these views on Jews by the Church and the Pope had an important impact.

Pope Innocent III brings several proofs for Jewish ingratitude and hatred. He mentions crimes such as blasphemy of Jesus, blasphemy against the host, and oppression of Christians through lending against interest. Innocent expresses the widespread idea that Jews grab every opportunity to kill Christians, merely out of hatred of the Christian faith. In his letter to the king of France he writes: “They take advantage of every wicked opportunity to kill in secret their Christian hosts.”

Still, the leaders of the Church often protected the Jews against the worst accusations that reared their head during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The blood libel accusation – the claim that Jews killed Christians to use their blood for Jewish rituals – was often investigated by the Pope, and rejected. Other claims however were reinforced or justified by the popes. For instance, the claim of host desecration was often confirmed by the papacy when it endorsed the building of churches on the sites of these supposed desecration, which became sites of miracles as well. An influential example was the Pope’s recognition of a such a shrine in Paris. In short, with respect to anti-Jewish allegations, the leadership of the Church was ambiguous.

The previously discussed investigation and condemnation of the Talmud contribute strongly towards the declining image of Jews in western Christendom. However, Pope Innocent IV did try to reverse the total prohibition of the Talmud of 1242. In general, the popes were in favor of censoring the Talmud, which meant taking out sections that were considered offensive. The harsh language with which the popes portrayed the Talmud, did support the idea of Jews being an alien and hostile part of society. Out of concern for Jewish blasphemy, the Church intensified the anti-Jewish perceptions that had developed across Western Christendom from the 12th century on.

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL CREATIVITY: DANGER, CHALLENGE, STIMULUS

So far, we have focused on Church doctrine, policies and imagery related to Judaism. These had a profound influence on Jews. But there was another source of Christian influence on the Jews of the west. The period 1000-1500 showed remarkable cultural and spiritual creativity in areas like science, philosophy, architecture, literature, visual arts, and the founding of new European universities. Especially in the 12th century, these innovations were so remarkable that scholars call this period a “renaissance”. Most of this creativity came forth from the Christian religious outlook. Sometimes however, the Church saw certain innovations as heretical. Identifying and destroying heresy became a major concern of the Church. In any case, all this creativity affected the Jews who lived in this environment.

This new cultural and spiritual blossoming posed new threats to the identity of the Jews. Christians felt that their religion which had brought forth such a vigorous new culture must be superior, and other religions inferior. Strengthened by this, missionary activity was intensified.

This Christian creativity resulted in new efforts in winning over the Jews. First and foremost, of course, old-fashioned argumentation from the Hebrew Bible. That strategy can be traced back to the beginning of Christianity. Over time, Christians became more aware of the Jewish tradition of Bible interpretation. With the advanced development of biblical scholarship in the 12th and 13th centuries, those seeking to convert the Jews became convinced that the true meaning of the text could be detected and that this would convince the Jews.

Others focused on philosophy to prove the truth of Christianity. This approach also goes back to the early days of Christianity. Justin Martyr had been one of the Church’s first philosophers and at the same time one of its first influential defenders. However, Thomas Aquinas’s effort to prove Christianity through philosophy had little impact on medieval Jews and Muslims; his synthesis was too complicated to serve as a convincing tool. Nonetheless, it still shows how confident Christians were that philosophic achievements validated the Christian truth.

A new effort to acquire knowledge from the world outside Christianity also had an impact on missionizing strategies. Religious texts of other traditions were translated. These translations then were used as tools for converting people to Christianity. In targeting the Jews, missionaries argued that the rabbinic texts supported the Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible.

For example, traditionally, Christians used Isaiah 52-53 and claimed that the Suffering Servant of the Lord described in that text referred to Jesus. Jews rejected this claim and argued that the Isaiah passage depicted the persecution of Jews, not the Messiah. Now the missionaries were able to cite rabbinic passages that also took Isaiah 52-53 as a portrayal of the Messiah, thereby countering the standard medieval Jewish view, while supporting Christian claims.

Beside Jewish explanations of Bible texts, other rabbinic sources were cited as proof of Christian truths, such as that the Messiah had already come or that the one God had multiple personas. Jewish leaders did come up with responses, but these attacks on Jewish beliefs – creatively using Jewish sources – were quite powerful.

The most impactful Christian argument however was that Christianity had become dominant and that the Jews were living in a humiliated position. This was obviously proof that God had favored the Church and abandoned the Jewish people. Jewish spokespeople did try to counter this argument, but it was nonetheless felt as a troubling point.

Aside from these specific attacks created by Christianity's cultural creativity, a more general challenge was posed. As we saw before, one of the most powerful Christian arguments for Jewish conversion was taken from practical realities. Jews were reminded of the remarkable difference between the rise and dominance of Christianity and Jewish decline. This would suggest divine acceptance of Christianity and divine rejection of Judaism. Generally, proofs of Christian dominance and Jewish decline were taken from the physical world: demography, economy, and political power. Jews did have answers to these claims and argued that the material achievements of Christendom were no proof of spiritual truth. Of course, they could not acknowledge cultural or spiritual inferiority. Thus, Christian cultural and spiritual achievement challenged the Jews to develop their own cultural creativity, one that would match or – at least in Jewish eyes – exceed Christian achievement.

We see this Jewish feeling of being superior in the violent attacks on the Jews in the Rhineland that were a part of the First Crusade. Those Jews who recorded the events felt no need to portray the motives of the violent crusaders as evil or low. They agreed that the crusaders were moved by spiritual values, be it that these were blemished by the Christian faith. They agreed that the crusaders were driven by heroism, be it that this heroism was tainted by the crusaders' empty beliefs. They recognized the crusaders' exalted desire towards Jerusalem, even though the crusaders were only concerned with the physical Jerusalem. It was the Jewish martyrs who built a *spiritual* Jerusalem in the Rhineland. It was the Jews who were the real heroes. This was in fact the opposite of the Christian perception, in which the Jews were the Israel of the flesh, and the Christians the new Israel of the spirit.

We see a similar competition from the new style of Jewish Bible interpretation. As Christians became more focused on explaining the Bible text in a literal way, they turned to the Jews for deeper study of the Hebrew language. As a direct response, Jews then also focused on the literal sense of the Biblical text, convinced that they were much better at it than the Christians. This is how, confronted with a new style of Christian Bible study, the Jews worked in the same direction, claiming to be more successful at it.

Besides these previously described areas in which Jews tried to match and surpass Christians, there are remarkable similarities between new ways in which Christians studied and applied Church law and innovative ways in which Jews studied the Talmud. Such a new approach to Talmud study emerged in the early 12th century in northern France.

Philosophic interest first emerged in the Muslim world, where it enticed the Jews to embrace philosophy as well. The height of this philosophical thinking is found in the works of Maimonides. The philosophical tradition that initially flourished in the Muslim world, eventually spread to Christian society,

including to its Jewish communities. In the Jewish perception, Christian philosophy was superficial and irrational, while Jewish philosophy was a natural outgrowth of the rationality and logic of Judaism.

Most interesting is the development of Jewish mysticism. While forms of Jewish mysticism had existed since Biblical times, in Christian lands where mystical beliefs were deeply ingrained in society, it received a major boost from the 12th century onward. The appearance of the *Zohar* in the late 13th century fits very well in the trend of this period. Both Christian and Jewish mystical thinking was focused on bridging the gap between humans and the Divinity, and on discerning multiple aspects and dynamic features within the one God. At the same time, Jewish mystics were persistent in their criticism of Christianity, blaming it for much of the evil in the world. Here again, Jews followed what was going on in the dominant society, and at the same time encouraged to point out the errors of Christianity and the superiority of the Jewish vision.

Up until this point, the Christian-Jewish relationship has been described as hostile, with the Jewish minority challenged by the Christian majority, and asserting its dominance. However, in medieval western Christian society, much of Jewish creativity simply came from living in a dynamic and exciting environment.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Roman Catholic Church's doctrines, its policies, and the image of Jews it presented greatly impacted the fate of the Jews in Christian lands. But no matter how influential the Church was, it was not the only force and its impact was not the same throughout different locations and periods. Therefore, we must now discuss the various Jewish communities throughout Western civilizations. We shall see how the Church's doctrines, policies and imagery interacted with different local circumstances and affected the Jewish communities in different ways.

We shall also see how many Jewish communities in medieval western Christendom experienced a burst of creativity, largely due to their dynamic surroundings. Jews were very much aware of the culture dynamism of their Christian environment. They were impressed by it but also threatened as they saw it as an outcome of the Christian religion. As a result, the Jewish people were compelled to reject these Christian achievements while proclaiming the superiority of the Jewish faith and of *its* cultural and spiritual creativity. Both Jews and Christians harbored mixed feelings about the other faith.