

Polemical Dialogues with Christianity in Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen's >Sefer ha-Nizahon<¹⁾

Milan Žonca (Prague)

The polemical mode in which much of the Jewish-Christian interaction of the last two millennia took place – part function of the exclusivist tendency inherent in monotheistic religions in general, part result of the specific relationship between these »twin« communities, which found themselves from the very beginning entangled in complex cultural ties²⁾ – was amplified in the Middle Ages by various social and intellectual changes. These changes highlighted and problematised the position of Jews as the only significant and tolerated religious minority in Western Christendom. The image of the »hermeneutical Jew« – a personified prism through which law, redemption, and sacred history were viewed and endowed with meaning in Christian theological discourse – took new shapes at this time, and medieval shifts in perceptions of the Jews and in attitudes towards them had immediate bearing on their standing in Christian society³⁾. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, several intellectual trends converged and brought new intensity to the polemical give-and-take between Christians and Jews⁴⁾. First, the religious discourse in the twelfth century turned its focus to the relationship between faith and reason. Second, Christian awareness of the rabbinic literature and its contents increased. Third, religious and secular

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2) For the twin metaphor applied to Jewish and Christian origins, see Daniel BOYARIN, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Stanford 1999, pp. 1–19.

3) Jeremy COHEN, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*, Berkeley 1999.

4) See Amos FUNKENSTEIN, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, Los Angeles 1993, pp. 169–201; Anna SAPIR ABULAFIA, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth Century Renaissance*, New York/London 1995; Robert CHAZAN, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response*, Berkeley/London 1989; Ryan SZPIECH, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*, Philadelphia 2013; Paola TARTAKOFF, *Conversion, Circumcision, and Ritual Murder in Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia 2020.

authorities became more concerned with religious identities and tried to safeguard their boundaries and/or neutralise the difference between them through conversion. In conjunction with anti-Jewish libels and gradual economic decline, these developments contributed substantially to the deterioration of the status of Jews and their conditions of life in Christian Europe in the late Middle Ages.

Jewish literary polemic against Christianity is often analysed as a response to these external challenges; as a rhetorical self-defence that in its essence strove to construct convincing counter-images of the Jewish community as rationally and morally superior to the oppressive Christian majority⁵). To achieve this aim, Jewish polemicists used different methods and arguments, reflecting the social and cultural setting in which they wrote, the shifts in the challenges they were addressing as well as the expectations of their intended audiences⁶). From this perspective, Jewish polemical works differed significantly in their approach to combatting Christian claims, but they shared one common trait: they operated first and foremost in a »reactive« mode and their polemical strategies were determined by a Christian polemical agenda.

This interpretive attitude towards literary polemics contrasts with the way scholars have in recent decades examined polemical motifs in various segments of medieval Jewish culture, especially liturgical poetry and ritual⁷). In the context of Ashkenazic culture (the culture of Jewish communities living in Northern and Central Europe), Ivan Marcus has drawn attention to a process which he labelled »inward acculturation« and which involved neutralization or even polemical inversion of religious motifs borrowed from Christian culture and their internalization in Jewish literature and religious practice (such

5) Cf. Robert CHAZAN, *Fashioning the Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom*, Cambridge 2004, *passim*. See also Jeremy COHEN, *Towards a Functional Classification of Jewish anti-Christian Polemic in the High Middle Ages*, in: *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. Bernard LEWIS/Friedrich NIEWÖHNER, Wiesbaden 1992, pp. 93–114. For an overview of medieval Jewish anti-Christian polemical works, see Hanne TRAUTNER-KROMANN, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics Against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100–1500*, transl. James MANLEY, Tübingen 1993.

6) Sephardic authors generally placed greater emphasis on rational arguments against Christianity, while polemical texts from the Ashkenazic cultural sphere in Northern and Central Europe are often characterised by aggressive and emotional language. On the role of philosophical arguments in Sephardic polemic, see Daniel J. LASKER, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edition, Oxford 2007; ID., *Popular Polemics and Philosophical Truth in Medieval Jewish Critique of Christianity*, in: *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999), pp. 243–259. For the contrasting approach in Ashkenaz, see David BERGER, *Polemic, Exegesis, Philosophy, and Science: On the Tenacity of Ashkenazic Modes of Thought*, in: *Jb. des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 8 (2009), pp. 27–39; ID., *On the Image and Destiny of Gentiles in Ashkenazic Polemical Literature*, in: ID., *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations*, Boston 2010, pp. 109–138.

7) Israel Jacob YUVAL, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, transl. Barbara HARSHAV/Jonathan CHIPMAN, Berkeley 2008; Susan L. EINBINDER, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France*, Princeton 2002.

as the Ashkenazic school initiation ceremony) with the aim of buttressing Jewish identity and highlighting the superiority of Judaism⁸⁾.

This methodological difference between the treatment of these genres is to some extent understandable, given their respective characteristics. In poetry and ritual, religious polemic is transposed into another mode of discourse, one that is more symbolic and, by definition, more open to the multiplicity of voices and agendas. It can, therefore, evince more creativity and agency than the focused and systematic nature of literary polemic allows. I would nevertheless like to suggest that even in explicitly polemical works it may sometimes be fruitful to search for creative inversions, rhetorical echoes and allusions borrowed from the very discourse that they aim at subverting.

To trace these possibilities, I examine >Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon< (>The Book of Victory< or >The Book of Polemic<), perhaps the most popular late-medieval Ashkenazic polemical work⁹⁾. Its author, Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen (d. 1421), was one of the most original and versatile Ashkenazic thinkers of the late Middle Ages¹⁰⁾. He served as a rabbinic judge in Prague and Erfurt, where he also led a rabbinic academy (*yeshiva*)¹¹⁾. In addition to being a respected authority in Jewish law, Lipman displayed a wide range of intellectual interests. His works reveal the ability to juxtapose reflections on contemporary religious practice and

8) Ivan G. MARCUS, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*, New Haven 1996, pp. 8–13; Id., *Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz*, in: *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David BIALE, New York 2002, pp. 449–518 (esp. pp. 461–463).

9) The work was published for the first time by Theodoricus Hackspan (*Liber Nizachon Rabbi Lipmanni*, Altdorf 1644). All the following references to >Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon< are to this edition. Because Hackspan's print contains numerous minor mistakes, I have also consulted a digital copy of the oldest dated manuscript of >Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon<, Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Cod. hebr. 76 (Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts [IMHM] F 918), available on-line: https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000062939/ (26. 5. 2021). Hackspan's edition was reprinted in Jerusalem in 1983 with an introduction by Frank (Ephraim) Talmage, which also was also translated into English. See Frank TALMAGE, *Sefer Ha-Niṣṣaḥon of R. Yom Tov Lipmann Muehlhausen*, in: *Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver: Studies in Medieval Jewish Exegesis and Polemics*, ed. Barry Dov WALFISH, Toronto 1999, pp. 319–356.

10) For an overview of Lipman's work and thought, see Yehuda KAUFMANN, *Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen: Polemicist, Philosopher, and Kabbalist* (in Hebrew), New York 1927; Vladimír SADEK, *Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen and His Rationalistic Way of Thinking*, in: *Judaica Bohemiae* 24 (1988), pp. 98–113; *Germania Judaica*, vol. 3, 1350–1519, ed. Arye MAIMON/Mordechai BREUER/Yacov GUGENHEIM, Tübingen 1987–2003, vol. 2 (1995), pp. 1129–1131; Abraham DAVID, *Jewish Sages in Medieval Erfurt*, in: *Judaica* 70 (2014), pp. 121–138 (at pp. 130–135).

11) In this capacity, Lipman corresponded with rabbi Jacob Mölin of Mainz, a leading Jewish legal authority of his time. See Rabbi Jacob Mölin (Maharil), *Sh[e']'elot u-ṭ[eshuvot] Maharil ha-ḥadashot*, ed. Yizhak SATZ, Jerusalem 1977, no. 187 (p. 290). Lipman also attended a gathering of the rabbis of Saxony and Thuringia. See Israel J. YUVAL, *Scholars in Their Time: The Religious Leadership of German Jewry in the Late Middle Ages* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1988, pp. 152–154.

popular piety with discussions based on philosophical and Kabbalistic traditions¹²⁾. Remarkably open to intellectual cross-fertilisation, Lipman combined esoteric interpretations of Jewish scriptures and rituals nourished by the traditional library of Ashkenazic scholars, as well as by the more recently disseminated texts of Sephardic provenience, with polemical arguments defending the Jewish tradition against different threats, external and internal alike. His ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹ is a multi-layered work that not only documents the development of Jewish polemical argumentation against Christianity during the Middle Ages, but also illustrates how discussions between Jews and Christians were shaped by broader debates touching upon issues of religious identity and practice. My aim is to explore this text, and in particular the passages dealing with image worship, in relation to contemporary Christian debates. By contextualising Lipman's anti-Christian rhetoric in this way, I demonstrate how literary polemics can demarcate boundaries and reinforce communal identity while being at the same time rooted in discourses shared with the majority culture.

To understand the background of Lipman's polemical project, one must pay particular attention to Prague, the city with which he was most prominently associated. The first written record of Lipman's presence in Prague dates from 1406, but he must have lived there for some time beforehand¹³⁾. Already in 1407 he appears in Christian records as *magister Lyppman judex*, acting on behalf of the Jewish community, and a Hebrew document dated 1413 mentions him as a member of the local rabbinic court¹⁴⁾. While he seems to have travelled to other places as well and left Prague around 1415, it was in this

12) On Lipman's interest in philosophy and Kabbalah, see KAUFMANN, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen (as n. 10), pp. 27–44. On the eve of the Hussite wars Lipman issued a letter seeking to suppress the production of *shofarot* (musical horns used in Jewish ritual) from goat horns instead of ram's horns – a practice which he believed was not only problematic from the point of view of Jewish religious law, but also diminished the protective qualities of this ritual object. See Israel Jacob YUVAL, *Juden, Hussiten und Deutsche. Nach einer hebräischen Chronik*, in: *Juden in Christlichen Umwelt während des späten Mittelalters*, ed. Alfred HAVERKAMP/Franz-Josef ZIWES, Berlin 1992, pp. 59–102 (at pp. 70–71). The influence of Kabbalah on Lipman's interpretations of Jewish religious practice have been examined in detail by Liat SIVEK, *Yom Ṭov Lipmann's Stairway to Heaven: Cosmology and Kabbalah in Late Medieval Jewish Custom*, MA thesis, CEU, Budapest 2015. Available online: http://www.etd.ceu.hu/2015/sivek_liat.pdf (17.05.2021).

13) In his treatise on the mystical meaning of the Hebrew alphabet written after 1413, ›Sefer alfa beta‹, Lipman mentions that he studied with Samson ben Eliezer, a respected authority on Jewish scribal practice. According to his own testimony, Samson ben Eliezer had been taken by his parents from his birthplace in Saxony to Prague, where they both died when he was only eight years old. Although Samson ben Eliezer travelled widely in later life, including to the Land of Israel, it is possible that Lipman studied with him in Prague in the 1380s. See Kovež sifrei StaM, ed. Menaḥem Mendel MESHI-ZAHAV, Jerusalem 1981, p. 15, 198.

14) See Václav Vladivoj TOMEK, *Základy starého místopisu Pražského*, Praha 1866–1875, vol. 1 (1866), p. 247; London, formerly Montefiore Library, Ms. 156 (IMHM F 7306), fol. 72r.

city where he most likely composed ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹, his major and most widely disseminated work.

I. LIPMAN'S POLEMICAL PROJECTS

›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹ is not an exclusively anti-Christian polemical work, and the plurality of its polemical targets is clearly embedded in its structure. Following the example of earlier Ashkenazic polemical works, Lipman's treatise follows the structure of the Hebrew Bible, explaining contested and problematic passages book by book¹⁵). At the same time, the exposition is divided into 354 sections, one for each day of the lunar year, to enable its readers to study it on a regular basis. In this respect, ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹ betrays the influence of Jewish legal works composed for a general audience, such as the thirteenth-century ›Small Book of Commandments‹ (›Sefer miẓwot ẓaṭan‹) by Isaac of Corbeil. Lipman further divided the sections of his work into seven groups dedicated to specific subjects and assigned each group to one day of the week when it should be studied¹⁶). In his explanation of this structure in the introduction to ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹, Lipman listed four specific groups of opponents he intended to tackle in his treatise. These opponents are described primarily in terms of their approach to rabbinic authority and to the interpretation of Jewish scripture and tradition. Thus, alongside Christians and Karaites (a Jewish sect rejecting the authority of the Talmud), Lipman directed his polemical efforts against two groups representing extreme approaches to rationalistic exegesis: literalists, who in their unreflective interpretation of authoritative texts disregard reason altogether, and ›doubters‹ (*meharherim*), that is sceptics who fail to restrain their rationalistic impulses¹⁷).

As I have argued in detail elsewhere, Lipman's emphasis on correct attitude to rationalistic exegesis is rooted in his desire to popularise a rationalistic reinterpretation of

15) Perhaps the best-known example of an Ashkenazic work with this structure is the thirteenth-century anonymous polemic of the same name (›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹). Given the popularity of Lipman's work, the Christian Hebraist Johann Christoph Wagenseil renamed the older treatise ›Sefer Nizaḥon Yashan‹ (›The Old Book of Polemic‹) when he published it in his collection of Jewish anti-Christian polemic ›Tela Ignea Satanae‹. This title has been used ever since. For a modern critical edition, see David BERGER, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizḥon Vetus with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Philadelphia 1979. A similar structure is followed by another thirteenth-century work written by Joseph ben Nathan Official and titled ›Sefer Yosef ha-Meḳane‹ (›The Book of Joseph the Zealot‹). See Sepher Joseph Hamekane, ed. Judah ROSENTHAL, Jerusalem 1970.

16) Lipman instructed his readers to acquaint themselves with arguments against Christianity on Sundays. But several sections not assigned to Sundays also contain anti-Christian polemic. Cf. Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon* (as n. 9), no. 32 (p. 23), 119 (p. 71), 122 (p. 72), 137 (p. 93), 155 (p. 102), 228 (pp. 126–127), 230 (p. 127), 236 (pp. 129–132), 260 (p. 141), 268 (p. 148).

17) Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon* (as n. 9), introduction (unpaginated).

Judaism among his contemporaries¹⁸⁾. Influenced by the writings of the twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Maimonides, Lipman sought to reshape Ashkenazic religious language and practice according to Maimonides's strictly rationalistic understanding of God's unity and incorporeality¹⁹⁾. He chose to respond to what he perceived as the shortcomings of late-medieval Ashkenazic devotion by fashioning Jewish identity as constructed primarily around belief based on carefully delineated theological principles which he listed at the end of the introduction to ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹²⁰⁾. It is adherence to these principles, he claimed, that makes a person Jewish rather than circumcision alone²¹⁾.

Lipman's focus on the rational scrutiny of popular belief and his use of philosophical texts are remarkable in the context of Ashkenazic literature, in which philosophy traditionally played only marginal role²²⁾. His turn to rationalism in ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹ has been interpreted by some scholars as an attempt to impress a younger generation of Jews disillusioned by traditional Judaism and attracted to an intellectually superior Christian culture, or as a rhetorical strategy devised to demonstrate polemical competence to his readers²³⁾. But the desire to integrate philosophical ideas into Ashkenazic religious discourse also permeates Lipman's other writings and is by no means particular to ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹. Moreover, while focusing on the correct approach to reason and its application in his polemic against the literalists and ›doubters‹, rational arguments represent only one of several strategies employed against Christianity in ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹.

When it comes to Christianity, Lipman's polemical *modus operandi* consists mostly of contextual refutation of Christological interpretation of the Biblical verse under discussion²⁴⁾. He often shows awareness of earlier Ashkenazic polemical texts without mentioning them by name, but he usually prefers to bring forward his own exegetical argu-

18) Milan ŽONCA, 'The »Imagined Communities« of Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen: Heresy and Communal Boundaries in Sefer Nizzahon', in: *The Jews of Europe Around 1400: Disruption, Crisis, and Resilience*, ed. Christoph CLUSE/Lukas CLEMENS, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 119–143.

19) Cf. KAUFMANN, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen (as n. 10), p. 182; ŽONCA, 'The »Imagined Communities«' (as n. 18), p. 130.

20) The list is very similar, but not completely identical, to the one formulated by Maimonides. For a comparison of these two lists, see TALMAGE, *Sefer Ha-Niṣṣaḥon* (as n. 9), pp. 335–337.

21) Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon* (as n. 9), no. 21 (p. 19); cf. ŽONCA, 'The »Imagined Communities«' (as n. 18), pp. 137–138.

22) See Daniel J. LASKER, 'Jewish Philosophical Polemics in Ashkenaz', in: *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews*, ed. Ora LIMOR/Guy G. STROUMSA, Tübingen 1996, pp. 195–213; BERGER, 'Polemic' (as n. 6), pp. 30–31.

23) Ora LIMOR/Israel Jacob YUVAL, 'Skepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Doubters in ›Sefer Ha-Niẓaḥon‹', in: *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison COUDERT/Jeffrey S. SHOULSON, Philadelphia 2004, pp. 159–180 (at pp. 173–175); Tamás VISI, 'The Emergence of Philosophy in Ashkenazic Contexts: The Case of Czech Lands in the Early Fifteenth Century', in: *Jb. des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 8 (2009), pp. 213–243 (at pp. 231–232).

24) TALMAGE, *Sefer Ha-Niṣṣaḥon* (as n. 9), pp. 338–342.

ments²⁵). Occasionally, he chooses a more thorough treatment, combining different polemical strategies. Thus, for example, in his lengthy commentary on Gen. 2,17 (»[A]s for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die«)²⁶, Lipman elucidates step by step how the Christian belief that the souls of the righteous could not enter Paradise in consequence of Adam's sin before Jesus's coming is contradicted by »the Bible, rational knowledge (*muškal*), [the laws of] nature (*teva*)', their own [Christian] books as well as speculation (*sevara*)«²⁷. In his arguments from reason and nature, however, Lipman does not go into detail and avoids overly technical philosophical language; instead, he focuses on his attempts to reduce Christian claims *ad absurdum* and brings forward playful and ribald counterarguments that are clearly chosen for their rhetorical effect rather than intellectual appeal²⁸.

Lipman's rationalistic attitude is, therefore, better understood as part of a broader trend among certain scholars, including Lipman's close friends and collaborators, which involved close interaction with Jewish philosophical and Kabbalistic texts that had been ignored so far²⁹. This trend was probably rooted in several factors, most notably contacts with Jews from other cultural domains, the decline of confidence in the Ashkenazic rabbinic tradition after the Black Death, and the institutionalization of the rabbinic office at the end of the fourteenth century, which opened alternative educational trajectories for

25) Thus, for example, Lipman's discussion of verses Gen. 48,14 (no. 45, p. 27) and Exod. 15,25 (no. 56, p. 35) is almost identical to the treatment of these passages in »Sefer Nizahon Yashan«, see BERGER, The Jewish-Christian Debate (as n. 15), no. 27 (p. 20; pp. 59–60*) and no. 36 (p. 25; pp. 65*). Lipman's discussion of Deut. 6,4 (no. 128, p. 83) also incorporates material from »Sefer Nizahon Yashan« (ibid., no. 55, p. 37, p. 78*), but is significantly longer. Lipman's commentary on Gen. 37,35 (no. 39, p. 25) seems to employ arguments taken from »Sefer Yosef ha-Mekane« (as n. 15), no. 19 (pp. 42–43).

26) Christian exegetes commonly understood the *figura etymologica* present in the verse (*mot tamut* in the Hebrew original, *morte morieris* in the Vulgate) as a reference to two types of death – physical and spiritual. This interpretation is found in the Glossa ordinaria: *Morte morieris. Duplex mors significatur: animae, Domino discedente, qui est ejus vita; vel corporis, quam in fine vitae accepit*. MIGNE PL 113, col. 89.

27) Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, Sefer ha-Nizahon, no. 8 (pp. 10–14); cf. Ms. Hamburg (as n. 9), fols. 9v–11v.

28) Lipman claims that omnipotent God could have devised a more dignified way of redeeming humanity than dying on the cross and he could have certainly made Christ's virgin birth irrefutable, if he were born from Mary's mouth or through her ear or if she bore him at the age of two or three. Similarly, he claimed, it would have been more appropriate if the salvation came to the world through the serpent, who was the original cause of Adam's sin, or through man, who bore greater guilt for it than the woman. See ibid., pp. 12–13.

29) This trend was described in detail in Ephraim KUPFER, Concerning the Cultural Image of Ashkenazic Jewry and its Sages in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries (in Hebrew), in: Tarbiz 42 (1973), pp. 113–147. See also Israel Jacob YUVAL, Kabbalisten, Ketzer und Polemiker: Das kulturelle Umfeld des Sefer ha-Nizachon, in: Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism, ed. Karl Erich GRÖZINGER/Joseph DAN, Berlin/New York 1995, pp. 155–171.

those scholars who did not attain rabbinic ordination³⁰⁾. While interest in philosophy remained a marginal phenomenon as far as contemporary rabbinic authorities were concerned, it animated attempts to integrate systematic reflection of Jewish theological principles into Ashkenazic religious practice which stirred debate in wider circles of late medieval scholars. This can be illustrated by the example of Lipman's colleague and fellow member of the rabbinic court in Prague, Avigdor Kara, who composed liturgical poems that list the articles of faith in rhymed form, both in Hebrew and in the vernacular, to be recited during synagogue liturgy³¹⁾. This practice did not remain uncontested – Jacob Mölin of Mainz, one of the leading Jewish authorities of the early fifteenth century, criticised the incorporation of these articles of faith into synagogue liturgy, claiming that they misled people into thinking that their mindful recitation replaces actual practice of ritual commandments³²⁾.

Lipman's polemical project, therefore, is shaped by contemporary Jewish debates and internal challenges as much as by those posed by Christianity. In fact, these two levels seem to complement each other: Lipman's desire to promote a systematic treatment of Jewish theological principles represents an attempt to realign Ashkenazic identity with the intellectual trends described above precisely at a time when Christian society was concerned with religious identities and beliefs³³⁾. Given that Lipman's understanding of Judaism reflects contemporary intellectual currents in Ashkenazic Jewry, we may also ask whether his attitude to Christianity draws on similar interaction with the religious discourses of the majority culture.

30) For a detailed discussion of these factors, see Tamás VISI, *Plague, Persecution, and Philosophy: Avigdor Kara and the Consequences of the Black Death*, in: *Intricate Interfaith Networks in the Middle Ages: Quotidian Jewish-Christian Contacts*, ed. Ephraim SHOHAM-STEINER, Turnhout 2016, pp. 85–117.

31) See Ruth GLADSTEIN, *Eschatological Trends in Bohemian Jewry During the Hussite Period*, in: *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves*, ed. Ann WILLIAMS, Harlow 1980, pp. 241–256 (pp. 244–245); Frank (Ephraim) TALMAGE, *Angels, Anthems, and Anathemas: Aspects of Popular Religion in Fourteenth-Century Bohemian Judaism*, in: *Jewish History* 6, no. 1/2 (1992), pp. 13–20 (at pp. 15–17).

32) »The rhymes and poems that are written in vernacular on the unity of God and the Thirteen Principles [of Maimonides] – would that they were not written! For most of the ignorant believe that all of the commandments depend on this, and they abandon the practice of various positive and negative commandments [...] and they believe that they fulfil their obligation by saying those rhymes with mental concentration.« Jacob Mölin, *Sefer Maharil: minhagim*, ed. Shlomo J. SPITZER, Jerusalem 1989, Liḳuṭim, no. 59.

33) ŽONCA, *The »Imagined Communities«* (as n. 18), pp. 133–138.

II. POLEMIC AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Lipman's willingness to communicate with contemporary Christian culture is visible throughout *Sefer ha-Nizahon*. Although most of his knowledge of Christian exegesis seems to have been taken from earlier Jewish polemical texts³⁴, the contents of several sections suggest that Lipman was not only acquainted with Christian liturgical practices, but also with the liturgical texts that accompanied them. This is visible in Lipman's commentary on Ps. 45³⁵. Whereas earlier Jewish polemical works focus on tackling the Christological exegesis of this psalm prevalent in the commentaries of the Church Fathers, Lipman claims that the Christians interpret verses 3 and 11 as a reference to Mary. This exegesis probably reflects the widespread liturgical use of these passages, which appeared in different chants for Marian feasts and feasts of virgin saints³⁶. Similarly, in a different section, Lipman mentions the custom popular in German lands of the *Palmesel*, a wheeled sculpture of Christ riding a donkey, used in the procession on Palm Sunday³⁷: » »Build up, build up the highway, remove the rocks! Raise an ensign over the peoples! [...] Announce to Fair Zion, Your Deliverer is coming! [...] And they shall be called The Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord.« (Isai. 62,10–12) Christians err [in their interpretation of] this verse when they claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the ensign of the nations and that he saved them and redeemed them. Similarly, [they are also mistaken regarding] the adjacent section: »Who is this coming from Edom, in crimsoned garments [...] Why is your clothing so red? [Isai. 63,1–2]«. They read it seven days before Easter when they take out the statue of Jesus and imagine that his clothes were reddened with blood because he was killed«³⁸.

Here, too, Lipman refers to liturgical texts associated with the ritual. Isaiah's prophecies were a standard part of the scriptural repertoire during Passiontide and the passage from

34) BERGER, *The Jewish-Christian Debate* (as n. 15), p. 279; YUVAL/LIMOR, *Skepticism* (as n. 23), p. 174.

35) Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizahon* (as n. 9), no. 277 (pp. 151–152). Cf. Ms. Hamburg (as n. 9), fol. 67v.

36) *Diffusa est gratia in labiis tuis: propterea benedixit te Deus in aeternum. [...] Audi filia et vide et inclina aurem tuam et obliviscere populum tuum et domum patris tui*. Ps. 45,3.11. See Susan BOYNTON, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, in: *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages: Production, Reception, and Performance in Western Christianity*, ed. Susan BOYNTON/Diane J. REILLY, New York 2011, pp. 10–33 (at pp. 20–21).

37) On the custom, see Max HARRIS, *Interpreting the Role of Christ and His Donkey: The Palmesel as Actor in the Processional Theatre of Palm Sunday*, in: *European Medieval Drama* 16 (2012), pp. 1–17.

38) גם בזה טעו הנצרי' לומר שהנצרי נס לעמי' וישעם וגואלם. כן הפרשה הסמוכה לזה דכת' מי זה בא מאדום חמוץ בגדי' וגו' מדוע אדום ללבושך קורא' ביום ז' קוד' כסח כשמוצאין הפסל דמות הנצרי ומדמין לומ' שמחמת שנהרג הנצרי נצבעו בגדיו בדם.

Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizahon* (as n. 9), no. 240, p. 134. Cf. Ms. Hamburg (as n. 9), fol. 61v.

Isai. 63 was included among the liturgical readings on Wednesday of the Holy Week³⁹⁾. It could, however, also be incorporated into versets and antiphons sung during the procession on Palm Sunday⁴⁰⁾. Lipman's treatment of these passages suggests that he was sensitive to the role of liturgy in shaping Christian exegesis and to the constant interaction between text and ritual action in Christian religious practice.

III. LIPMAN'S DISPUTATION WITH THE CONVERT PETER

Lipman's interaction with contemporary Christianity also had a personal dimension: in ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹ he lists several occasions on which he engaged in polemical encounters with Christian clerics. He recounts several debates with the Franciscan provincial and theologian Marquard of Lindau (d. 1392)⁴¹⁾, as well as a discussion about the merits of the Second Temple with an anonymous priest who employed arguments that seem to be borrowed from the ›Dialogue against the Jews‹ by Petrus Alfonsi⁴²⁾. But to further illustrate Lipman's awareness of the surrounding religious landscape of late medieval Christianity, I will examine the episode recorded as an appendix to ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹. There, Lipman describes a disputation he had with a Jewish convert to Christianity, Peter,

39) Thomas H. BESTUL, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society*, Philadelphia 1996, pp. 28–29.

40) Cf. Eyal POLEG, *Approaching the Bible in Medieval England*, Manchester 2013, pp. 27–30.

41) See Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon* (as n. 9), no. 179 (p. 107), no. 225 (pp. 123–124), no. 290 (pp. 159–160). Lipman's Christian interlocutor is described only as the »head priest of Lindau«. For his identification with Marquard, see YUVAL/LIMOR, *Skepticism* (as n. 23), p. 175; Stephen MOSSMAN, *Marquard von Lindau and the Challenges of Religious Life in Late Medieval Germany: The Passion, the Eucharist, the Virgin Mary*, Oxford 2010, pp. 16–18.

42) Lipman introduced a polemical question put to him by a »certain priest« in his commentary on Agg. 2,9 (»The glory of this latter House shall be greater than that of the former one, said the Lord of Hosts«). See *Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon* (as n. 9), no. 260, pp. 141–143. The priest asked what could have been the merit attributed by the prophet to the Second Temple when it would seem that it was in fact inferior to the First Temple, as it lacked certain liturgical paraphernalia present in the First Temple. In his view, the glory mentioned by Haggai must refer to the birth of Jesus Christ at the time of the Second Temple. The same issue is discussed at the end of the ninth titulus of Alfonsi's ›Dialogue‹. Cf. Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus*, vol. 1. *Kritische Edition mit deutscher Übersetzung*, ed. Carmen CARDELLE DE HARTMANN/Darko SENEKOVIC/Thomas ZIEGLER, trans. Peter STOTZ, Firenze 2018, pp. 318–321. While both texts use similar formulations, the debate in ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹ is much longer and more elaborate. Like Moses, Alfonsi's Jewish counterpart in the ›Dialogue‹, Lipman first claimed that the Second Temple was active for ten more years than the First Temple. But while Alfonsi merely dismissed this counterargument with one sentence, the Christian priest in ›Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon‹ tried to disprove it and launched a lengthy discussion with Lipman about the correct chronology of both Temples.

also known by his Jewish name Pesah⁴³). According to the narrative, the Jews were »arrested [on suspicion of] heresy« (*nitpasnu le-minut*) as a result of the charges brought forward by the convert, and Lipman had to defend Judaism publicly »to appease the nations«. The arrest allegedly occurred in August 1399 and, despite Lipman's efforts, 77 Jews were murdered and an additional three burned at the stake one year later.

Peter's allegations, as summarised in ›Sefer ha-Nizahon‹, revolved around two main subjects. He listed offensive references to Christianity and Christians that the Jews allegedly incorporated into their liturgical prayers (in particular ›'Aleinu le-shabeaḥ‹ and ›'Amida‹). He further claimed that certain Jewish rituals also have anti-Christian meaning and mock the Eucharist. According to Lipman, Peter presented at least some of these accusations in writing, in the form of an incriminating list of insults written »in the name of the Jews«. Lipman's response to Peter's accusations attests to his polemical ingeniousness. As we shall see, he not only offered alternative interpretations of the problematic expressions, but also appropriated motifs from contemporary Christian theological debates and employed them to boost the effectiveness of his polemical argument.

Unfortunately, the circumstances of Lipman's encounter with Peter remain disputed. Apart from the date, Lipman did not provide any specific information about the incident. Given Lipman's connection to Prague, it has often been assumed that the trial took place there. There are, however, no records of anti-Jewish violence in Prague at the turn of the century, and Lipman's narrative does not suggest an isolated outburst of popular violence such as the one that occurred there during Easter 1389⁴⁴). Although inquisitorial investigations of Waldensian heresy are documented in Prague towards the end of the fourteenth century, there are no indications of similar proceedings involving the Jewish community⁴⁵). Heinrich Graetz and more recently Israel Yuval and Ora Limor have connected the unfortunate outcome of the debate with the deposition of the Bohemian King Wenceslas IV from the imperial throne in August 1400⁴⁶). Lipman's argument in the debate that the Jewish prayer for the destruction of the »kingdom of evil« in the ›'Amidah‹ prayer refers only to those who dethrone »upright kings and cause damage in

43) Yom Ṭov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizahon* (as n. 9), no. 347–354 (pp. 191–195). For a summary, see KAUFMANN, *Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen* (as n. 10), pp. 21–25.

44) See Miri RUBIN, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*, New Haven/London 1999, pp. 135–140; Milan ŽONCA, »...And Order was upset«: Easter, the Eucharist, and the Jews of Prague, 1389, in: *The Medieval Roots of Antisemitism: Continuities and Discontinuities from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, ed. Jonathan ADAMS/Cordelia HEß, New York/London 2018, pp. 287–305.

45) Ivan HLAVÁČEK, *Zur böhmischen Inquisition und Häresiebekämpfung um das Jahr 1400*, in: *Häresie und vorzeitige Reformation im Spätmittelalter*, ed. František ŠMAHEL/Elisabeth MÜLLER-LUCKNER, München 1995, pp. 109–131.

46) Heinrich GRAETZ, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, 2nd edition, Leipzig 1875, vol. 7, p. 71; LIMOR/YUVAL, *Skepticism and Conversion* (as n. 23), pp. 170–172.

their kingdoms and lands« could indeed be interpreted as a veiled reference to contemporary political turbulence⁴⁷⁾. I suggest, however, that the debate could also be seen as a part of the proceedings following a host desecration accusation and that it is more likely to have happened in a different location⁴⁸⁾.

The precise dating of the event is crucial to its interpretation. According to Hackspan's edition of >Sefer ha-Nizahon<, the initial arrest took place on the fourth day of Elul 5159, that is, on 6 August 1399⁴⁹⁾. Unfortunately, the manuscript used by Hackspan contained numerous errors. As already noted by Wagenseil, a large number of manuscript copies of >Sefer ha-Nizahon< indicate a different date for the arrest – the fourteenth day of Elul, that is, 16 August⁵⁰⁾. This date would fit an event that is described by later writers as occurring in the city of Poznań in 1399⁵¹⁾. The Polish historian Jan Długosz, writing in the second half of the fifteenth century, recounted that around the Feast of the Assumption (15 August), a Christian woman stole a host from the local Dominican church and sold it to the Jews. The host was later found in a field just outside the city walls and caused many miracles⁵²⁾. A miraculous host is mentioned in papal bulls of indulgence issued in 1400 and

47) Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizahon* (as n. 9), no. 448 (p. 193); cf. Ms. Hamburg (as n. 9), fol. 83rv.

48) This possibility has been raised earlier by YUVAL, *Two Nations* (as n. 7), pp. 132–133, n. 111; 232–233.

49) Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizahon* (as n. 9), p. 191.

50) Johann Christoph WAGENSEIL, *Correctiones Lipmannianae*, in: ID., *Sota, Hoc est: Liber Mischnicus De Uxore Adulterii Suspecta*, Altdorf 1674, p. 79. I have examined digital copies of thirteen fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts of >Sefer ha-Nizahon< containing the description of the debate, including the oldest dated manuscript (Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 76, dated 1421). Eight of these manuscripts indicate 14th Elul as the date of the event: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 76, fol. 82v; Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. ebr. 559, fol. 112v; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ms. Cod. hebr. 107, fol. 201r; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ms. Cod. hebr. 423, fol. 128v; Prague, Jewish Museum, Ms. 143, fol. [87v]; Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg, Ms. 3952, p. 240 (dated 1518); Frankfurt, Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Ms. hebr. oct. 175, fol. 94r (this manuscript was probably copied from Hamburg, Cod. hebr. 76); Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. B. H. qu. 33, fol. 153r. 4th Elul appears in three manuscripts: Frankfurt, Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Ms. hebr. oct. 179, fol. 142r; London, British Library, Harley Ms. 5528, fol. 152r; Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 138, fol. 131v. Two manuscripts contain different dates altogether: 10th Elul [= 12th August] (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. héb. 735, fol. 101v, dated 1459); 24th Elul [= 26th August] (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. héb. 734, fol. 90v).

51) For a summary of the events, see Joseph PERLES, *Geschichte der Juden in Posen*, Breslau 1865, p. 8; Józef ŁUKASZEWICZ, *Obraz historyczno-statystyczny miasta Poznania w dawniejszych czasach*, Poznań 1838, vol. 1, p. 72, n. 2.

52) *Die Veneris quindecima Augusti, mulier quaedam de Posnania, procurata, in monasterio fratrum Predicatorum Posnania diuinissimo Eucharistiae Sacramento, illud ex ore sustulit, Iudaeis Posnaniae commorantibus venditura. Quod in pratis ciuitatis Posnaniensis repertum, magna mortalibus beneficia in loco inuentionis praestare coepit. Cuius rei deuotione Wladislaus Poloniae Rex motus, in eodem loco fratrum*

1403 and in royal privilege given in 1406 to the Carmelite Corpus Christi convent built on the site of the finding, although these documents contain no reference to the Jews and their role in the discovery of the host⁵³). Later versions of the story nevertheless confidently attribute the desecration to the Jews and claim that, as a punishment, the engineers of the crime were slowly burned at the stake with wild dogs tied to their legs⁵⁴).

Although the relations between these literary representations and the historical event are complex and intertwined, judging from other medieval host desecration narratives, we may posit that a discovery of a miraculous host may have sparked accusations and perhaps even physical attacks against the Jewish population of Poznań. The imprisonment and the debate described by Lipman might then be read as forming part of an inquiry into Jewish participation in the alleged desecration⁵⁵). The assumption that the narrative refers to an accusation of this kind is also supported by the arguments used by Peter, as summarised by Lipman. Although polemical arguments against the Eucharist play only a tangential role in the body of >Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon<, this key element of late medieval Christian piety was at the centre of the debate as described at the end of Lipman's treatise. According to Lipman's narrative, Peter presented several arguments to prove Jewish hatred of Christians and Christianity, and the Eucharist in particular⁵⁶). He mentioned derogatory terms used

Carmelitarum erigit coenobium, sub titulo Corpus Christi. Jan Długosz, *Historiae polonicae libri XII*, 2 vols, Leipzig 1711, vol. 2, p. 165.

53) See *Kodeks Dyplomatyczny Wielkopolski*, 11 vols, Poznań 1877–1999, v (1908), nos. 91, 167. Cf. RUBIN, *Gentile Tales* (as n. 44), p. 91.

54) The story about the desecration was preserved in sermon manuals from the last quarter of the fifteenth century and in a handwritten copy from the convent of canons regular in Trzemeszno. This text was used for the homily on the Blessed Sacrament. See James John BOYCE, *Carmelite Liturgy and Spiritual Identity: The Choir Books of Kraków*, Turnhout 2008, p. 221. The following description of the burning of the Jews is found in a much later (and more elaborate) narrative of the desecration and subsequent miracles performed by the three [!] hosts involved: *Alligati igitur ad palum cathenis ferreis constricti, vna cum impia muliere, quae tamen de facto dolens, in inopiam suam, & Hebraeorum persuasiones, culpam conferebat, subiecto igne sensim subministrato, affabantur: vtq[ue] gravius fieret supplicium, canes robusti ad pedes eorum ferreis vinculis alligati, cum ignis ardore[m] perferre non possent, membra illorum crudelissimis morsibus, dum deficerent, dilaniabant.*

See Thomas TRETER, *Sacratissimi Corporis Christi Historia et Miracula: Quae in Ecclesia Posnaniensi Ordinini S. Martae Carmelitarum Divina bonitas operatur*, Braunsberg 1609, fols. e2v–e3r. For a song sung about the desecration as late as 1926, see Magda TETER, *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation*, Cambridge (MA) 2011, pp. 89–90.

55) It has already been noted that the Jews of Poznań disappear from the town books in 1399–1401. See Rodgero PRÜMERS, *Der Hostiendiebstahl zu Posen im Jahre 1399*, in: *Zeitschrift der historischen Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen* 20 (1905), pp. 293–317 (at p. 298). It is also noteworthy that Waldensian heretics were active in the diocese of Poznań at the turn of the fifteenth century. See Reima VÄLIMÄKI, *Bishops and the Inquisition of Heresy in Late Medieval Germany*, in: *Dominus Episcopus: Medieval Bishops between Diocese and Court*, ed. Anthony John LAPPIN/Elena BALZAMO, Stockholm 2018, pp. 186–206 (at p. 198).

56) Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon* (as n. 9), no. 349–351 (pp. 193–194).

know that they are only a likeness and think that they have some substance of your divinity?> He was forced to acknowledge this. I said: >You have now acknowledged everything we say in > 'Aleinu le-shabeah'.> For we do not simply say >who has not made us like the nations<, rather we say: >who has not made us like the nations of the lands nor placed us like the families of the earth.< These are the villagers that do not dwell in the cities but [live] on the land without fortifications. And they are the families that work the land. These do not know anything and think that those images are your Godhead. And this is a great evil, as it is said in the book of Isaiah: >And [they] pray to a god who cannot save.< [Isai. 45,20] These images are the source of this error, as I have just explained. Therefore, the Torah warned us in the Decalogue: >You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness.< [Exod. 20,4] Therefore, we say this correctly, as written in the Torah and the prophets.<<⁶¹⁾

Here, Lipman tried to reinterpret a polemical passage in a Jewish liturgical text as a criticism not of Christian religion *per se*, but rather of a specific type of Christian religious abuse, one that was perceived as a problematic superstition by many Christians authorities. By doing this, he diverted the polemical attack from Jewish anti-Christian rhetoric towards an issue that was at the same time the staple of Jewish-Christian polemic and increasingly debated in the late-medieval Bohemian theological discourse, namely the veneration of images.

Matter, be it in the form of images, liturgical objects, or relics of saints, had a profound influence on late medieval spirituality. Debates about its role in worship and its ambivalent relationship to the divine were an important component of late medieval theological discourse⁶²⁾. In Bohemia, the cult of images and relics that flourished during the reign of Charles IV was strongly critiqued by reform preachers from the 1380s onwards⁶³⁾. Among the first Bohemian preachers to target the veneration of images was Lipman's contem-

ואען ואומר אי אתה מודה שאותם צורות של עץ ואבן שאתם משתחוין להם שאינכם עושים אותו רק לדימיון ואין ממש בהם ואי אתה מודה שיש נשים וקטני וכפריי שאינם יודעים שהם דימיון וסבורי שיש בהם ממש האלוה שלכם והוצרך לומר הן. אמרתי הלא כבר הודיתם כל מה שאנחנו אומריי בעלינו לשבח שהרי אין אנו אומריי סתמא שלא עשאנו כגויי אלא אנחנו אומריי שלא עשאנו כגוי הארצות ולא שמנו כמשפחו האדמי ואילו הן כפריי שאינם דרים בעיירות אלא על פני הארץ בלי חומה והמה משפחו שעובדי האדמי ואותם אינם יודעי מאומי רק סבורי שאותן צורות אלהות שלכם המה. וזהו רעה רבה כמו שאמי ישעיהו ומשתחוין אל אל לא יושיע ואותם הצורות גורמי הטעות שפי' לכן הזהיר התור' בי הדברוי לא תעש' לך פסל שאמי ישעיהו ומשתחוין אל אל לא יושיע ואותם הצורות גורמי הטעות שפי' לכן הזהיר התור' בי הדברוי לא תעש' לך פסל (Ms. Hamburg (as n. 9), fols 82v–83r; cf. Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizahon* (as n. 9), no. 447 (pp. 191–192).

62) See, for instance, Caroline WALKER BYNUM, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, New York 2010, *passim*.

63) Jana BĚLOHLÁVKOVÁ, *Die Ansichten über Bilder im Werk der tschechischen Reformprediger*, in: *Studie o rukopisech*, 29 (1992), 53–64; Pavel KALINA, *Cordium penetrativa. An Essay on Iconoclasm and Image Worship around the Year 1400*, in: *Umění* 43 (1995), 247–257; Milena BARTLOVÁ, *Understanding Hussite Iconoclasm*, in: *Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice* 7 (2009), 115–126. On reform preaching in Prague, see František ŠMAHEL, *Die Hussitische Revolution*, trans. Thomas KRZENCK, ed. Alexander PATSCHOVSKY, 3 vols, Hannover 2002, vol. 2, pp. 717–787.

porary, Matěj (Matthias) of Janov, a canon of the cathedral chapter in Prague, who was also one of the first champions of heightened Eucharistic devotion⁶⁴). Matěj is often considered an ideological forefather of the Bohemian reformation and his critique of image worship had a profound influence on later Hussite theologians, especially Mikuláš (Nicholas) of Dresden and Jakoubek of Stříbro (Jakobellus von Mies).

Matěj of Janov dealt with the abuses associated with the worship of statues and images in popular devotion in the sixth distinction of Book Five of his monumental work ›Regulae veteris et novi testamenti‹, written between 1387 and 1393⁶⁵). In this work, Matěj presented an apocalyptic interpretation of the vices widespread in contemporary Church – clerical corruption, avarice, and devotional laxity are signs of the coming of the Antichrist – and he proposed an appropriate remedy, namely heightened eucharistic devotion, including frequent lay communion. The sixth distinction of Book Five is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, Matěj frames the problem of the appropriate form of image veneration in terms of eucharistic devotion. He argues that anything which distracts the faithful from appropriate and full adoration of the sacrament should be removed from the church. In the second chapter he criticises the cult of images and statues and claims that it can in fact be used by the Antichrist to threaten appropriate piety. He even claims that the wonders produced by miraculous images could be the work of the Devil. In the third chapter, Matěj criticises priestly avarice and pride that supports the cult of images. Finally, in the last chapter, Matěj reiterates his argument that an excessive cult of statues and images leads the faithful away from the worship of the Eucharist.

Restating the classical Christian doctrine formulated already by Pope Gregory the Great, Matěj claimed that as long as people consider images and statues as nothing more than wood or stone, a remembrance of Christ and the saints, they are used appropriately. But as soon as the »vulgar people« begin to attribute to them singular virtues and greater veneration, they become dangerous for simple minds, »who are attracted exclusively and forcefully by sumptuous and sensuous things, according to their excessive ignorance«⁶⁶). To provide an example, Matěj referred to a superstitious belief that certain ancient images contain some sort of divine presence: »And this is the source of the error, which is believed

64) On Matěj of Janov, see Vilém HEROLD, *The Spiritual Background of the Czech Reformation: Precursors of Jan Hus*, in: *A Companion to Jan Hus*, ed. František ŠMAHEL, Leiden 2015, pp. 69–95 (at pp. 81–89); Vlastimil KYBAL, *M. Matěj z Janova: Jeho život, spisy a učení*, Praha 1905.

65) *Matthiae de Janov dicti Magistri Parisiensis Regularum veteris et novi Testamenti Liber V De corpore Cristi*, ed. Jana NECHUTOVÁ/Helena KRMÍČKOVÁ, München 1993.

66) *Neque eciam iste statue tales in templis Dei sunt periculose, quamdiu quod habentur a populo tamquam signa de ligno vel lapide simpliciter et memoriale Cristi et sanctorum eius et nichil amplius, quia tunc habentur in veritate, sicut debent haberi et fit earum bonus usus. Sed quam cito tales statue alique in templo incipiunt fieri in maiori reverencia et stupore apud vulgus quam alie similes et ponitur in ipsis singularis virtus et cultus amplior, tam cito excedunt sui status mensuram et declinantur in partem abhominacionis in templo Domini et per consequens incipit tunc esse periculum simplicibus animabus, que solum et maxime ducuntur rebus splendidis et sensibilibus, accomodis sue nimie ruditati.* Matthias of Janov, *De corpore Cristi* (as n. 65), p. 92.

and disseminated by some people, that an image of Christ or such like contains a certain power as soon as it reaches the age of thirty years, and that divinity is present in it [emphasis M. Ž.]. Then certain omens and rumours regarding miracles brought about by these images are added to this, signs of such omens and miracles are multiplied, and doubtful memorials appear all around in great number. They draw the people of God neither to the faith in Lord Jesus Christ, nor to charity, nor to hope in Jesus Christ alone, but they attract carnal people and lead them towards alien belief and stupid reverence of such statues, so that they put their love and confidence in them«⁶⁷⁾.

In the light of such abuses sanctioned by the clergy and the theologians, Matěj claimed, it is no wonder that some Jews think that Christians venerate gold and wood, and not God, and turn Christian religion into an object of ridicule: »The above-mentioned proclamations and doctrine, namely that such statues or images are to be venerated by the same kind of worship and adoration as God himself, scandalise the Jews completely needlessly and bring the faith in Christ into derision among them. The Jews laugh and affirm that we Christians have in our temples gods made of wood and stone, venerate them and worship them«⁶⁸⁾.

Scholastic justifications of image worship are in Matěj's view insufficient to challenge the arguments of »deriding Jews or reproaching pagans«, especially if they are aimed at simple Christians⁶⁹⁾. It is not clear, however, to what extent these remarks reflect Matěj's

67) *Inde namque venit error, ut credant quidam et diffament, quod ymago Cristi vel alia huiusmodi, quam cito attingit ad annum XXX^m sue etatis, mox continet aliquam virtutem, et adest ibidem numen; et tunc accedunt ad hoc quedam portenta vel opiniones miraculorum factorum per tales ymages, et multiplicantur ibidem talium portentorum et miraculorum signa et memorialia circumcirca in magna multitudine pendencia et multe alie apparencie, que omnia alliciunt populum Dei non ad fidem domini Iesu, non ad caritatem, non ad spem in solum Cristum Iesum, sed attrahunt et inducunt homines carnales in credulitates quasdam peregrinas et ad stuporem et reverenciam talium statualium et ad dileccionem et confidenciam ad easdem.* Matthias of Janov, *De corpore Cristi* (as n. 65), p. 104.

68) *Predicacio eciam et doctrina supradicta, puta quod statue vel ymages huiusmodi sint eodem cultu et adoracione eadem adorande qua ipse Deus, omnino sine causa scandalizant ludeos et ponunt apud eosdem Cristi fidem in derisum. Dicunt siquidem et affirmant ludei cacinantes, quod nos cristiani deos ligneos et lapideos habeamus in templis nostris et eos adoremus et colamus.* Ibid.

69) *Nam, heu, hodie collegia quedam et multitudo eorum qui se dicunt magistros ecclesie et sapientes, decreta dei in ecclesia posuerunt, quod videlicet statue lignee atque lapidee, argentee et cetera huiusmodi sint a christianis adorande et collende, patulo et expresse sancta scriptura dicente: Non adorabis ea neque coles. [Exod. 20,5] Quod nequaquam ex assercione Thome de Aquino vel aliis doctoribus potest haberi vel defendi. Nam id, quod ipsi ponunt in libris eorum, hoc utique solum disputative et in scolis docuerunt, que non competit coram rudibus determinative dicere in ambone, per hoc parvulos in Christo Ihesu non modice ulnerando, puta suadendo, quod de cetero debeant statuas lapideas et ligneas adorare. Favetur namque per talem doctrinam detraccioni, quam et conviciis contra christianos exaggerant Judei et pagani, affirmantes, quod puta christiani sint cultores statuarum, neque inficiari hoc facile contra Judeum poterit, si illa doctrina, quam modo supradicti divulgant, predicetur. Nam bene sequi videtur: Omnis, qui colit statuas vel adorat, et docet insuper ipsas adorandas, ille iuste dicitur cultor statuarum. Sed secundum istos predictos christianus populus colit et adorat*

awareness of contemporary polemical encounters between Jews and Christians rather than common literary tropes. In contrast, Matěj's sharp criticism of churchmen sanctioning the excesses in image worship is most likely directed at the local ecclesiastical establishment and its opposition to his public preaching. In 1388, the synod of vicars general in Prague defended the worship of images and affirmed the right of the faithful to pray to images and believe in the miracles they perform⁷⁰. In 1389, the synod forced Matěj to revoke his views on image worship and frequent communion and suspended him from preaching and administering the Eucharist outside his parish church in western Bohemia⁷¹. While Matěj explicitly did not recommend the destruction of images, some of his contemporaries were more radical in their stance. Together with Matěj, two other Czech preachers, Jakub of Kaplice and an otherwise unknown Ondřej, were forced to publicly recant their earlier opinions on images. Jakub had preached that relics should not be decorated or worshipped and »nothing would happen if they were thrown into fire or stamped upon«. The records of the investigation into Jacob also suggest that he had verbally abused a statue of the Virgin Mary and even made vulgar gestures in front of it. Such violent rhetoric and bold opposition to images must have been perceived as particularly dangerous, and it is unsurprising that Jacob was suspended from preaching for ten years⁷².

Lipman's criticism of Christian attempts to justify image worship and his references to liturgical abuses, especially among the uneducated Christian population, thus parallel the theological arguments of Bohemian reformers. Some of these emphases are also echoed in the body of >Sefer ha-Niẓaḥon<. Thus, when discussing the Biblical prohibition of images, Lipman claims: »>You shall have no other gods etc., you shall not bow down to them or serve them.< [Exod. 20,3–5] [Verse 20,3] warned us against idolatry, why was it necessary to mention [in verse 20,4]: >You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness?< It is forbidden even if it is not [meant as a representation] of the deity, but merely as a likeness. The Torah said about the production [of images]: >Cursed be anyone who makes a sculptured or molten image, abhorred by the Lord, a craftsman's handiwork< [Deut. 27,15] – so that a person is not misled [by the image] to believe that there is some [divine] substance in it. Similarly, it says: >Be most careful – since you saw no shape when the Lord your God spoke to you etc., not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever< [Deut. 4,15–16]. It is clear that the Lord does

statuas. Igitur christianus populus est cultor et adorator statuarum. Et sic verum erit, quod detrahendo Judei christianis obiciunt, puta dicentes: Vos, christiani, adoratis sculptilia et statuas et per consequens habetis deos ligneos et lapideos. Matthias de Janov, Matěje z Janova mistra pařížského Regulae veteris et novi testamenti, sv. III., ed. Vlastimil KYBAL, Innsbruck 1911, pp. 36–37 (liber III tr. V dist. 5 cap. 10).

70) Jaroslav POLC/Zdeňka HLEDÍKOVÁ, Pražské synody a koncily předhusitské doby, Praha 2002, pp. 243–245.

71) Ibid., pp. 245–247. See also ŠMAHEL, Die Hussitische Revolution (as n. 63), vol. 2, pp. 772–773.

72) POLC/HLEDÍKOVÁ, Pražské synody a koncily (as n. 70), pp. 247–249.

not wish that we make images as an illustration [of his appearance]. Hence there is a reply to the Christians who say that they make forms and images in remembrance⁷³).

Similarly, in a paragraph summarising the discussion Lipman had with Marquard of Lindau, Lipman claims that image worship renders all Christian religious practice void and ineffective. Marquard had asked Lipman why the Jews did not worship God using songs and musical instruments like their forefather King David and even mocked the Christians for doing so. According to Marquard, by doing this they resembled Michal, David's wife, who had criticised him for dancing in an undignified manner⁷⁴. In his reply, Lipman argued that the Jewish reticence to use liturgical music is caused by the reality of their exile outside of the Land of Israel. At the same time, he incorporated another attack on Christian image worship, one that mirrors the terminology used by reform preachers: »It is true that we find it amusing that you place images in front of you and cry out in a great voice, but they do not hear you. For most of you direct [your prayers] towards [the images]. Even those who say that [they venerate the images] only as a likeness and remembrance [are not justified in doing so] because it is a cause of error⁷⁵).

Despite the similarities in vocabulary, I am not suggesting any direct link between Lipman and Matěj of Janov – although it is noteworthy that the sermons of some reform preachers in Prague allegedly attracted members of the Jewish community and Matěj, like his more radical fellow preachers Jakub and Ondřej, preached in the Old Town church of St Nicholas, just outside of the Jewish quarter⁷⁶. But I believe that Lipman was consciously using formulations that echo Christian reform discourse and present Jewish objections to image worship as a legitimate opinion that can be embraced by Christians too. Furthermore, he employed a distinction between educated and uneducated people and their attitudes to images, which was a staple of Christian theories of image veneration.

לא יהיה לך אלהי אחר' וגו' לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם הרי הזהיר על ע"ז ולמה הוצרך עוד לומר לא תעשה לך פסל (73) וכל תמונה אלא בא להזהיר שלא לעשות פסל ותמונה אפי' שלא לשם אלהות אלא לדומיון בעלמ' אסור. ואפי' על העשייה בלבד אמר' תורה ארור האיש אשר יעשה פסל ומסכה תועבת ה' מעשה ידי חרש והטעם שלא יבא אדם לטעות אחריו שיהא ממש בו. וכה"א ונשמרתם מאד לנפשותיכם כי לא ראית' כל תמונה ביום דיבר ה' עמכם וגו' פן תשחיתון ועשית' לך פסל תמונת Ms. Hamburg (as n. 9), fols. 22v–23r; cf. Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizahon* (as n. 9), no. 61 (pp. 38–39).

74) Cf. 2 Sam. 6,14–22.

75) אמת שחוק בעינינו שאתם מעמידים נגדיכם צלמים ואתם קורא' להם בקול גדול ואינם שומע' כי רובכם מכווני' להם. Ms. Hamburg (as n. 9), fols. 51r–v. Cf. Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizahon* (as n. 9), no. 179 (p. 107).

76) Konrad Waldhauser, an Austrian Augustinian who preached in Prague in 1363, claimed that many Jews, both men and women, visited his sermons, »sitting and standing manifestly among Christians«. He explained their presence as a sign of the approaching universal conversion on the eve of the Apocalypse. See *Geschichtsschreiber der hussitischen Bewegung in Böhmen*, Theil II, ed. K[onstantin] HÖFLER, FRA I,6, Vienna 1865, p. 28.

In his rebuttal of Peter, Lipman skilfully shifted the emphasis of the discussion in order to manipulate Christian perceptions of the Jews. He presented the Jewish prayer as taking part in the contemporary debate about the role of images in worship. By embedding his response in the broader context of internal Christian theological debate, Lipman showed his Jewish contemporaries how to effectively suppress the polarity of a polemical situation. He also introduced an element of ambiguity into the antagonistic image of Jewish-Christian relationship suggested by the prayer in question and tried to show that it was not an expression of Jewish emotions of resentment or hatred – but rather an intellectual statement, a sign of an exegetically reinforced unease that his audience could not consider to be distinctively Jewish. Moreover, he constructed an image of Jews as members of the urban polity, to be distinguished from the uneducated village population.

By dissociating the Jews from uneducated villagers, Lipman also challenged contemporary Christian perceptions of them. In medieval parody, Jews were associated with peasants (and *vice versa*) because of their stubbornness. In the fifteenth-century >Peasant Catechism<, a short mock grammar written by a Viennese bachelor Georg Prenperger, peasants are described as »stupid and disgraceful« like Jews⁷⁷). In astrological texts, too, both Jews and peasants were associated with the rule of Saturn⁷⁸). This association was well known to scholars residing in Prague: the astronomer Křišťan of Prachatic mentioned it in one of his replies in 1422⁷⁹). It is not difficult to imagine that such stereotypes flourished in Prague, where both Jewish communal leaders and Christian masters and students strove to present themselves as an intellectual elite. Comparing the well-connected Jewish population of Prague to peasants may have been a way of neutralising their claims to authority and minimising their influence. In contrast, Lipman's argument that the Jews avoid theological errors to which the Christian lower classes often fall prey might bolster the position of Jewish community in the eyes of Christian reformers.

V. CONCLUSION

In his discussion with Peter, Lipman seems to have appropriated and manipulated the emphases of contemporary Christian theological debates to enhance the power of his polemical argument. But his interpretation of >'Aleinu le-shabeaḥ<, one of the core prayers of synagogue service, was also fully congruent with his internal polemical aims:

77) *Rusticus que pars est? Nomen. Quale nomen? Judaicum. Quare? Quia ineptus et turpis est ut Judaeus.* Paul LEHMANN, *Die Parodie im Mittelalter*, 2nd edition, Stuttgart 1963, p. 76; the text is at pp. 197–198.

78) The association between the Jews and Saturn goes back to the Late Antiquity. See Shlomo SELA, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, Leiden 2003, pp. 152–154.

79) Alena HADRAVOVÁ et al., *Replika M. Křišťana z Prachatic k prorocství M. Jana Pařížského* [The Response of Křišťan of Prachatic on the Prophecy of John of Paris], in: *Listy filologické* 123 (2000), pp. 40–51 (at p. 45).

he proposed to his Jewish readers an understanding that underlined the importance of non-anthropomorphic exegesis informed by the basic theological principles he promoted throughout his work. Lipman's arguments against image worship in >Sefer ha-Nizahon< thus illustrate that Jewish literary polemic can operate on different levels. Lipman simultaneously tackles external challenges, articulates, and promotes a particular Jewish self-understanding, and interweaves elements of both Jewish and Christian discourses. This multiplicity of voices is not a constant feature of Lipman's text, but when it does appear, it demonstrates a nuanced and ingenious approach to the genre of literary polemic, one that underscores the inherently intertwined nature of Jewish-Christian polemical discourse.

