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Calvin's Jewish Interlocutor: Christian Hebraism and Anti-Jewish Polemics during the Reformation

The nature of Calvin's tractate *Reponse to questions and objections of a certain Jew* (*Ad quaestiones et obiecta Judaei cuiusdam responsio*) has long been a matter of some dispute among Calvin scholars. The nineteenth-century editors of Calvin's works considered the book to be "meager and weak," no doubt assuming that Calvin was responsible for composing both the questions and answers.[1] In the twentieth century, scholars have been more inclined to see some evidence of an actual dispute between a Jew and a Christian in the book. Most notably Salo Baron suggested that the work reflects an exchange that Josel of Rosheim claimed to have had with a Christian theologian at Frankfurt in 1539. Josel reported that the theologian "attacked him in a violent, angry, and menacing harangue," to which he responded: "You, a learned man, wish to threaten us poor people? God, our Lord, has preserved us from the days of Abraham. He in his grace will doubtless preserve us from you."[2] Baron's identification of the Jewish questioner with Josel and the Christian with Calvin, while incorrect, underscores how important the identity of Calvin's interlocutor is for interpreting this enigmatic work. Since Calvin's *Response* contains his only discussion of Jewish objections to Christianity, it is significant for understanding his opinion of the Jews and Judaism. By determining who wrote the questions we can better discern Calvin's image of the Jews and how seriously he took their objections to Christianity.[3]

1. "... elucubratio satis exilis ac tenuis," Jean Calvin, *Opera quae supersunt omnia* (Braunschweig and Berlin, Schwetschke, 1863–1900; reprint ed.: New York, Johnson Reprint Corp. 1964), v. 9, Introd., p. L. The text of *Ad quaestiones et obiecta Judaei cuiusdam responsio* is printed in: John Calvin, *Opera*, vol. 9, cols. 657-674. Gottfried W. Locher discusses how Calvin scholars have traditionally understood the work in his article, "Calvin spricht zu den Juden," *Theologische Zeitschrift* (Basel) 23 (1967), 180-181. More recently see Mary Potter Engel, "Calvin and the Jews: A Textual Puzzle," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin. Supplementary Issue* 1 (1990), 106-123.

2. Salo Baron, "John Calvin and the Jews," in *The Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday,* 2 vol. (Jerusalem, American Academy of Jewish Research, 1965), p. 156. The article has been reprinted in Baron's *Ancient and Medieval Jewish Literature: Essays by Salo Wittmayer Baron* (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 338-352, and more recently in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict from Late Antiquity to the Reformation*, ed. Jeremy Cohen, Essential Papers on Jewish Studies (New York, New York Univ., 1991), pp. 380-400.

3. Mary Sweetland Laver, for example, thinks that Calvin's *Ad Quaestiones* is of secondary importance in understanding Calvin's view of the Jews. She forcefully argues that he had no "view of Jews

Calvin wrote the book in a question-answer format, allowing his Jewish interlocutor to pose 23 questions and answering each one in turn. As it stands the work is an unfinished torso, lacking introduction, conclusion, or any explicit clue as to when or why it was written. Calvin apparently intended to publish it, since in one passage he turned briefly from polemics to give a short explanation of the phrase "sons of God" as it is used in the Old Testament. He did this, he said, "to instruct the simple," clearly assuming that others would read it.[4] Beza published the unfinished treatise with Calvin's letters after the latter died, which gave rise to speculation that Calvin had been in contact with his Jewish questioner by letter.[5]

Before considering further the provenance of the book, let us turn to its content. Calvin himself chose to answer these questions, whoever first posed them, and they are worth considering for the role they play within this treatise quite apart from their authorship. The interlocutor tried to call elements of Christian belief into question by alleging contradictions in Christian dogma, drawing attention to inconsistencies between the Gospel accounts of Jesus and Jesus the Son of God as understood by Christian theologians, and making sarcastic jibes at a few apparent inconsistencies between biblical teaching and Christian practice.[6] In the first question, for example, he demanded to know how Christians could claim that "Jesus came to cleanse men of sins and lead them out of hell," when in fact he "increased the sin of the Jews who crucified him."[7] The interlocutor argued by implication that Jesus' mission had failed. In question 18 he expressed doubt about Jesus' divinity. When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering be taken from him, he noted the implication that Jesus's will differed from God the Father's. "Therefore," he concluded, "their wills are not alike," raising doubts about Jesus' divinity and his unity with the Father.[8] Finally, (in question no. 12) he asked whether any Christian had faith even the size of a mustard seed.

> It is written that if anyone, has faith in Jesus, even as slight as a grain of mustard, he will be able, by speaking, to move a mountain from its place. But we see that even the holiest of them cannot move anything, however light. And how much less can the masses do? This being the case, they possess no power or dominion by which they might excel in any way, although they believe in him.[9]

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and Jewish religion" apart from his intra-Christian polemical agenda. See "Calvin, Jews, and Intra-Christian Polemics" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1987), pp. 223-224.

4. All quotations from *Ad quaestiones* have been taken from the English translation of the book made by Rabbi Susan Frank, which was included by Laver in her dissertation as an appendix. *Ibid.*, p. 239 (Question 7).

5. Locher, "Calvin," pp. 181-182.

6. Contradictions in Christian theology: Questions 1, 8, 9, 16, 21, 22, 23. Inconsistencies between Son of God and Jesus of the Gospels: Questions 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20. Inconsistencies between biblical teachings and the lives of Christians: Questions 4, 5, 12.

7. Laver, "Calvin," p. 229 (Q. 1).

8. *Ibid.*, p. 254 (Q. 18).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 245 (Q. 12).

Each question assumed the falsity of Christianity, and was delivered in a snide tone which offended Calvin. The questions also reveal that the interlocutor was familiar with both Christian theology and the Gospels themselves.[10] Twenty of the 23 questions allude to either specific passages within the Gospels, usually Matthew, or discuss important themes from them, such as the meaning of the title "Son of God."[11] In fact questions 2–20 appear to follow the order of the Gospel of Matthew, chaps. 5–28.[12]

Calvin did not pose these questions to give an anonymous Jewish spokesman a chance to speak, but rather to refute the charges implicit in each query and to clarify the problems raised by placing them in what he considered a proper theological context. Each answer Calvin gave consists of two parts: first he pointed out that the difficulty raised by the questioner was already present in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. Calvin tried to show that the questioner did not understand his own Scriptures when he objected to similar incongruities in Christianity. Then Calvin provided an answer which took into account the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and Christ's role in bringing both together.[13] So, for example, in response to the view that Jesus' death had the effect of heaping guilt on the Jews instead of resulting in their forgiveness, Calvin asked,

> Answer me this in turn: How can the Law be said to have been given for salvation when in fact it increased transgressions and indictment? For it is clear that the Jews at once violated the covenant of God and greatly provoked God's wrath against themselves by violating the justice of the law.[14]

Then he went on to summarize the traditional Christian position that the prophets had predicted Israel's rejection of the Messiah. He concluded that "God's grace does not always profit men. On the contrary, it sometimes makes things twice as bad, when it is improperly profaned."[15] Strikingly absent from Calvin's answer is any hint that the Jews somehow bore an extra measure of guilt for being "Christ-killers." Although the interlocutor framed his question in these terms, Calvin did not make the slightest allusion to it. In this respect at least Jews were one more group in the host of unbelievers, rather than the victims of a special divine curse. Calvin's response to the question about whether God the Father and Jesus had the same will was more strictly theological. He began by asking how

> God could say that he did not desire the death of a sinner, while at the same time he destined sinners to destruction, saying to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and compassion to those to whom I will show compassion"? For,

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10. Baron, "Calvin," p. 155.

11. The only four questions which do not in some way relate to the Gospels are nos. 1, 4, and 5.

12. Only question 13 is out of sequence. See Appendix.

13. Laver, "Calvin," p. 223.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 229 (Q. 1).

15. *Ibid.*, p. 254 (Q. 1).

> reserving to his own decision every judgment about saving or damning men, he does not show himself giving the spirit of repentance to all.[16]

God could and did have desires in the Old Testament which appeared to be in conflict with each other. Then Calvin went on to explain that Christ, after his incarnation, had not only a human body but human feelings as well. "Therefore he possessed a will distinct from the Father's because he wanted no feature that was proper to human kind to be alien to himself."[17] He concluded that it did not undercut the divinity of Christ to assert that he and God the Father had separate wills.

On the question of faith the size of a mustard seed, Calvin responded with a series of offensive questions of his own which illustrated how men's unfaithfulness can bring certain divine promises to naught:

> It is written of Mount Zion "This is my resting place forever. Here I will dwell since I have chosen it." This emptiness and desolation which has lasted so many centuries, what good is it to him? And tell me, why did he wish that they should wander, miserably scattered around the world, that they should lie prostrate in their ruins, when Isaiah announced that they would be redeemed from Babylonian exile to restore the ruins of the whole world and gather all the dispersed into their body?[18]

Calvin then went on to say that if the Jews had a "grain of wit or sane intelligence they would recognize that the word of Christ in which they hunt for meaninglessness is the very truth." The faith Jesus discusses here is not saving faith, but the "faith with which it was proper for the apostles to embrace the office laid on them, to sanctify with miracles the new teaching of the gospel which had not yet been accepted by the general public." The gift of working miracles was not given indiscriminately even in the first generation of the Christian church. In any case, a lack of faith on the part of Jesus' followers was hardly a reflection on Christ himself.[19]

This third example also shows that Calvin was not engaging in a dispassionate examination of questions raised by a disinterested party. Calvin cheerfully returned insult for insult and made every effort to give back better than he got. Did Calvin create a rather lively straw man, as he did in some of his other polemical books, who would bear the brunt of his rhetoric and be crushed in the end?[20] The offensive nature of the questions attests either to Calvin's willingness to attribute tremendous hostility to a fictive Jewish interlocutor or provides an authentic example of Calvin's apologetic writing in response to unusually searching questions. Despite all that can be gleaned from analyzing the form and content of the book, it remains impervious to interpretation unless the identity of the interlocutor can be established. Fortunately he can be identified, if not by name.

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16. Laver, "Calvin," p. 254 (Q. 18).

17. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 246-247.

20. Francis M. Higman, *The Style of John Calvin in his French Polemical Treatises* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 19.

Calvin's interlocutor was neither one of Calvin's contemporaries nor Calvin himself writing in a different persona, but the author of *Sefer Nizzahon,* which translated means *The Book of Victory*. *Nizzahon* is a Jewish polemical anthology probably written in Germany during the fourteenth century.[21] It had acquired a particularly evil reputation among Christians even before the Reformation began. It was one of only two books that Reuchlin considered worthy of suppression in his famous legal opinion on Jewish books.[22] Reuchlin made this judgment on the basis of first-hand acquaintance with the book. His manuscript copy, which was unfortunately destroyed during the Second World War, contained many ill-tempered marginal responses to some of the more outrageous remarks made by its author.[23]

Despite the book's reputation, or perhaps because of it, a number of Christian Hebraists went to great lengths to acquire their own copies. Sebastian Münster made his own copy of Reuchlin's original between 1511 and 1514, and he printed 65 excerpts from it in the annotations to his Hebrew Latin diglot Bible and his Hebrew-Latin diglot of the Gospel of Matthew.[24] Wolfgang Capito may also have had a copy of the book, probably also copied from Reuchlin's original.[25] Immanuel Tremellius brought his own manuscript of the book from Italy.[26] The anonymous Jewish convert who wrote an apologetic work in Hebrew entitled *The Book of Faith* (*Sefer Amana*) quoted at some length from *Nizzahon* in his rebuttal of traditional Jewish objections to Christianity. Paul Fagius translated *The Book of Faith* into Latin and printed both the translation and Hebrew original in 1542.[27] *Nizzahon* was thus available to

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21. David Berger, Introd., *The Jewish Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages. A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus,* ed. and trans. David Berger, Judaica Texts and Translations, no. 4 (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1979), p. 35.

22. Johann Reuchlin, *Augenspiegel*, Quellen zur Geschichte des Humanismus und der Reformation in Faksimile-Ausgaben, no. 5 (Tübingen, Thomas Anselm, 1511; reprint ed. Munich, Johann Froben, n.d.), f. 15 a.

23. Karl Preisedanz, "Eine neue Handschrift aus Johann Reuchlins Bibliothek," *Neue Heidelberger Jahrbücher* (1936), 110.

24. *En Tibi Lector Hebraica Biblia Latina Planeque Nova,* trans. Sebastian Münster (Basel, Henric-Petri, 1534-1535; reprinted 1546); *Evangelium Secundum Matthaeum in Lingua Hebraica cum versione latina,* trans. Sebastian Münster (Basel, Henric-Petri, 1537). Karl Heinz Burmeister, *Sebastian Münster. Versuch eines biographischen Gesamtbildes,* Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft, Bd. 91 (Basel, Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1963), p. 26. Berger, *Debate*, p. 377. Berger overlooked Münster's quotations in his *Messias Christianorum et Iudaeorum* (Basel, Henric-Petri, 1539). See William Horbury, Review of *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages. Journal of Theological Studies,* 34 (1983), 332-333.

25. Münster remarked in the introduction to his Latin translation of Moses Kimhi: "Verentes nimirum impia quorundam suorum Rabbinorum scripta Christianis innotescere: id quod iam aliqui dolentes sciunt factum, quibus constat & mihi & D. Capitoni esse librum *Sefer Nizzahon* iniurijs plenum, atque Christi nostri blasphemijs per totum scatentem," *Grammatica Rabbi Mosche Kimhi* (Basel, Andreas Cratander, 1531), f. a2 v°.

26. William Horbury, "The Basle Nizzahon," *Journal of Theological Studies,* n.s. 34 (1983), 502.

27. Moritz Steinschneider first noted the quotations from *Sefer Nizzahon* in *Sefer Amana* in "Le Livre de la Foi," *Revue des études juives,* 5 (1882), 57-67. Jerome Friedman discusses Fagius's use of *The Book of Faith* in *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth Century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia* (Athens, OH, Ohio Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 244-250.

some Christian Hebraists in its entirety, and excerpts of it were available to a much wider reading public.

Although Calvin may have had the chance to examine the entire work in manuscript, since he was personally acquainted with both Sebastian Münster and Immanuel Tremellius, he actually responded to quotations from *Nizzahon* printed by Sebastian Münster with his annotations on the Gospel of Matthew.[28] There are several reasons which suggest that Münster's work was the source of Calvin's questions. First, all except two of Calvin's questions are to be found in Münster's annotations. Münster included the Hebrew quotations in his notes, sometimes with a Latin summary. Calvin's wording suggests that he translated the questions from the Hebrew.[29] Calvin also responded to the questions largely in the order that Münster printed them.[30] Finally, one of the questions cited by Calvin was taken not from *Nizzahon*, but from the *Book of Faith*, and this question also appears in Münster's annotations on Matthew.[31] Thus it is safe to assume that Calvin confronted the challenge of *Nizzahon* through Münster's quotations in his Gospel of Matthew. Since neither Münster nor Calvin knew who wrote *Nizzahon*, Calvin responded to the objections of "a certain Jew."[32]

Having identified Calvin's Jewish interlocutor it is now possible to search for correspondences within his other works and to limit the date of its composition more narrowly. Since Calvin responded to quotations of *Nizzahon* printed in Münster's annotations to Gospel of Matthew, Calvin's commentary on the synoptic Gospels (1555) would be an obvious place to look for parallel passages. There are several parallels between Calvin's answers in his *Response* and his commentary on corresponding verses, but there are no references to his interlocutor's objections. The most obvious example is Calvin's response to question 10:

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28. Jerome Friedman noted that Münster responded to genuine Jewish objections to Christianity in his *Evangelium secundum Matthaeum in Lingua Hebraica, cum versione latina atque succintis annotationibus* (Basel, Henric-Petri, 1537), but thought that he derived them from David Kimhi's Psalms Commentary of his *Answers to Christians*. *Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 224.

29. Calvin's use of *Nizzahon* sheds some light on his abilities as a Hebraist. The Hebrew of *Nizzahon* is not very different from biblical Hebrew and would have presented few problems for Calvin to read and translate. For a discussion of the extent of Calvin's Hebrew abilities, see Laver, "Calvin," pp. 183-184.

30. The only questions that are not quotations from Münster's work are nos. 19 and 22. The former is quite similar to questions 17-18 and might have simply been derived from them. Question 22 concerns the problem of reconciling God's sovereignty and Judas's responsibility in the betrayal of Christ, a subject of enduring interest to Calvin. *Sefer Nizzahon* also raises this problem in a pericope that was not quoted by Münster, although not in the same way that Calvin did (para 108). Calvin may also have derived the two questions from his harmony on the Gospels.

31. Question no. 13 was taken from *Sefer Amana*, Basel UB Ms R IV 3, f. 26b. Cf. Paul Fagius, *Sefer Amana* (Isny, Fagius, 1542), para 31.

32. *Sefer Nizzahon* (Vetus) is occasionally confused with Yom Lipmann Mühlhausen's work of the same name, but is older and its author is unknown. Berger, *The Jewish Christian Debate,* pp. 33-35.

> Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. And Jesus was in the earth for three days and three nights. This is not true. Even according to your own words he was in the earth only three days and two nights.

Calvin responded both here and in his Gospels commentary that Jesus was employing a synechdoche, by which the part stands for the whole. He wrote: "In *exempla* full conformity is not essential, nor is it rendered useless if something not quite matching is used."[33] In his commentary, however, Calvin did not attack his Jewish contemporaries for their unbelief, but instead focused on Jesus's contemporaries. He wrote that Jesus "pronounces the Jews — or at least the scribes and those who resembled them — to be a wicked nation ..."[34] In his commentary Calvin discussed the two questions that were not derived from Münster's annotations. These concern the relationship between God's sovereignty and Judas's guilt, and whether Jesus had one will or two. The commentary identifies these objectors as Christians rather than Jews.[35] Indeed, Calvin attributes the question about Christ's will to seventh century Monothelite heretics rather than to any Jewish objection. Calvin's references to ideas that he discussed in this Gospels commentary suggest that he wrote the *Response* after 1555. He may not have interacted with passages from *Nizzahon* in his Gospels commentary because he had not read them in 1555, but it is more likely that he ignored them because they had no place in his theological agenda, as evidence from several of his other commentaries suggests.

Calvin's familiarity with Sebastian Münster's commentary on Matthew also raises the question of how extensively Calvin used it and his Hebrew Bible in his Old Testament commentaries. Henry Walter, a nineteenth century annotator of Calvin's Pentateuch commentary, stated that all of Calvin's citations of Jewish sources came from Münster's Bible.[36] More recently H.F. van Rooy has suggested that Calvin made some use of Münster's Bible in his Genesis commentary (1554).[37] If Calvin did use Münster's Bible as a source for his Genesis commentary he did not refer to any of Münster's *Nizzahon* quotations.[38] Likewise, if Calvin used Münster's Bible as a source for his Psalms commentary (1557) then he ignored the latter's quotations from

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33. Laver, "Calvin," pp. 243-244. Cf. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle, 3 vols (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1956-1957), 2:95 (= Calvin, *Commentarius in Harmonium Evangelicam, Opera,* v. 45, cols. 352-353).

34. Calvin, Harmony, 2:93 (Matthew 12:39) (= Calvin, *Opera*, v. 45, cols. 352-353).

35. *Ibid*., 3: 200 (Matthew 26:24) and 3: 233 (Matthew 26:39) (= Calvin, *Opera*, v. 45, cols. 701-703, 721-724).

36. Laver, "Calvin," p. 184.

37. H. F. van Rooy, "Calvin's Genesis Commentary—Which Bible Text Did He Use? in : Our Reformational Tradition: A Rich Heritage and Lasting Vocation ([Silverton, South Africa]: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1984), pp. 203-215.

38. According to Berger, Münster quoted from *Nizzahon* paras. 3, 5, 6 (Gen. 1), 9 (Gen. 3:22), 10 (Gen. 14:18), and 16 (Gen. 22:13). Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentariorum in quinque libros Mosis, Pars I,* in: *Opera*, vol. 23, cols. 15, 25-27, 78-79, 200-203, 318.

Nizzahon.[39] In fact, Calvin made few overt references to Jewish interpreters or opinion in his Psalms commentary. This omission must have been intentional, since he made extensive use of Martin Bucer's Psalms commentary and the latter interacted vigorously with medieval Jewish commentators such as Rashi, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and David Kimhi, particularly when explaining important messianic passages such as Psalm 22.[40] Calvin acknowledged the importance of Jewish exegesis only indirectly by urging restraint in christological exegesis of the Old Testament, much as Bucer had done in his commentary.[41] Calvin wrote in his discussion of Psalm 72:1: "We must always be careful not to give the Jews any reason to claim that we split hairs in order to find a reference to Christ in passages not directly related to him."[42] Calvin's respect for Jewish opinion evaporated, however, when it denied the truth of Christianity as his interlocutor did in the *Response*. Calvin's disregard for Jewish polemics in his commentaries supports Laver's argument that Calvin's use of Israel and the Jews in his exegetical works was intended to encourage Christian nurture and to bolster his attacks on the Anabaptists and Catholics.[43]

Since Calvin was clearly responding to questions posed by a Jewish author in his *Response*, his answers reflect his opinions of the Jews and their objections to Christianity. Before determining Calvin's attitude toward the Jews, however, a word is in order about his use of defamatory rhetoric.[44] Calvin's descriptions of his Christian opponents were nearly always abusive to the core. He frequently called them pigs and dogs, but on occasion used much cruder characterizations. On occasion he likened them to prostitutes, thieves, or vomiting drunkards, and in other places he employed images of defecation, latrines, and sewage.[45] Calvin once went so far as to associate the statements of one Anabaptist opponent with vomit, and the speaker with "a drunkard in his cups."[46]

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39. According to Berger, Münster quoted from *Nizzahon* paras. 128 (Ps. 2), 143 (Ps. 19), 144 (Ps. 21), 145 (Ps. 22), 151 (Ps. 86), and 152 (Ps. 110). Cf. Calvin, *Commentarii in librum Psalmorum, Opera*, v. 31, cols. 41-52 (Ps. 2), cols. 194-207 (Ps. 19), cols. 212-237 (Psalm 21-22), cols. 791-798 (Ps. 86); vol. 32, cols. 159-166 (Ps. 110).

40. R. Gerald Hobbs, "Martin Bucer on Psalm 22: A Study in the Application of Rabbinic Exegesis by a Christian Hebraist," in *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVIe siècle: Textes du Colloque International tenu à Genève en 1976*, eds. Olivier Fatio and Pierre Fraenkel (Genève, Droz, 1978), pp. 155-162.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 151, 155, 160.

42. Calvin, *Opera*, v. 51, p. 71 ; quoted by Hans Joachim Kraus, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles," trans. Keith Crim, *Interpretation* 31 (1977), 15.

43. Hobbs suggested that Bucer's motives for using Jewish exegetes were also more influenced by apologetic than missionary concerns. "Bucer," p. 162.

44. Heiko Oberman discussed the problem of understanding sixteenth century anti-Jewish rhetoric in *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1984), p. 25.

45. Higman, *Style*, pp. 148-149. Higman's discussion focuses on Calvin's French language polemics, none of which addressed Jewish opponents.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

Since Calvin treated other Christians this way, how did his Jewish interlocutor fare? Calvin used some terms of abuse in his answers, describing his Jewish questioner or Jews in general as "sheep," "pigs," "dogs," and "brutes."[47] He characterized his opponent as "impudent" and "arrogant" since the latter in effect demanded that God behave not according to his sovereign will, but rather as he the questioner expected.[48] Since these insults were similar to those Calvin heaped on Christian opponents they do not shed much light upon what he thought of the Jews specifically. In this instance Calvin was probably not so concerned with defaming the character of his (anonymous) opponent as with belittling his objections. Accordingly he focused his abuse on the intellectual and spiritual state of the Jews and did not use his crudest diction and imagery.

Calvin sought to discredit his interlocutor and the Jews in general by denigrating their spiritual and intellectual capacities and ridiculing their objections to Christianity. To Calvin the very questions that the interlocutor raised demonstrated the Jews' spiritual state. He characterized the Jews as "blind," "stupid," and "foolish."[49] Calvin thought that they suffered from a form of "madness" or "insanity," since they did not have enought sense to understand their own Bible.[50] The Jews sought to evade their responsibility before God to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah by raising foolish objections.[51] The objections themselves Calvin described as "stinking cavils," ridiculous, nonsensical, and frivolous.[52] Nonetheless, Calvin realized that while he himself was unmoved by the Jewish objections, they might raise doubts in the minds of other Christian readers. He may have been moved to write his treatise to offer a better apologetic response to *Nizzahon* than Münster had.

There are indications that Calvin may not have been the only Protestant theologian who was provoked by the writer of *Nizzahon*, encountered at second hand through Münster's quotations. Martin Luther was familiar with both Münster's Hebrew Bible and his Hebrew Gospel of Matthew.[53] In his most famous anti-Jewish book *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543), Luther complained about a "certain Jewish author" quoted by Münster in his Hebrew Bible, who referred to the Virgin Mary by the derisive name "*Haria*," that is "excrement." This was the normal way that the author of *Nizzahon* referred to Mary.[54] Radical Protestant Michael Servetus called

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47. Laver, "Calvin." Brutes: 242, 252; dogs: 242, 253; pigs: 249, 258.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 242, 254.

49. *Ibid.*, blind: 261; foolish: 258; stupid: 246, 248.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 248, 255.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 237, 244-245, 257.

53. Martin Luther, *Tischreden*, WA 4, p. 677.11 (Gospel of Matthew); WA 5, p. 414.9-12 (*Biblia Hebraica*). On the *Biblia Hebraica* cf. also *Tischreden*, WA 3, p. 619.25-30; WA 5, pp. 212.13-16, 218.7-12, 330.30, 363.4-5.

54. Martin Luther, *On the Jews and their Lies,* trans. Martin H. Bertram, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 47 : *The Christian in Society IV,* ed. Frank Sherman (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1971), p. 261 (= *Von den*

the author of *Nizzahon* a "perfidious creature" when he discussed Genesis 49:10. Münster also included this passage in the annotations of his Bible.[55] Since Münster's Bible was used so widely by Protestants it is safe to assume that many lesser-known theologians were also exposed to ideas expressed in *Nizzahon*.[56]

The identity of Calvin's Jewish interlocutor illustrates how much is still unknown about Hebrew learning among Christians during the Reformation and the entire early modern period. Until the past decade scholars have emphasized the importance of medieval anti-Jewish polemics in shaping the attitudes of Protestant theologians toward the Jews, leavened now and again by discussions with Jewish tutors such as Elias Levita or statesmen such as Josel of Rosheim. More recently Jerome Friedman, R. Gerald Hobbs, and Hans-Martin Kirn have pointed out that many Christian Hebraists and exegetes had read Hebrew language anti-Christian polemics. The best known representatives of this tradition were David Kimhi's Psalms Commentary and his *Answer to the Christians*, *Sefer Nizzahon*, and the *Toledot Yesu*, a defamatory life of Jesus.[57] The overall effect that these anti-Christian polemics had in shaping the rhetoric and argumentation of Reformation-era anti-Jewish polemics has yet to be measured. It is worth asking whether Christian polemicists were at times motivated by apologetic concerns in their works as well as purely anti-Jewish animus.[58] To what extent did Protestant theologians such as Luther project the aggressive, combative persona of the author of *Nizzahon* onto the Jews of their day?[59] Calvin's *Response* shows that he was inclined to identify the pugnacious stance and opinions of his interlocutor with those of his Jewish contemporaries.

More broadly Calvin's encounter with a medieval Jewish polemical work and his ability to read it illustrate how much research remains to be done on the penetration of Hebrew learning into Christian theological and academic circles. The explosive growth of Hebrew studies within schools and univer-

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Jüden und Ihre Lügen, WA 53 p. 517.31-33). The author of *Nizzahon* did in fact refer to Mary with this term. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate,* p. 302, n. 1 for p. 152. Luther probably read one of the following excerpts from *Nizzahon*: paras. 6, 47, 88, 145, 167, 220.

55. Michael Servetus, *Christianismi Restituio* (Vienne, n.p., 1553; reprint: Frankfurt/M, Minerva, 1966), pp. 61-62. Cf. Sebastian Münster, ed. and trans. *Hebraica Biblia* (1546), p. 108, note d, and Berger's critical notation on *Nizzahon*, para. 86. On Servetus' response to *Sefer Nizzahon* see Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy,* Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, no. 163 (Geneva, Droz, 1978), p. 131.

56. Urbanus Rhegius also claimed to have read portions of *Nizzahon*. See Scott Hendrix, "Toleration of the Jews in the German Reformation: Urbanus Rhegius and Braunschweig (1535-1540)", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 81 (1990), 193-194.

57. Friedman, *Most Ancient Testimony,* p. 224; Hobbs, "Martin Bucer," p. 162; and Hans-Martin Kirn, *Das Bild vom Juden im Deutschland des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts dargestellt an den Schriften Johannes Pfefferkorns,* Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism, no. 3 (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1989), pp. 23-24, passim.

58. Hobbs, "Martin Bucer," p. 162.

59. Oberman notes that Luther felt that the Jews' "theological misguidedness" was the greatest threat that they posed to Christianity. *Roots of Anti-Semitism,* p. 72.

sities during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries cannot be explained without discussing the emergence and growth of a philological apparatus, Hebrew printing industry and distribution system, and a rationale for appropriating post-biblical Jewish literature for Christian purposes, all of which developed during the sixteenth century and made it possible for Christians to learn biblical and rabbinical Hebrew from other Christians within the confessionally restricted academic world.[60] The questions posed by Calvin's interlocutor illustrate both the extent of Christian knowledge of the Jewish tradition and the increasing ability of Christians to interact with it independently of the Jews.

Stephen G. Burnett.
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Appendix: Index of Quotations in Calvin's Response

Question	Nizzahon Citation[61]	Matthew Citation	Münster Matthew page
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20	Para 182	Mt 28.18-20	153
21	Para 222	Mt 27	151
22	None	Mt 26	146
23	Para 191	Mt 21	119-120

60. Jerome Friedman discusses the first stages of these developments in *Most Ancient Testimony,* pp. 20-49.

61. Three of the twenty three questions were not direct quotations from *Nizzahon*. These are no. 13 which was taken from *Sefer Amana*, Basel, UB Ms R IV 3, f. 26b, para 31 in the printed version (Isny, Fagius, 1542) and nos. 19 and 22 which Calvin probably posed for himself, perhaps based on *Nizzahon* questions.