Humanism and Hebraism: Christian Scholars and Hebrew Sources in the Renaissance

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Humanism and Hebraism: Christian Scholars and Hebrew Sources in the Renaissance

Kathryn Christine Puzzanghera

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Prerequisite for Honors in Religion
April 2016

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This thesis is dedicated to the glory of God
Who gave us reason, creativity, and curiosity, that they might be used

AND

To the mixed Protestant-Catholic family I was born into,

and the Jewish family we chose
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Chapter I: Christian Humanist Hebraism in Context

From the beginning of Christianity, the relationship between Christian thought and the Hebrew Bible has been fraught with problems. This thesis aims to examine a crucial point in this contentious history, by exploring the late medieval and Renaissance moment that Christian thinkers began to re-appropriate the Hebrew Bible, its language, and Jewish thought. This introductory chapter briefly outlines the relevant history of the development of Christian thought as it pertains to Hebrew exegesis and Christian Humanism. It presents the shift in Christian Hebraism through three stages from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, through the work of the late medieval exegete Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349), to the Renaissance humanist Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522), and ending with the Protestant Reformer, Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560).

Humanism is a term that was adopted to describe the main cultural force that drove intellectual and artistic development during the Renaissance. This brand of Humanism grew and changed over the course of three centuries, continuously developing from the mid-14th century to the mid-17th century.1 Despite this, the term ‘Humanism,’ or umanesimo in Italian,2 was not coined until 1808 by the German theologian F. J Niethammer (1766-1846) “to refer to a philosophy of education that favored classical studies”3 and it was not until five decades later that two historians, Karl Hagen (1810-1868) and Georg Voigt (1827-1891), in their research, “first used the word Humanismus as a historical event and an intellectual phenomenon associated

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2 Ibid, IX 381
3 Ibid, 1
with the Renaissance.”⁴ It was “coined…to express the emphasis on the Greek and Latin classics in secondary education as against the rising demands for a more practical and more scientific training.”⁵

The term ‘humanist,’ of course, changed over the course of the Renaissance. In fifteenth century Italy, ‘humanista’ meant “teacher of the humanities.” By the sixteenth century in Germany, the term was “no longer limited to any particular profession or discipline.”⁶ As Erika Rummel notes, in the lifetime of the scholar Reuchlin, “the term ‘humanist’ had undergone considerable modification…changing from a professional designation to a cultural affiliation.”⁷

The term Humanism was derived from the phrase studia humanitatis, or, what we would today call, the liberal arts.⁸ The studia humanitatis was the core of a Humanist’s intellectual life and curriculum. Studia humanitatis

was apparently used in the general sense of a liberal or literary education by such ancient Roman authors as Cicero and Gellius, and this use was resumed by the Italian scholars of the fourteenth century. By the first half of the fifteenth century, the studia humanitatis came to stand for a clearly defined cycle of scholarly disciplines…and the study of each of the subjects was understood to include the reading and interpretation of tis standard ancient writers in Latin and, to a lesser extent, in Greek. This meaning of the studia humanitatis remained in general use throughout the sixteenth century and later, and we may still find echo of it in our use of the term ‘humanities.’⁹

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⁴ Ibid
⁷ Ibid, p. viii
⁸ Spitz, Luther and German Humanism, p. 2
⁹ Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought and its Sources, p. 22
The five subjects that were traditionally included in the *studia humanitatis* were grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy.\(^\text{10}\) Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370-1444), one of the early Humanists, wrote that these five subjects were the ones “best designed to perfect and ornament man”.\(^\text{11}\) Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) wrote, “The studies of humanity make you eloquent…those of philosophy will make you become God.”\(^\text{12}\)

Early Humanism started in central Italy, reaching its height from the 1300s to the 1400s.\(^\text{13}\) Humanism, like most of the intellectual movements of the time, spread primarily through the education and ecclesiastical systems, two institutions that had functioned symbiotically during the medieval era. The four main institutions working to transmit this new movement were the monasteries, the courts, the cities, and the universities, new centers of learning that were beginning to grow and multiply throughout Europe in conjunction with this movement.\(^\text{14}\) Most of the early Humanists initially spread their ideas by travelling from university to university as guest lecturers, before moving onto the next group of students.\(^\text{15}\)

The Humanists were unusually historically focused; they “stressed the study of ancient history (as recorded by the ancient historians themselves), and they also wrote histories of medieval and modern times, often in imitation of classical styles.”\(^\text{16}\) Leonardo Bruni’s main focus was on the study of history.\(^\text{17}\) Their movement continuously expressed a desire to return to


\(^{11}\) Ibid, 3

\(^{12}\) Kristeller, Paul Oskar. “Florentine Platonism and its relations with Humanism and Scholasticism.” *Church History* 8.2 (September 1939), p. 205

\(^{13}\) Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism*, p. V 202

\(^{14}\) Ibid, V 205

\(^{15}\) Ibid, 31


\(^{17}\) Ibid, p. 15
the original sources, described in their terminology as *ad fontes*, what Jerome Friedman describes as “systematic nostalgia.”

From a religious point of view, this focused on the theological texts referred to as the Patristics, or the writings of the Church Fathers, and the Bible itself. Salo Baron writes that, “The humanists liked the close connection of the Church Fathers to the sacred scriptures. To them ‘Back to the Sources’ meant the return of both, the biblical and the patristic sources.” The focus on early Christian writings led to questioning of the Church’s authority and practices, the humanists, and the reformers after them, were prompted to ask: “what do [these writings] tell us about the practices of the early church? And, to give the question a critical dimension, do current practices and dogma agree with those of the ancient church?”

The Humanists had a fascination with the classics, from classical history to philosophy to literature. The term ‘humanist’ in fact was first applied to describe instructors of classical literature. This was then widened to apply to anyone who studied the classics. The Humanists were fascinated with Plato and Aristotle, with the revivification of Latin to its classical (and, in their minds, purer) form, and in the discovery, preservation, translation, and transmission of the sources of these older authors such as Cicero (106-43 BCE). The Humanism in the fifteenth century “brought a renewed interest in proper speaking and the use of Cicero and Quintilian for constructing speeches and analyzing ancient ones,” such as in biblical exegesis. They revered the ancient Greeks (rather than contemporary Greek scholars) and Romans for their wisdom and

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21 David Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books*, p. 15
learning. Humanists read dozens of classical writers in the original languages. They believed these practices should be part of the core curriculum for any educated person. Paul Oskar Kristeller suggests that “Renaissance humanism was not such a philosophical tendency or system, but rather a cultural and educational program which emphasized and developed an important but limited area of studies.”

For the Humanists, classical antiquity was not simply an interesting historical period, but it was vital and relevant to their lives and to the present age. The Humanists saw themselves as the intellectual heirs of these classical giants. The medieval age, to them, had merely served as a buffer between the two great, interwoven, intellectual eras, leading Renaissance scholars to frequently refer to the medieval era as the “dark middle age.” As the humanist movement matured, its goal shifted from the fulfillment of intellectual curiosity to how to apply the humanist principles to life. The two were thought to be directly related, for “Humanism associated ethical norms with aesthetic forms, the good with the beautiful, in a manner reminiscent of Plato.”

Ozment identifies at least four schools of thought on Renaissance Humanism. The first is posited by Jacob Burckhardt, who describes the “Renaissance as the birth of modern consciousness and praised humanists as advocates of individuals, secularism, and moral autonomy against medieval Christian culture.”

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23 Paul Oskar Kristeller, “Florentine Platonism and its relations with Humanism and Scholasticism”, p. 202
24 Ibid, 307
25 Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought and its Sources, p. 22
26 Paul Oskar Kristeller, “Florentine Platonism and its relations with Humanism and Scholasticism”, p. 1
27 Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought and its Sources, p. IV 107
28 Spitz, Luther and German Humanism, p. IX 381
29 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, p. 305
30 Ibid
Secondly, there is the school described by Italian scholar Giuseppe Toffanin: “Italian humanism was an epitome of medieval Christian culture and humanists as true champions of Christian NeoPlatonism and Augustinianism against Averroism and Aristotelianism.” He developed what Ozment described as “the paradoxical statement that humanism was a reaction of Christian feeling against the heretical tendencies of scholasticism.”

The third, argued by Paul Oskar Kristeller, “restrict[s] the definition of humanism to educational and cultural programs dedicated to rhetoric, scholarship, good language, and literature, with only a secondary interest in metaphysics and moral philosophy, whether Christian or pagan.” This framework, shared by Timothy Wengert, argues that “many, if not all, of the Protestant Reformers were at the same time humanists, that is, committed to the study of the humanities.” Kristeller and Wengert, and others of this school, “have argued that humanism presented not a common philosophy but a common methodology and approach to texts marked by a concern for the sources (ad fontes), for history, and for poetics, and by a proper use of the classical languages (Latin, and later, Greek and even Hebrew) and their literatures (bonae litterae).” Through this lens, the Reformation and Humanism were not movements incompatible with one another, but complementary.

The fourth is articulated by Hans Baron, who “portrays Florentine humanists as proponents of republican liberty and civic responsibility, who urged urban elites to study ancient history and literature primarily for its political and moral instruction.”

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31 Ibid
32 Ibid, p. 204
33 Ibid, p. 305
34 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 321
36 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, 305
While various aspects of each of these are valid, of the four, this paper most closely aligns with the thought of Kristeller and Wengert. This thesis is concerned primarily with methodology, and traces a movement forward regarding the progression of the philological method of Biblical studies. This thesis contends that Aristotelianism and Platonism were not viewed as mutually exclusive by the Humanists and to treat Humanism as diametrically opposed to Scholasticism or the medieval era, given the points of connection and continuity.

These four theoretical frameworks are by no means the only ones. Rummel argues that the term of ‘humanist’ in the sixteenth century “applied to anyone who admired and emulated the artistic and literary standards of classical antiquity. In the context of university studies, being a humanist meant promoting the study of ancient languages over Aristotelian logic, the traditional core subject, and privileging rhetorical and philological methods over scholastic dialectic.”37 Rummel goes onto argue that the “neatly packaged” designations of ‘Renaissance’, ‘Middle Ages’, and ‘Reformation’ are “useful for organizational purposes, but imply an internal consistency and a cultural uniformity that did not exist.”38 Whereas, Maurer, who wrote in opposition to Kristeller, argues that Humanism “denotes a philosophy that champions the human being and its powers and is tied to certain anthropological and theological presuppositions from classical antiquity.”39

Humanism, though most frequently associated with artistic figures like Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Michelangelo (1475-1564), functioned simultaneously as an intellectual, religious movement known as Christian Humanism. There were few Humanists that were not

37 Erika Rummel, *The Case against Johann Reuchlin*, p. ix
38 Ibid, p. vii
identified as Christians, but the Christian Humanists, while approaching sources and education with the same philosophy, had fundamentally different concerns than the artists and politicians.

Their concern was how to take the underlying humanist principles and how to apply them to scripture, to ecclesiastical procedures, and to the church hierarchy. Learning was no longer an end in and of itself, but a path towards self-improvement and a closer relationship with God. Such a concept found its fullest expression in the work of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), who believed “learning was to lead to virtue, scholarship to God, and thus…the restoration of theology was to be the means toward the revival of a living and lived Christianity.”

Doctrine and tradition were no longer to be accepted simply because they had always existed, but they now also had to be judged by the ultimate good they produced on a moral scale. These scholars prioritized right living over right thinking. Their concerns were not simply intellectual exercises, but were, to them, discussion about the most serious matters possible: salvation, God, scripture, and revelation.

**Christian Thought and Biblical Exegesis**

Christianity came into being during the golden age of the Roman Empire. Through its evangelism to non-Jewish populations, Christianity began to differentiate itself as its own religion, rather than a Jewish sect, and to begin to blend its burgeoning theology with Greek and Latin philosophers. The educated Christians, the creators of nascent Christian theology, were also well-read in philosophers like Aristotle (384-322 BCE), Plato (427-347 BCE), and Philo (c.20 BCE-c.50 CE), and authors such as Virgil (70-19 BCE) and Euripides (c.480-406 BCE).

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41 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform* pp. 307-308.
This model of integration of classical sources was one that the later Humanists built on, drawing from the same sources of inspiration as their forebears. The fact that these texts were seen as being primarily in the literary or philosophical genres, as opposed to the theological, allowed for the ease with which they were able to be appropriated into the Christian tradition. The smooth appropriation of Greek sources stands in stark opposition to the Christian scholarship’s relationship with the Jewish sources. Viewed instead as rival theology, Jewish scholarship, after the first century or two of Christianity, was no longer consistently used or relied upon in the development of Christian thought or exegesis. It could be acquired only “through private initiative, usually by engaging the services of a native speaker.”42 From that point on, it was studied sporadically by the occasional creative thinker, but primarily was used to create polemic against the Jewish faith and people.

The first several centuries of Christian thought were known as the time of the Church Fathers, the authors of the earliest secondary texts on Christianity, who set the tone for all subsequent scholarship. The writings they produced were known as patristic texts or the patristics. Scholars in this category include Justin Martyr (c.100-c.165), Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215), Tertullian (c.160-c.220), Origen (c.185-c.254), Cyprian (d. 258) Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350-428), Diodorus of Tarsus (d. c.390), and Ambrose (c.339-397). It was with the writings of Tertullian that Latin, the language of the Roman Empire, became the language for discourse on Christian theology.43

The most well-known and well-read of the Patristics were Saint Augustine (354-430), one of the most influential theologians through the Reformation, and Saint Jerome (c. 347-420), the

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42 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 282
translator of the Christian Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin. In every theological debate for the next thousand years, both sides would turn to Augustine when attempting to bolster the persuasive and authoritative nature of their argument.\footnote{Steven Ozment, \textit{The Age of Reform}, p. 22}

Jerome’s translation, utilizing three of the five languages that he was proficient in,\footnote{Ibid, p. 292} would become known as the Vulgate Bible and would become the standardized scripture in every church and monastery for the next several hundred years. Any argument from later theologians would inevitably cite such figures, relying upon the authority of the past as an argument for the present. Jerome held that the Hebrew text was more authoritative than the Greek text when it came to the Old Testament.\footnote{Throughout this thesis, I am going to be referring to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament, as that is the framework within my three theologians were operating} He chose the less popular method of translating directly into Latin from Hebrew instead of using the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament for his foundation.\footnote{Klepper, Deeana. \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, p. 13; Price, David H. “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism: Johannes Reuchlin and the Discovery of Hebrew.” \textit{Arthuriana} 99.3 (Fall 2009): p. 81. Web.} This approach earned him the criticism from many corners, including from Augustine himself. Augustine accused Jerome of trying to spread Jewish beliefs in place of Christian ones, a critique called Judaization.\footnote{Deeana Klepper, \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}, p.13}

This charge would continue to resurface for the next thousand years. Scholars who would try to integrate Hebrew and Jewish sources into their Christian scholarship were frequently labeled “Judaizers” by their contemporary critics, who used anti-Semitic fear to discredit the work of Hebraists.\footnote{Ibid; Ilona N. Rashkow, “Hebrew Bible Translation and the Fear of Judaization”, p. 218}
Upon the advent of the medieval age, marked by the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE, major doctrinal questions, from the nature of the trinity to the process of salvation were considered to have authoritative answers. By the time of the councils, there was “another major break with Judaism; Jews could not remain within Judaism and believe that Jesus is God.” As the church became increasingly institutionalized, so did the methods behind Biblical interpretation and theological formulations. In a culture where the Church was the dominant landowner and political power, religious and secular methods and concerns became fused together. As Steven Ozment wrote, “Reality is one; truth is one—no conviction was more medieval than that.” This mentality would feed into the later Scholastic movement.

During the medieval era, all Biblical interpretation was believed to fit into a four-fold sense of hermeneutic principles. The first was the ‘letter’ of the text. This referred to the literal sense of the scripture, the historical context in which it was written, and the favorite method of Jerome. The second was the method of allegory--pioneered in the Patristic age by Philo, Ambrose, Augustine and Origen--that saw scripture as a homiletical tool. Oftentimes, by this method’s argument, the strict literal reading did not identically match up with the spiritual meaning implicit in the text, and instead the message or ecclesiastical doctrine was cloaked in allegory or metaphor. This tool was particularly used to develop Christological foreshadowing in Old Testament exegesis. The third sense was the tropological sense, where the text served as a directive on how to live one’s life, providing examples and exhortations, the moral dimension of the text. This sense was the one that was believed to be the most relevant to an individual.

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51 Hershel Sharks ed., *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 320
52 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 12.
54 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 64.
believers’ life and was able to serve a homiletic purpose.\(^{55}\) The fourth was the anagogical sense, which interpreted the scripture in a broader context, asking where, as a person, as human beings, we should be aiming in a cosmological sense.\(^{56}\) This was the mystical sense of scripture, dealing with heaven, hell, and the metaphysical nature of the universe.\(^{57}\) These four hermeneutical principles were written into a rhyme by John Cassian (c.360-after 430) that was utilized up through the 16\(^{th}\) century:

\[
\text{The letter shows us what God and our fathers did; (litera gesta docet,)}
\]
\[
\text{The allegory shows us where our faith is hid; (quid credas allegoria,)}
\]
\[
\text{The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life; (moralis quid agas,)}
\]
\[
\text{The anagogy shows us where we end our strife; (quo tendas anagogia.)}\(^{58}\)
\]

These methods, while all utilized in one form or another, were not all treated or respected equally. Herman Hailperin maintains that “Biblical exegesis, from its beginnings, was characterized by either one of two principles: the inspirational or the philological. St. Augustine and Luther followed the inspirational view” while the exegetes, “St. Jerome, Lyra, Reuchlin, and Erasmus followed the philological.”\(^{59}\) During the 13\(^{th}\) and 14\(^{th}\) centuries, the literal-historical sense—with a few major exceptions, including Thomas Aquinas\(^{60}\) (1225-1274) and the Franciscan order\(^{61}\)—was entirely subordinated to the spiritual sense (containing the allegorical, moral, and anagogical meanings of the text).\(^{62}\) However,

the problem with allegory, or figurative interpretation, is that, unless one grounds exegesis in a fixed canon of traditional allegorizations, there is no clear

\(^{55}\) Ilona N. Rashkow, “Hebrew Bible Translation and the Fear of Judaization”, \textit{JSTOR}. 221.
\(^{56}\) Deeana Klepper, \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}, p. 33.
\(^{58}\) Ibid
\(^{60}\) Steven Ozment, \textit{The Age of Reform}, p. 67.
\(^{61}\) Deeana Klepper, \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}, p. 17.
\(^{62}\) Ibid, p. 31.; Steven Ozment, \textit{The Age of Reform}, p. 65-66.
hermeneutical principle to establish the meaning of a certain text. If nothing means just what it says, everything can mean anything. One project of twelfth-century exegesis was to establish just such an allegorical canon, in the standard gloss to the entire Bible, the *Glossa ordinaria*.\(^6.3\)

The *Glossa Ordinaria*, alternatively known as the *Glossa Communis* or simply as ‘the Gloss,’ was a standardized medieval Biblical commentary. It was composed primarily of the works of the Church Fathers and “was arranged in the form of marginal and interlinear glosses.”\(^6.4\) The authors and compilers of the gloss are still often unknown, though some of the known contributors were Anselm of Laon (d.1117) (the Psalms, the Pauline Epistles, and John) and Gilbert the Universal (d.1135) (the Pentateuch and likely Joshua, Judges, Kings, Lamentations, and several of the major prophets). By the twelfth century the entire Bible had been covered by the patchwork of redactors.\(^6.5\) Franz van Liere contends that in its own way, the Gloss was more than a compilation. New interpretations were added, especially in the interlinear glosses. These interlinear glosses served three functions: they were often short abbreviations of the marginal glosses: sometimes they gave brief lexicographical explanations; and, at times, they provided textual criticism. Scholars have often assumed that the Glossa ordinaria was intended as a schoolbook…It seems more likely that the Glossa was used as reference work.\(^6.6\)

This spiritual sense was used most prolifically in the Old Testament commentaries. Van Liere notes, “In the medieval exegetical theory, scripture, and especially the Old Testament, was read not primarily for its literal, but for its figurative meaning. In its figurative or allegorical sense, the Old Testament was seen as a foreshadowing of the mysteries of the Christian faith

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\(^{6.3}\) Heffernan, Thomas J. and Thomas E. Burman, eds. Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Leiden: Brill, 2000, p. 62


\(^{6.5}\) Ibid

contained in the New Testament. Not infrequently, this allegorical interpretation had a
polemical, anti-judaizing tone."67

During the early medieval age, the majority of scholarship took place in monasteries. In
despite these settings, monks read and wrote theological texts while living a life of austerity and prayer.
Two of the most influential orders, known as the Mendicant orders, were created at around the
turn of the thirteenth century, each founded by and named after a charismatic priest seeking to
return the church to its original intention, Saint Dominic of Caleruega (1170-1221), founder of
the Dominicans, and Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), founder of the Franciscans. Both
movements were evangelical in their approach, spurred by the threats to the church by heretical
teaching. Both also, at least during their early years, utilized the itinerant preacher model.68

The Dominicans were particularly influential in the later scholarship because they frequently
chose to establish themselves in the contexts of the university.69 Ari Geiger writes that “[o]ne of
the expressions of the Twelfth Century Renaissance was the transition of scholarship from the
monastery to the university.”70 Scholastic theology was strongest in the schools of the
mendicant orders.71 The university, as an idea, was just taking off and the new schools were
starting to proliferate throughout Europe, creating centers of learning and research outside of the
confines of cloistered monasteries. The rise of the university coincided with the rise of the city
and the creation of cultured urban centers where scholars had begun to congregate, finding a
community of like-minded peers to study and discuss with. The increased prominence of the

67 Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman eds., Scripture and Pluralism, p.62
68 Madigan, Kevin. Medieval Christianity: A New History. New Haven and London: Yale University, 2015, pp. 211-
256.
69 Ibid, pp. 211-225
70 Geiger, Ari. “In Hebraeo Habetur: The Hebrew Biblical Text in the Literal Commentary of Nicholas of Lyra on the
Book of Lamentations.” In The Jewish Sources of the Literal Postilla of Nicholas of Lyra on Lamentations. Israel: Bar
Ilan University, 2002, p. 149
71 Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought and its Sources, p. 41
mercantile class led to a rise in the literacy level, as the economic demand for more bookkeepers, lawyers, and government officials made the ability to read and write a priority for social mobility.\textsuperscript{72}

The rise of the city as an institution changed academic methods, including the possibility for academic discourse between Jews and Christians: “Because Jews and Christians lived together in the cities, the sporadic contacts that had occurred between Jews and Christians from the Carolingian era until the end of the eleventh century were transformed into current and continuous relations in the scholarly centers.”\textsuperscript{73} Urban schools led to “the exposure of scholars to the influence of the various components of the city population. The residence of Jews and Christians in the same town promoted daily contacts.”\textsuperscript{74} It is worth noting that urban connections of this sort were cut off in later centuries with the systematic exile of the Jews from Europe and the ghettoization of the remaining Jews. Yet, Aryeh Grabois contends that

The development of biblical studies in the twelfth century was correlated with the progress of urban society, and was one of its results. The schools located in the cities grew, and unlike the monastic type of learning, they were open to a larger number of students. But these open schools by their own definition had to be competitive, and the masters had to pay much more attention to stimulating and original teaching. Concerning the study of the Bible, Abelard explained that the traditional training of a good and well-equipped preacher was no longer sufficient and that the masters had to attract their students by displaying a deeper understanding of the text.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72}Kevin Madigan \textit{Medieval Christianity: A New History}, pp. 257-286.
\textsuperscript{74}Aryeh Grabois, “The Hebraica Veritas and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century”, p. 619
\textsuperscript{75}Ibid, p. 619
The twelfth century brought “a new school of thought” to the forefront. “Its proponents were commonly associated with the Parisian masters and were primarily concerned with the philological and historical explanation of the text.” Van Liere describes this period as one of the most exciting and formative periods in medieval Europe. It saw the formation of a multitude of religious orders and reform movements and the rediscovery of Europe’s classical heritage and the power of Reason. Charles Homer Haskins referred to it as the ‘renaissance of the twelfth century.’ In describing this renaissance, scholars have traditionally emphasized the rationalistic and humanistic outlook of scholars in this period, the renewed interest in ancient and classical learning, and the expression of individualism.

An example of such a scholar was Peter Abelard (1079-1142/1143), “whose motto ‘Nothing can be believed unless it is first understood’ seemed to express a nearly unlimited optimism in Man’s capacity to rely on his own rational faculties.” Van Liere notes that “Richard Southern has offered a more helpful paradigm for this period by coining the label ‘scholastic humanism.’” Whereas “Frederick Artz, for instance, saw the twelfth-century renaissance as terminated by the rise of scholasticism: ‘The humanism of the twelfth century … came to understand better the world of Greece and Rome. But this humanistic movement was cut short by the growing interest in dialectical and theological studies stimulated by the recovery of Greek and Arabic learning.’” This twelfth-century ‘renaissance’ gave birth to the scholarship that would prove foundational for later exegetes and philologists.

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76 Ibid
77 Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman eds., Scripture and Pluralism, p. 59
78 Ibid
79 Ibid, p. 60
80 Ibid, pp. 59-60
Jewish-Christian Dialogue and Anti-Semitism

As previously mentioned, Jewish-Christian interactions had been strained from the first few centuries of Christianity. However, the newfound differentiation of Christianity from Judaism did not stop many of the Church Fathers from trying to “appropriate the Torah of the Jews.” Marc Hirshman attributes the first major move among patristic scholars for such a project to Justin. Such an undertaking was important because the Church believed itself to be the only body capable of decoding the biblical message accurately. According to the Christians, the Jews were unable to understand their own Torah. Rather, the Torah and the Prophets were important to Christianity to prove that the coming of Christ was the fulfillment of age-old prophecies. At the same time, the Church relied on the Bible and its Jewish origins to ward off the Roman claim that Christians worship “new gods”…on grounds of politics as well as faith, then the Church attempted to appropriate Jewish Scripture in its entirety, while engaged in a stubborn struggle with both Jews and gnostics over its interpretation.  

The early Christian church’s appropriation of Jewish scriptures was part of its move towards self-definition, their increased approach to see themselves as the new Children of God who had the true interpretation. Augustine “compare[d] the role of the Jews to that of a blind man who lights up the road for others with no torch but cannot see the light himself.” In these early years, “Christians had to defend themselves against Gnostics and pagans, while at the same time contending with Jewish views.” Both religions were small sects struggling for both survival and identity in the Roman Empire.  

Yet, there was still a level of dialogue during this period: “Evidence indicates that Church Fathers were sensitive to the educational needs of Christians who were involved in disputes with

82 Ibid, p. 14
83 Ibid, p. 9
84 Ibid, p. 1-6
Jews. The *Tosefta*, edited close to Origen’s times, makes patently clear that Jews and Christians met around Scripture.”85 Before the fifth century, the “term ‘Jew’ did not have a pejorative sense in the writings of the Church Fathers.”86

By the Middle Ages, Jewish-Christian relations were defined by anti-Semitism, ironically “rationalism contributed…to the justification of intolerance. Peter the Venerable presented the following syllogism: since man is an *animal rationale* and the Jews would not listen to reason, there is no conclusion left but that they are ‘beasts.’”87 Amos Funkenstein argues that “Christian and Jewish polemics during [the Middle Ages] are characterized by increase of knowledge of the antagonists’ theological literatures and mode of thinking….Even in their polemics, Christians and Jews used a common theological language.”88 By the twelfth century, converts to Christianity from Judaism were also producing polemical literature.89 In fact, converts often produced some of the most scathing polemic against Judaism.90

Jewish postbiblical literature often suffered the brunt of the attacks by Christians: “The condemnation of the rabbinical oral tradition as a postbiblical innovation and therefore heresy was by far the most detrimental theological argument the Jews were to confront in the Middle Ages.”91 Of the many Christian polemical writings published in the Middle ages that used the Talmud and other Jewish writings

85 Ibid, p. 9
88 Ibid, p. 382
89 Ibid, p. 378
90 Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 16
91 Amos Funkenstein, “Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages”, p. 381
The most comprehensive of this polemical type, which was exercised first in the disputation of Barcelona in 1263, was done by Raymundus Martini in his *Pugio Fidei*. Though less dangerous than the total condemnation of the Talmud, it nevertheless led to the habit of discerning ‘genuine’ and worthless traditions within Jewish literature; the Midrash, and later especially the Kabbalah, were sometimes declared to be the only parts of Jewish tradition worth conserving.  

Yet the categories of ‘safe’ and ‘dangerous’ Jewish writings could change at any point. Despite some Christian scholars’ fascination with Kabbalah, for example, many also viewed it as a dangerous brand of magic and mysticism. The English word ‘cabal,’ meaning “both magical powers and conspiratorial intent” was derived from Kabbalah.

Theresa Gross-Diaz writes that, “Certain friars, such as the fanatic Dominican Raymond Martini hurled condemnations, accusations and gratuitous insults against the Jews…and especially against their rabbis who had, he claimed, deliberately and maliciously led astray their own people in order to keep them from converting to Christianity, as the prophecies of their own Hebrew Bible would otherwise have led them to do.” However, such “Christian anti-Jewish polemics became internalized. Its content became admonitory…and homiletic; its function was both to assist the self-interpretation of Christianity and to supply the community with an explanation for the existence of the Jews and for the relative tolerance they enjoyed—or were supposed to enjoy.”

Funkenstein recognizes four distinct patterns of anti-Jewish polemic after the twelfth century. The first was “the older pattern of *Daiologicum Judaeis* or *Tractatus contra Judaeos*—a stereotype repetition of arguments usually going back to Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine.” The second can be described as “rationalistic polemics, attempting a deduction of the Christian

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92 Ibid, p. 382
93 Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 17
94 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, p. 115-116
95 Amos Funkenstein, “Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages”, p. 374
dogma or a demonstration of the philosophical superiority of Christianity.” The third consisted of attacks against the Talmud or the “totality of postbiblical Jewish religious literature,” accusing the texts of being “heretical even in terms of Judaism proper.” The fourth and final form was an “attempt to demonstrate, with the help of the Talmud, that even postbiblical Jewish literature, especially the Midrash, contains explicit hints of the veracity of the Christian dogma.”

It should be noted that Nicholas of Lyra arguably engaged in three of these four and even Reuchlin, the most tolerant of the three, undoubtedly utilized the fourth method of polemic. Hirshman points out that the polemic was not one-sided, and “rabbinic literature mentions its ideological rivals in antiquity and openly contends with their claims.” He adds that “[n]either Judaism nor Christianity, then, attempted to hide the views of their rivals. Instead, they contested them, and their controversies have been preserved in the Midrash, the Talmuds, as well as in many Christian works.”

The Christian attacks on the Talmud came to a head in 1242, with the burning of the Talmud in Paris. A Jewish convert named Nicholas Donin told the authorities that the Talmud contained blasphemous writings about Jesus. Subsequently, the French Jews were forced to turn over their copies of the text. At the end of a ‘trial,’ King Louis IX (1214-1270) ordered that all copies of the Talmud were to be destroyed. Twenty-four cartloads of texts, thousands of manuscripts, were burned. After this instance, sporadic burnings of the Talmud continued in countries such as Italy and Poland; the practice was encouraged by numerous popes. During the next century, the Talmud was burned in Bourges, Toulouse, Paris, Pamiers, and Rome. However, the Talmud

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96 Ibid, pp. 373-374
97 Marc Hirshman, A Rivalry of Genius, p. 8
98 Ibid, p. 12
was rarely burned on a large scale until the mid-fifteenth century in Italy where thousands of copies of the Talmud and other Jewish writings were burned in Rome and Venice.\textsuperscript{100}

During this time, Jewish sources were rarely, but still occasionally, utilized. Particularly rare, relatively speaking, was the use of postbiblical Jewish sources, such as the Talmud.\textsuperscript{101} The use of Hebrew sources in Christian history is related closely to the use of the literal-historical method in Biblical exegesis, since a scholar who was mostly concerned with understanding precisely what the text is saying needed to be more familiar with the grammar and vocabulary than was otherwise available.\textsuperscript{102} However, even in these cases, often literal-leaning exegetes, such as the Dominicans at the inception of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, proceeded without utilizing Hebrew or Jewish texts.\textsuperscript{103}

Part of this reticence was due to the widespread belief in the Christian community that the Hebrew text had been corrupted from God’s divine plan by influence from the Jewish people, who had edited the text for their own purposes and removed Christological references.\textsuperscript{104} This charge was particularly common in the Mendicant orders, but can be attributed as far back as Jerome and Justin Martyr. Sydney Griffith writes,

> From the early Islamic period onward, in the arguments about religion that proliferated from the beginning until well into the Middle Ages, the charge and countercharge of corrupting the scriptures became a staple item in the apologetic and polemical texts composed by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. In the judgement of at least one prominent, modern scholar,\textsuperscript{105} this interreligious concern for the integrity and authenticity of the Biblical text between Jews,

\textsuperscript{101}Deeana Klepper, \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{103}Ibid, 18
\textsuperscript{104}Ilona N. Rashkow, “Hebrew Bible Translation and the Fear of Judaization”, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{105}This scholar is Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, posited in her book \textit{Intertwined Worlds
Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages ultimately contributed to the rise of the modern science of Biblical criticism.\textsuperscript{106}

To support these charges, Christian scholars referenced the Jewish practice of \textit{tiqqun soferim}:

“certain changes in the text of the Bible made by early scribes (soferim) in places where are offensive or show lack of respect to God.”\textsuperscript{107}

An example of this polemic can be found in the argument of a medieval scholar named Rufinas. His argument is mainly concentrated on the presumption that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament had been corrupted between the time of Jerome’s translation and his own day. Such a presumption leads to the conclusion that the Latin Vulgate, whatever version might be available, is the best text, while the Greek Septuagint and in particular the Hebrew text are useless for the understanding of the Scripture….The concepts of Rufinas were not universally accepted, but it seems that they represented an important current of opinion among intellectuals in western Europe.\textsuperscript{108}

Though the Christianity and Judaism of the Renaissance had both come out of the same traditions and sources, they had long since ceased a mutual dialogue and had developed their methodology separately from one another. Despite the estrangement, the two religions were not wholly disconnected, and while lacking in mutual dialogue, they were still in conversation with one another. Instead of discourse, the two religions were shaped by the actions and attitudes of the other.

While relations between the two religions appears to have been one of mutual wariness and frequent disrespect, Jews had been able to maintain some degree of physical security in Europe for centuries, due to the influence of Augustine,

\textsuperscript{106} Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman eds., \textit{Scripture and Pluralism}, p. 30
\textsuperscript{107} Ari Geiger, “In \textit{Hebraeo Habetur}”, p. 157
who argued that the Jews were to remain at large in the world to testify to the Old Law and to bear witness to the promise of the Old Testament, which will be fulfilled at the end of time with all mankind, including Jews, pagans, and infidels, being converted to and perfected in Christ. The Augustinian justification held sway with remarkable tenacity for centuries. But in the thirteenth century, this theological argument for the protection of the Jews in Christian Europe began to be eroded by new Christian initiatives.  

England exiled its Jewish population in 1290 and Austria in 1421. When England expelled the Jews from its borders, a contemporary commentator, wrote, “You have achieved in one day what the Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt failed to do.” France expelled the Jews in 1306 and again in 1327, before exiling them definitively in 1394. Between 1420 and 1510, no fewer than ten provinces in the Holy Roman Empire expelled the Jews from their borders.

The most dramatic turn came when Queen Isabella (1451-1504) and King Ferdinand (1452-1516) of Spain exiled their native Jews on January 2, 1492, over a quarter of a million individuals. Another quarter million were forced to convert, though such conversions were usually viewed with suspicion and could still often lead to continued harassment and danger. Spain had historically been home to thriving Jewish intellectual communities and their loss had serious consequences. In 1499, the Spanish Jews “driven to Portugal had to flee once again, or else undergo baptism. But even these new Christians were subjected to pogroms that culminated

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109 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture, p. 114
111 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture, p. 115
112 David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 4: the ten are as followes: Vienna (1420-1421), Cologne (1424), Bavaria (1442, 1450), Würzburg (1453), Passau (1478), Mecklenberg (1492), Magdeburg (1493), Württemberg (1498), Nuremberg (1498-1499), Ulm (1499), and Brandenburg (1510).
in the dreadful massacre of Lisbon in 1506.”

As Spanish rule spread, the Jews were banished from Sicily in 1492, followed by Naples two decades later.

Venice, in what was believed at the time to be an extremely generous and liberal approach (as opposed to exile), created the first ghetto in 1516, an idea that rapidly spread throughout Europe. By 1500, there were “fewer Jews in Western and central Europe than at any point in the previous 1000 years.” David Price identifies this point in time as “the nadir of Jewish life in western and central Europe prior to the Holocaust.”

Part of the willingness to exile the Jews now, as opposed to previously, was partially due to the change in the fifteenth century as Christian bankers started to be allowed to charge interest, “under the guise of administrative charges or reimbursement for lost income,” thus removing the economic need for Jews to serve in the banking profession.

The cities, where the scholars were located, were particularly dangerous for Jewish people: “The Jews who were expelled from the cities took refuge in the provinces where, apart from exceptional, isolated cases of displacement, they could take up residence without ever having to subject themselves to forced baptism.” Practicing Judaism became increasingly dangerous as Jews were falsely accused of desecrating the Eucharist and murdering Christian boys for their blood. Jewish books were routinely banned or even burned. Hailperin notes “that those who displayed the greatest zeal in the destruction of Hebrew books were usually converted Jews.” Johannes Reuchlin warned of the effects these policies could have on scholarship in 1506.

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114 Ibid, p. 95; Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 18
115 David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 4
116 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 18
117 David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 4
118 Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. 6
119 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 96
120 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 250
stating, “the unfortunate events which we have experienced recently with the Jews—they have been expelled not only from Spain but also from our German lands. In quest of new settlements they have been forced to migrate all the way to the Beduins [Turkey]. As a result, it may come to pass that the Hebrew idiom of their sacred writings will undergo great destruction and disappear from our midst.””

Despite these challenges and persecutions, European Jewish scholars had continued to produce high-quality scholarship and exegesis, practicing their faith through study (as the Christian theologians were doing at the same time). Like their Christian counterparts, Jewish exegetes relied upon a similar four-fold method for their scriptural interpretation. The four forms for rabbinical hermeneutics were *peshat, remez, derash,* and *sod.* The four forms made an acronym for the word *Pardes,* the Hebrew word for paradise.\footnote{Ibid, 22}  *Peshat* is often translated as “simple,” referring to the literal interpretation. *Remez* means “illusion,” often understood as the allegorical interpretation. *Derash* is translated as “exposition” and corresponds to the homiletical interpretation. *Sod,* translated as “mystery,” is used for the esoteric interpretation.\footnote{Ilona N. Rashkow, “Hebrew Bible Translation and the Fear of Judaization”, p. 222.} The four-fold method in Jewish exegesis corresponds similarly to the scholarly Christian equivalent.

Jewish exegesis had its own major figures, the most important of whom were Shlomo Itzhaki (or Solomon ben Isaac) of Troyes, known more popularly as Rashi (1040-1105), Samuel ben Meir (c.1080/85-c.1174), Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164), Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), David Kimhi (c. 1160-c. 1235), and Nahmanides (1194-1280).
Of all the medieval Jewish exegetes, Rashi by far had the most influence on the Christian Hebraists. Rashi studied at the universities of Mainz and Worms before returning to Troyes. Due to that decision, the Northern French scholarship gained momentous reputation as Rashi set up a school that soon became renowned throughout Europe. He commented on the majority of the books of the Bible, and possibly all of them (though several commentaries attributed to him appear to have been written by someone else). Rashi’s exegetical method is primarily regarded as an integrated middle ground between the literal and allegorical interpretations. The allegorical midrash interpretations were the primary approach in French, Jewish exegesis, but through Rashi’s work, the literal supplemented the former. He extensively cited other rabbis and “[a]t least three-quarters of Rashi’s comments are based on rabbinic sources.” His original work primarily consists of philological explication, and he frequently referred to the French vernacular to explain confusing Hebrew phrases (about one thousand such instances are noted in his Biblical commentaries). In addition to the Bible, Rashi commented extensively on the Babylonian Talmud.\footnote{124} Rashi’s work was well-known and widely read. In 1475, it was Rashi’s Torah commentary that earned the title of first Hebrew book to be printed on a press, seven years before the first printing of the Hebrew Bible.\footnote{125} While it cannot be proven that Rashi was familiar with the Christian, Latin commentaries, Shereshersky argues that at times his work suggests that he is in dialogue with them.\footnote{126} While Rashi had no sons, his daughters had numerous children who became prominent rabbis, the most well-known of them being Rashbam who surely “knew of the Latin Bible and its commentaries.”\footnote{127}

\footnote{124}{“Rashi”, Encyclopedia Judaica, pp, 101-105}
\footnote{127}{Ibid, p. 77}
Rashbam, or Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, was the son of Rashi’s daughter Jochebed and one of his disciples, Meir. He studied primarily with his famous grandfather. He was a prolific writer, commenting on every book in the Hebrew Bible (only the Pentateuch has survived to modern times in a nearly-complete form), but made his living as a sheep-farmer and the cultivator of a vineyard. Rashbam was most focused on the literal sense of the text (peshat), referring to it as “profound.” He occasionally made use of the Midrash or Halakhah when they were aligned with his perception of the text’s literal meanings. He supplemented Rashi’s commentary on the Talmud by completing the parts that Rashi had failed to complete before his death. Rashbam himself viewed his work as an extension of Rashi’s, however, Rashbam’s work was characterized by its extensive length and verbosity.

One of the greatest exegetes to come out of the Spanish Jewish scholarship was Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra. Unlike the all of the other Jewish scholars discussed here, he was not a rabbi, and as such, ended up making his living as a Hebrew poet dependent on wealthy patrons. Ibn Ezra focused on the literal, peshat sense of the text, and this was reflected in his commentaries on Genesis, Exodus, the Psalms, Song of Songs, Esther, Daniel, and the minor prophets. In the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch, he wrote that his work “is bound by the cords of grammar/and approved by the eye of reason.” He devoted much of his work to “philological-contextual interpretation…accompanied by a strong methodological awareness.” He rejected sections of Midrash that were not based on the Biblical text itself.

The Aristotelian scholar Moses Maimonides (alternatively known as Moses ben Maimon or Rambam) was originally from Spain before being forced to flee from persecution as a teenager; he ended up spending most of his life in Egypt. Maimonides’s work is characterized by a

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128 “Rashbam”, Encyclopaedia Judaica, pp. 771-773
129 Ibn Ezra, Abraham ben Meir”, Encyclopaedia Judaica, pp. 665-668
rationalistic approach. He commented on the Mishnaic portion of the Talmud, wrote philosophical treatises, studied medicine, and did extensive work on halakhah, the legal aspects of Jewish practices. He is described as the most influential Jewish figure in the post-Talmudic period.\footnote{“Maimonides, Moses”; Oxford Dictionary of Judaism, pp. 436-437; “Halakha” p. 293, Encyclopedia Judaica; “Maimonides, Moses”, Encyclopaedia Judaica, pp. 381-395}

Rabbi David Kimhi (also known as Radak) was a French exegete known for his dedication to philology. He wrote a treatise known as the \textit{Mikhlo\l}, which was separated into grammatical and lexicographical sections. He relied on the methodology of Ibn Ezra in his exegetical work, the first example of such was a \textit{peshat} commentary on the Book of Chronicles. He strove to follow in the footsteps of his father Rabbi Joseph Kimhi and his brother Rabbi Moses Kimhi, who became known for his exegesis and his focus on the morphology of Hebrew.\footnote{“Kimhi, Moses”, Encyclopaedia Judaica, p. 158} Kimhi took issue with a “number of Christological interpretations by demonstrating Christian ‘corruption’ of the text,” thereby turning the Christian charge against the Jews back on themselves. Additionally, he argued against the Christian’s reliance on the allegorical method of interpretation.\footnote{“Kimhi, David”, Ibid, p. 155}

Moses ben Nahman (known both as Nahmanides and Ramban) was a medieval, Spanish rabbinical scholar. He gained some of his skills from the school established by Rashi in northern France. In a debate between Nahmanides and the converted Jew, Pablo Christiani, Nahmanides was triumphant, winning the argument in front of his king and the leaders of both the Dominican and Franciscan orders. Most of his work consists of commentary on the Talmud and Halakhah, though he did complete a commentary on the Pentateuch late in his life. Nahmanides held that the Torah was the sacred “source of all knowledge.” He made use of both Rashi and Abraham
Ibn Ezra in his analytical work, not hesitating to argue against them when he felt they were in the wrong.\textsuperscript{133}

\textbf{Scholastics and Humanists in dialogue}

As universities put forth a new educational model, the Scholastic movement was proliferating throughout them and even making its way into the monastery. Scholasticism attempted to logically prove Christian doctrine and belief. Scholastics would take a question that Christianity had a defined answer to, such as ‘Does God exist?’ and try to work backwards to be able to logically prove that in fact, God did exist. A similar method was used to attempt to harmonize disagreements in the patristic texts or in scripture. They saw their job not as critiquing works or improving upon them, but as synthesizing divergent opinions within the Church.\textsuperscript{134} They approached their issues indirectly, preferring to rely on past authorities and interpretations to build an argument.\textsuperscript{135} Their three sources of authority were the Bible, church histories, and theological commentaries.\textsuperscript{136} The concerns were primarily theological and doctrinal, rather than ethical. Scholastics believed that “true doctrine would lead to a responsible moral life.”\textsuperscript{137} The Scholastics drew a line between the sciences of theology and philosophy, treating them as separate, rather than interchangeable, disciplines.\textsuperscript{138} Scholasticism generally found more of an audience in Northern Europe than the south.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{133} “Nahmanides”, Ibid, pp. 739-747
\textsuperscript{134} Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, p. 307.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, p. 308
\textsuperscript{139} Lewis W. Spitz, Luther and German Humanism, p. III 120.
The two major Scholastic universities in Europe were the University of Padua, in Italy, and the University of Paris. The scholastic method of education utilized the pre-humanist liberal arts, known as the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the quadrivium (geometry, astronomy, music, and arithmetic) that were recommended for study by Saint Augustine. However, in practice, the Scholastics rarely were able to produce equal education in all seven of these subjects and a typical education usually tilted depending on the specialties of the instructor.\textsuperscript{140} This method was utilized by scholars such as Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard (1096-1160), Gratian (d. by c.1160), Bonaventure (1221-1274), Johann Eck (1486-1543), Robert Holcot (d.1349), St. Albert the Great (d.1280), and, of course, Thomas Aquinas.\textsuperscript{141}

Aquinas, in particular, produced dozens of volumes of theology and scriptural commentary over the course of his prolific career. While Aquinas allowed for metaphorical interpretations, he, unlike most of his contemporaries, placed a strong emphasis on the literal sense of the text. Aquinas was a student of Aristotle, a skilled articulator of the Catholic doctrine, and fascinated with the roles of reason and revelation in faith. Both Aquinas and Lombard, with their \textit{Summa Theologiae} and \textit{Sentences} respectively, produced theological texts and would become academic classics, often being accorded a place in the university just below the Bible itself.\textsuperscript{142}

While Scholasticism is usually described in opposition to Humanism, the two learned from each other and, from the 13\textsuperscript{th} century on, developed and grew together.\textsuperscript{143} Instead of the popular narrative of two philosophies, diametrically opposed to one another, it is much more accurate to acknowledge that the majority of theologians drew from both schools. Even the most notable

\textsuperscript{140} Kevin Madigan, \textit{Medieval Christianity: A New History}, pp. 261.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, pp. 257-286
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, pp. 257-286.
\textsuperscript{143} Steven Ozment, \textit{The Age of Reform}, p. 306.
Humanists, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), had tremendous respect for the Scholastics and believed that Scholasticism served a valuable purpose. Humanist critiques tended to focus less on the substance of Scholastic thought and more on the particular form in which it was articulated and developed, including the educational methods of Scholastic scholars. Scholasticism also had long-lasting influences on Protestant thought. Much of the tension derived less from theological debates, and more from fights over teaching positions at universities. \(^\text{144}\)

Aquinas, Abelard and many of the other theologians embraced the Aristotelian logic that, with the newfound access to Aristotle’s complete work, was revitalized during this time period. It became increasingly popular, with nearly half of the over “2700 Greek manuscripts of Aristoleica known today dat[ing] to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.” \(^\text{145}\) Over three thousand editions of Aristotle’s works were produced between the invention of the printing press and the start of the seventeenth-century. The sixteenth-century produced more translations of Aristotle and Aristotelian commentators than had been ever been produced previously combined. There were, at the minimum, twenty times more editions of Aristotelian commentaries than Platonic ones. \(^\text{146}\)

These scholars sought to synthesize apparent contradictions between Aristotle and Christian doctrine. Such attempts had been made since the early church, though the patristic writings mainly made use of Aristotle’s works on logic, the only texts of his available to them in Latin at

\(^{144}\) Paul Oskar Kristeller, “Florentine Platonism and its relations with Humanism and Scholasticism


\(^{146}\) Ibid, p. 50
the time.\textsuperscript{147} This was pursued despite the repeated banning of the study of Aristotle by numerous bishops and popes who found the contradictions between the two to be too dangerous for public consumption and that Aristotelianism “represented a naturalism incompatible with Christian belief.”\textsuperscript{148} The rise of Aristotelianism in Christian circles went against the prevailing academic norm, which utilized Platonism instead, including its dualistic approach between the spiritual and temporal domains and its focus on self-knowledge as a source. Kristeller writes, this earlier “tendency to harmonize Plato rather than Aristotle with Christian theology was amply sanctioned by the Greek patristic authors.”\textsuperscript{149} Aristotelianism affected all aspects of scholarship, including biblical exegesis, which “began to deal with questions of structure (\textit{forma tractatus}), style (\textit{forma tractandi}), the background of the author of a biblical book, etc.”\textsuperscript{150} The revival of Aristotelianism led also to greater focus on chapter divisions and other organizational tools such as concordances in the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{151}

Aristotelianism was part of what led to the increased focus on the literal text, since Aristotelianism “would perceive the ‘spirit’ of Scripture as something not hidden behind or added on to, but expressed by the text….neither can we understand the Bible by distinguishing letter from spirit and making a separate study of each.”\textsuperscript{152} It also allowed Biblical studies to move away from the notion of a universal. Aristotelian though was based on the notion of causality and Christian Aristotelians, as described most famously by Thomas Aquinas, thought

\textsuperscript{147} Komonchak, Joseph A., Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane, eds. \textit{The New Dictionary of Theology}. Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987, p. 57
\textsuperscript{149} Paul Oskar Kristeller, \textit{Renaissance Thought and its Sources}, p. 53
\textsuperscript{150} Ari Geiger, “\textit{In Hebraeo Habetur}”, p. 149
\textsuperscript{152} Smalley, Beryl. \textit{The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages}. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964, p. 293
that God was the first mover. That carries over into scripture, which also is derived from God, but “the sacred writers are authors too, chosen by God as instruments of his revelation, and acting under his motion, but choosing their own words and material. Scripture began to seem less like a mirror of universal truth and more like a collection of works whose authors had intended to teach particular truths; so exegesis was bound to resolve itself into the scientific study of these authors.” This Aristotelian approach allowed for the first separation between theology and exegesis as separate disciplines.

Aristotelianism experienced a revival in the twelfth-century with its use of scholars such as Peter Abelard. The “Aristotelian orientation of the university philosophers can be traced at Paris, Louvain, and other centers far into the sixteenth century.” Kristeller notes that “at the German universities, Aristotelianism was strong and productive through the fifteenth century, and continued to flourish long after the Protestant Reformation…thanks to the influence of Melanchthon, Aristotle remained the chief source of academic instruction in the philosophical disciplines.” Jordan writes, “The complexities of theological Aristotelianism are only compounded by the Renaissance. There is, first, a humanist assault on the mingling of Aristotelian philosophy with the Gospel. Second, there comes a philological drive towards the purer representation of original Aristotelianism.”

The Christian Aristotelians not only studied Aristotle’s work, but read and wrote in dialogue with the Muslim Aristotelians’ commentaries, particularly Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-1198). The work of Maimonides on Aristotle also played a valuable role. Avicenna

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153 Ibid, p. 293
154 Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought and its Sources, p. 40
155 Ibid, p. 41
156 Joseph A. Komonchak et Al. ed., The New Dictionary of Theology, p. 59
was a physician and philosopher who wrote over one hundred philosophical treatises. He was primarily an Aristotelian, but was also influenced by Neo-Platonism thought. Numerous Latin editions of his work were published in Venice, starting in 1495.\textsuperscript{159}

Averroes, like Avicenna, was a physician and philosopher-scholar. He was known in the Middle Ages as ‘The Commentator’ for his extensive Aristotelian commentaries. His works were introduced into Christian thought around 1230 and subsequently taught in several universities.

His works, while written in Arabic, were translated into Hebrew and Latin. Translations of Arabic Aristotelianism had become increasingly common, usually by Spanish translators, starting in the twelfth-century.\textsuperscript{160} However, Averroism, as the school of philosophy based on his work was known, received backlash from numerous Scholastics, such as Bonaventure.\textsuperscript{161} Kristeller writes that Averroism is the “[m]ost ambiguous and controversial” term of all, since it has been applied by historians to one particular trend of medieval Aristotelianism. If we understand by Averroism the use of Averroes’ commentary on Aristotle, every medieval Aristotelian including Aquinas was an Averroist. If we limit the term to all those thinkers who made a neat distinction between reason and faith, Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology, practically all teachers of philosophy, as distinct from the theologians, took that position, from the later thirteenth century through the fourteenth century and later. Finally, if we mean by Averroism the adherence to one distinctive doctrine of Averroes, namely the unity of the intellect in all men, we are singling out a much smaller group of thinkers who still differ among each other on the numerous other questions which occupied and divided Aristotelian philosophers of the period.\textsuperscript{162}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{158} Beryl Smalley, \textit{The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages}, p. 295
\item \textsuperscript{159} Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., eds. \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church}, pp.139-149.
\item \textsuperscript{160} Joseph A. Komonchak et Al. ed., \textit{The New Dictionary of Theology}, p. 58
\item \textsuperscript{161} Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., eds. \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church} pp. 138-139.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Paul Oskar Kristeller, \textit{Renaissance Thought and its Sources}, p. 39
\end{itemize}
Kristeller urges, as a result, caution in using such labels, given the ambiguity in their designation, but his point is further valuable in emphasizing that Averroism was a complex phenomenon that defies easy categorization.

Thomas Aquinas stands as a giant in theology. His influence was so far-reaching that he was taught in all major universities. The students and professors who embraced his theological approach and built upon it were known as Thomists. Thomism, unsurprisingly, enjoyed much of its popularity within Aquinas’s own monastic order, the Dominicans. Thomism continued to develop Aquinas’s theories on matter, intellect (including the intellect of God himself), the soul, free will, epistemology, causality, the divine nature and the sacraments. Thomism held that there could be no conflict between faith and reason, since God was the author of them both. Thomism also frequently found itself in opposition to the school of the Scotists.163

Scotists were a school of theologians founded by Duns Scotus (1266-1308), a medieval theologian and a Franciscan monk.164 He was influential in Franciscan thought, developing further the theories of the old Franciscan school led by figures such as Bonaventure,165 but his theories ended up being contentious in humanist and Protestant circles.166 Scotus was heavily influenced by Augustine and believed in the concept of predestination.167 Ozment writes that “the hallmark of Scotist theology was its appreciation of God’s distance and otherness,” a quality that most Humanists strongly disagreed with.168 Erasmus and Henry of Ghent (d.1293) were some of Scotus’s most vehement critics. The Scotists frequently clashed with the Thomists, since Scotus believed that “Thomist theology seemed to run the danger of entangling the divine

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164 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, p. 15.
167 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, p. 33.
168 Ibid, p. 15
will in the secondary causation of the church, priests, sacraments, and accidental forms of grace.” The Scotists had allies, however, in the form of the Ockhamists (it is worth noting that both Ockhamism and Scotism were founded by Franciscans, and they found a shared opposition in Thomism, a primarily Dominican school), who shared their belief in the doctrine that “will [was] supreme over intellect.”

Ockhamism was inspired by the theology of William of Ockham (1285-1347), an English Franciscan who studied and taught at Oxford. Ockham produced numerous commentaries and he focused especially on the writings of Lombard and of Aristotle, which he was determined to ‘purify.’ He was a skilled logician, but his radical views led to him being excommunicated in 1328. He rejected the philosophy of universals, which was generally accepted at the time. In his theological work, he did his best “to eliminate anything that limited God’s omnipotence and freedom,” including the notion that the universe could not have been created in a way differently than it was. He believed that God could only be accepted through revelation, but could not be proved through philosophical logic. His work was a foundation for the study known as the *via moderna*, the revival of Nominalism, the Conciliar Movement, and covenant theology. Ockham recognized the authority of the king over the pope, arguing that a pope could not choose

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169 Ibid, p. 33
170 Ibid, p. 244
171 Ibid, p. 308
173 Ibid
174 Ibid
175 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 308.
a king, but a king had the right to overthrow a heretical pontiff. He was a strong influence on Gabriel Biel (c.1420-1495), Robert Holcot, and Martin Luther (1483-1546).\textsuperscript{178}

Ockhamism held that individuals cannot achieve their own salvation; while they can initiate the salvific process,\textsuperscript{179} these efforts then have to be accepted by God.\textsuperscript{180} All people were believed to have the intellect and ability to find their own salvation.\textsuperscript{181} These views left him open to the criticism of Pelagianism, a frequent term used since the age of the Church Fathers to denote heresy that believed an individual was capable of achieving salvation through their own works and without the help of God, a heresy that placed works above faith.

Ockhamism has been described as a juxtaposition between “an Aristotelian concept of man with an Augustinian concept of God.”\textsuperscript{182} Ockham and other Nominalists believed that the doctrine of the ‘infusion of grace’ articulated by Aquinas and the Catholic of Church was incorrect, because if God granted grace that caused you to love God, then the love was not given freely.\textsuperscript{183} In Ockhamism, some scholars have felt that “the divorce between reason and revelation became final and the golden age of scholasticism effectively came to an end. Faith that was content simply to believe had supplanted faith that sought full understanding.”\textsuperscript{184} One of his most controversial theories was in the ethical sphere: Ockham held that sin referred to anything that was prohibited by God. Instead of any intrinsic characteristics or objective morality, ethics were entirely based on the divine will: “Most Ockhamists went so far as to assert

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{178} Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 1758.
\item \textsuperscript{179} Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, p. 234.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 237.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Ibid, p. 234
\item \textsuperscript{182} Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, p. 237.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Ibid, pp. 233-234
\item \textsuperscript{184} Ibid, p. 15
\end{itemize}
that God could command someone to hate Him.”¹⁸⁵ This movement was particularly popular in European universities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁸⁶

The advent of the printing press in the 1440s by Johannes Gutenberg (1398-1468) revolutionized the intellectual life and the communal sharing of ideas in the religious community. The printing press allowed for the easy dissemination of works of religious scholarship. The first Italian printing press, in the heart of the early humanist movement, was established less than 25 years later, in 1465.¹⁸⁷ Printers like Aldus Manutius (1449-1515) in Venice (who established his press in 1495)¹⁸⁸ and Johann Froben (c. 1460-1527) in Basel (who established his press in 1491)¹⁸⁹ were influential in the printing of humanist and Reformation tracts and the creation of new, accessible translations of the Patristics and the Greek classics. Froben in particular published many of the major works of Luther and Erasmus, along with being active in “Christian-Hebraica publication.”¹⁹⁰ Such printers were usually scholars in their own rights, publishing out of an ideological passion for the spread of learning rather than simply economic motivations. The press spread quickly, keeping pace with the rising tide of Humanism. By 1500, over 200 cities had established printing presses.¹⁹¹

The 1470s saw the beginnings of the first Jewish presses in Italy.¹⁹² In 1488, the first complete Hebrew Bible was printed by the Soncino family in Italy (they would go on to become owners of one of the most prominent Jewish presses in Italy), but the work was not available to a

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¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 535
¹⁸⁷ Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 14
¹⁹⁰ Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 44
¹⁹¹ Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 199.
¹⁹² Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 20
northern audience for another several years. Roughly three decades later, in 1516, the first Hebrew Bible was published with the papal imprimatur that marked it as being approved by the Church. This work was published by the printer Daniel Bomberg (d. between 1549 and 1553) with the help of a converted Jew named Felix Praetensis (d.1539). In 1523, Bomberg also was the first printer to publish a complete concordance of the Old Testament, a text that would end up being popular among both Jewish and Christian scholars. That same year he published the first full copy of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, complete with commentaries and glosses. It was published with papal permission. He also collaborated with Jewish scholars to produce numerous other rabbinical commentaries, such as Kimhi’s *Book of Roots*, standing in contrast to the “Parisian Hebraists [who] gave the world a never-ending series of editions of the Psalms.”

However, Bomberg was most well-known for his publication of the four-volume *Mikra’ot G’dolot*, a highly accurate Hebrew text of the Old Testament containing also the Aramaic Targum and rabbinic commentaries and glosses that was “found on virtually every Hebraist’s desk.” It was first published in 1517, but was republished multiple times in the next half century. The format in which Bomberg chose to print soon became the standard for all

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194 Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 38
195 Ibid, p. 38
196 Ibid, p. 37
197 Ibid, p. 38
198 Ibid, p. 38
199 Ibid, p. 36
200 Ibid, p. 36
editions of the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud throughout Europe.\textsuperscript{201} His formatting and typeface became known as the ‘Bomberg Print.’\textsuperscript{202}

Manutius, in particular, placed a strong emphasis on the preservation of the Greek classics through use of the printing press. He was aided in this venture by the numerous Greek refugees living in Venice at the time. Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1453. This military incursion had huge repercussions for the incipient humanist movement. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the main population centers had migrated inwards, way from the coasts, cutting them off from the Mediterranean which was Arab-controlled through much of the middle ages and the classical texts of Greece and the Middle East.\textsuperscript{203} The lack of trade between the Arab and Christian Empires allowed for little cross-cultural exchange and shared resources up until the fall of Constantinople.\textsuperscript{204}

With the fall of the city, dozens of Greek refugees fled to Western Europe, bringing with them classical manuscripts and their linguistic expertise. Many of the scholarly refugees—such as John Argyropoulos (1415-1487), Constantine Lascaris (1434-1501), John Lascaris (1445-1535), and Demetrius Calcondylus (1423-1511)\textsuperscript{205}—were taken in by wealthy, humanist patrons and were paid to teach Greek to the early Florentine Humanists who wanted to understand the language better so they could better understand the classics that they loved. With the new manuscripts and documents, Western scholars now had access to texts that they had never had in full or were older and had fewer copy mistakes.

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid, p. 36
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid
\textsuperscript{203} Ozment, p. 2
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid, p. 1
\textsuperscript{205} Lewis W. Spitz, \textit{Luther and German Humanism}, pp. 8, 10.
This opened up not only better texts from well-known philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, but also the works from the medieval Arab philosophers Avicenna and Averroes. For example, prior to 1150, only the *Organon*, the collection of Aristotle’s logical works, were translated into Latin (the *Organon* had been translated by Boethius²⁰⁶ (c.480-c.524) early on). The others were preserved and later translated through the efforts of Arabic scholars.²⁰⁷ For example, “[t]he Middle Ages had known [Aristotle’s] works only in a very limited selection or through quotations in Averroes.”²⁰⁸

All of these multifold factors paved the way for the creation of Humanism. Humanism is generally understood to have originated in Italy, usually marked by the career of Francis Petrarch (1304-1374), known as the ‘Father of Humanism’. Petrarch was characterized by his frequent critiques of Scholasticism and his love for the classics. Petrarch’s ideas found expression in the Florentine Academy, led by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino. Florence became the first humanist center and the Academy was the progenitor of philosophic Italian Humanism.²⁰⁹ Humanism in Italy spread as educated men, passionate about history and literature, began to develop discussion groups on the classics and wealthy nobleman sought to purchase better and older manuscripts. Centers of humanist study then developed in Padua, Verona, Vicenza, and Arezzo.²¹⁰ Italian Humanism placed a strong emphasis on Roman and Greek history and language, and on the purification of the Latin texts. Florentine Humanism held to the doctrine of *hominis dignitas*, or the dignity of man, indicative of its anthropocentric

²⁰⁸ Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, p. 45
²¹⁰ Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism*, p. 5.
Platonism. The Florentines in particular wanted to harmonize Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies.

Pico went another step forward and sought ways to create a synthesis not only of the two philosophies, but also of Islam, Kabbalah, and Hermeticism. Lewis Spitz writes that

[i]n [Pico’s] Conclusiones and Apologia, Pico explained that the great teachers such as Moses had transmitted many of their ideas orally through the seventy wise men in unbroken tradition until they had been embodied in the Cabala. It was the surest and most trustworthy key to Christian secrets, ‘greatly’ confirming the Christian religion. In it would be discovered such basic Christian doctrines as original sin, the Trinity, and the incarnation. In the Apologia, he declared that nothing makes one surer of the divinity of Christ than the Cabala. It was Pico who in his Heptaplus suggested the parallel between the ideas of the cabalists and the Pythagoreans. Pico derived from Ficino the idea that Platonism itself was based upon older Hebrew sources.

He believed strongly in the existence of a central, unifying truth. He “was convinced that it was possible to establish the grand unity of a Christian philosophical system with the Cabalist and Hellenic metaphysics. Pico agreed with the Cabalists that Hebrew was the first, purest, language.” He also believed that a Christianized Kabbalah could be used to convert Jews. Some of the other notable Humanists included Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), Leonardo Bruni, and Marsilius of Padua (1275-1342).

While Neo-Platonism was popular among many Humanists, it was particularly strong among the Italian Humanists. From Italy, humanist ideals began to spread, particularly from south to North. Intellectuals from places like Germany visited and learned from the southern Humanists.

212 I have chosen to use this particular spelling because of its widespread modern usage. Many of my sources to date prefer “Cabbala” or “Cabala” and a number of other variations. However, I have chosen to not change the spellings within quotations, which is why there might appear to usage of these variations.
214 Lewis W. Spitz, Luther and German Humanism, p. 15
215 Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, p. 67
216 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 96
The Hebraist and student of Kabbalah Johannes Reuchlin found Pico della Mirandola to be one of his greatest inspirations.

**Christian Hebraists: Medieval Exegetes, Renaissance Humanists, and Protestant Reformers**

Humanism chose to place an emphasis on the sensuality and the intelligence of human beings, instead of focusing on the depraved, sinful and powerlessness nature of humans in relation to God. Christian Humanists valued people’s ability to understand and to solve issues; they had a much greater belief in man’s innate ability to reason out concerns. They believed that such an intellect needed to find its fulfillment in an obligation to search for understanding and wisdom, to study and to gather knowledge. In a religious context, knowledge on religious matters was considered one of the greatest goods. While examples of similar sentiments can be seen earlier, Humanism was one of the earliest movements to harness these feelings into concrete goals: textual criticism, language acquisition, historical studies, et cetera.

Such a focus led to a strong emphasis on education, a value that would be passed on into the Reformation and beyond, eventually leading to the modern school system. God’s word, the Bible, was a vehicle through which a person could understand God, discern His will, and serve Him better. As such, the study of the Bible was not simply an intellectual pursuit, but a spiritual necessity. The Christian Humanists approached the texts and manuscripts with an eye to creating new methods for increased understanding, to find better and more accurate methods for interpreting scripture. They began to document and describe the procedures they utilized in their exegesis, allowing other scholars to understand and follow along with their scholarly choices.217

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217 Luca Bianchi, “Chapter 4: Continuity and Change in the Aristotelian tradition”, p. 54
Exegesis was a vital core to a religious life. Exegesis is the explication of a text (for our purposes, a sacred text). Such an explanation “may include translation, paraphrase, or commentary on the meaning.” An exploration of the meaning might seek to apply the text to daily life or its goal might be to decide what the author meant in the text.\(^{218}\) Exegesis is not to be confused with hermeneutics, which is the “science” of exegetical methodology.\(^{219}\)

Exegetical studies led to ecclesiastical doctrines, public morality, and to answering the most profound questions of a religious life. While exegesis was nothing new in religious academia, the widespread desire to learn about the scripture through any means possible, even to the point of utilizing previously virtually-taboo sources, such as the Talmud and Midrash, was novel.

The foundation of any exegesis, the Christian Humanists realized, was the accuracy of the texts and their translations. How could someone be expected to deduce the role of grace in the gospel if words were mistranslated or miscopied? As the text was God’s word, the need to have the most accurate texts was vital in ensuring that the word was preserved as closely as possible to God and the authors’ original intentions. To that end, Humanists started to gather manuscripts, collecting and cataloguing them. They used these manuscripts to go through their own texts, editing them, correcting errors as they went, relying on the notion that the older texts had more accurate renderings of the original scripture than the newer copies.\(^{220}\)

They compiled *correctoria*, comparative texts that catalogued mistakes in the Vulgate.\(^{221}\) This had been a practice initiated by the Dominicans in the early twelfth-century, but which the Humanists built upon and expanded.\(^{222}\) The Humanists went back to texts in the original


\(^{219}\) Ibid, p. 765

\(^{220}\) Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 307

\(^{221}\) Ari Geiger, “In *Hebraeo Habetur*”, p. 150

\(^{222}\) Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, p. 337
languages, questioned the authoritative translations that had been handed down, and tried to use their new expertise in Greek to see if they could now, with the access to more sources, establish a more accurate translation than had previously been possible.

In the century or so before the Renaissance, at the 1312 Council of Vienne,\textsuperscript{223} the Catholic Church required the implementation of university chairs of Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic at all major universities.\textsuperscript{224} This lofty goal was not realized at the time, but it shows evidence of the initial shift that started to see these languages as necessary. Over a hundred years later, in 1434, the Council of Basel felt the need to reissue this decree due to its lack of implementation.\textsuperscript{225} Even the attempts that were made to fill these posts, such as the Hebrew chairs, were unsuccessful due to the lack of qualified professors.\textsuperscript{226}

At this point in history, the focus was less on scholarship and more on the use of the language for purely conversionary purposes. Dominicans, during the late medieval period, were developing approaches to try to convert Muslims and Jews, on the assumption that such attempts would be more palatable in their own languages and from people who were more familiar with their sacred texts. The Dominican scholar, Raymond Peñafort (d.1275) established language schools specifically to educate friars in Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic.\textsuperscript{227}

However, even for polemical purposes, the use of any of language besides Latin in religious scholarship, such as Greek or Hebrew, stirred concern and wariness among the scholarly

\textsuperscript{223}David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{225}Johann Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, p. 8
\textsuperscript{226}Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 29
\textsuperscript{227}Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 16
community up to and during the Renaissance. Erasmus, writing to his friend and colleague, Martin Dorp (1485-1525), when speaking about a new translation he was working on with regards to the works of Jerome, said that “no sooner had the work been started and the news spread abroad than some men of eminent reputation and some distinguished theologians—distinguished, at least, in their own opinion—came running to beg the printer by all that is sacred not to allow any Greek or Hebrew to get involved, saying that those languages were dangerous and possessed no value.”

Christian Hebraists, even from the time of the early church, were a fragile minority. There were almost no competent Hebrew speakers for hundreds of years. A handful of academics often might acquire some sort of limited vocabulary, but almost no scholars were truly fluent in the language. There was little cross-cultural dialogue between the Christian academics and the Jewish rabbis and their communities. Jerome had been the greatest Hebraist of the Church Fathers and no other scholars were as influential in the integration of Hebrew with Christian scholarship until the Victorines in the twelfth century. Among the limited Hebraists of the medieval era, the Dominicans, Franciscans, and English Hebraists made up the largest proportions.

The Victorines were a group of monks studying in the abbey of St. Victor’s that developed their own school of theology. The Abbey of St. Victor was founded in Paris in 1108 by William of Champeaux (c.1070-1121). They were likely influenced by an academic shift that started right before their own work. As Grabois writes: “The situation changed in the last quarter of the eleventh century, when a greater number of Catholic exegetes began to take a deeper interest in

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229 Ari Geiger, “In *Hebraeo Habetur*”, p. 150
230 Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman eds., *Scripture and Pluralism*, p. 62
the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, so as to have a better understanding of the manuscripts they had to copy and to amend.”

Van Liere observes that “Hugh of St. Victor has been seen as the mastermind behind the essentially contemplative program of learning at the abbey of St. Victor, a program that sought to bridge the gap between scientia, Man’s inquisitive intellectual power, and sapientia, the human mind seeking God.”

This movement was one of the first unified attempts to improve the quality of texts prior to the Renaissance. By the twelfth century, “only parts of the Vulgate remained Jerome’s work, and even the alterations of the text were abundant. Further, a certain number of versions also attributed to Jerome, were copied and circulated, so that mistakes and textual corruptions proliferated.”

The most notable among the Victorines were Andrew of St. Victor (d.1175) and Hugh of St. Victor (d.1142).

The Victorines places a strong emphasis on the literal-historical method of exegesis, instead of the more popular allegorical method. Andrew, in fact, “ignored [allegorical interpretation] almost entirely.”

Robert Grant and David Tracy write that “in the twelfth century there was some emphasis in Jewish and Christian exegesis in the historical sense of the Old Testament. This emphasis, as Beryl Smalley has shown, permeates the work of Andrew of St. Victor. He constantly stresses the importance of the historical sense of scripture as his Jewish contemporaries have understood it.”

Beryl Smalley describes Andrew as “a humanist, with a taste for antiquities.”

Andrew was undoubtedly controversial, in reference to the key Christian

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232 Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman eds., Scripture and Pluralism, p. 59
235 Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible, p. 84; Robin R. Mundill, England’s Jewish Solution
236 Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman eds., Scripture and Pluralism, p. 61
verse “a virgin shall conceive,” for example, “Andrew insisted that the literal fulfillment of the prophecy belonged to the Jewish people; the Christian fulfillment in Christ was to be found only in the spiritual, allegorical interpretation.”

Hugh placed a greater emphasis on the “narrative context of Scripture.” He “insisted that the literal and historical sense of scripture formed the systematic foundation of all exegesis and thus was the foundation of all theological reflection.”

The Victorines believed that to be able to do literal exegesis well, they needed to be more informed about Hebrew and to study Jewish thought, which also placed greater emphasis on literal and historical interpretations. Hugh and Andrew relied on local rabbis to help them with their Hebrew and the text.

They utilized sources like Maimonides in their exegesis. Hugh of St. Victor also used Rashbam, and “followed Rashi’s method of annotating the text.” By using rabbinical thought, scholars like Andrew were accused of Judaization. Andrew of St. Victor borrowed heavily from Jerome’s Old Testament exegesis. For example, his commentary on three of the prophets was almost entirely “excerpt[ed] from Jerome.” The Victorines were influential not simply because of their exegesis, but because their knowledge was used by subsequent scholars. Deeana Klepper writes, “It was through Andrew [of St. Victor] that most thirteenth century scholars would get their knowledge of Jewish interpretation of Scripture.”

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238 Ibid, p. 111
239 Ibid, p. 100
240 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, p. 75
242 Ibid, p. 620
243 Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman eds., *Scripture and Pluralism*, p. 63
Roger Bacon (1214-1220) was a Franciscan philosopher. He dedicated much of his work to exploring Aristotle’s metaphysical works. In the 1260s, Bacon explained his “ideas on the defects he saw in western education” to a clerk in the household of the future Pope Clement IV (1195-1268) who, upon his election, asked Bacon to send him a copy of his theories. Bacon emphasized the importance of the study of Biblical languages in order to have any chance of understanding the text.²⁴⁵ Bacon took issue with the scholastic method that was popular in his day for their lack of consistent method when it came to textual criticism of the Bible.²⁴⁶ Bacon in fact criticizes the scholastics in nearly identical language to those of the later humanists. Instead of *ad fontes*, Bacon used *veritas in radice* as his slogan, ‘truth in the root.’²⁴⁷ He “explain[ed] how knowledge of Hebrew and Chaldean is indispensable to an understanding of the idiom and rhythm, and hence of the meaning of the Old Testament, and Greek to an understanding of the New. He points out that Latin thought, like the Latin language, is derivative. Consequently we need not only the Greek text but the Greek Fathers. We must go to the sources.”²⁴⁸ He felt these languages were vital for correcting the many errors in the Latin Vulgate.²⁴⁹ He appeared to be reasonably proficient in both Greek and Hebrew and made attempts at the creation of grammars for both.²⁵⁰ Despite these skills, he seems to have avoided much hands-on Biblical exegesis.²⁵¹

With the exception of Roger Bacon, after the Victorines, there were shockingly few Hebraists until the inception of the Renaissance, as increased manuscript study led to a renewed interest in the language and in new methods of exegesis.

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²⁴⁶ Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, p. 330
²⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 330
²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 331
²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 334
²⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 333
²⁵¹ Ibid, p. 333
With the lack of qualified Hebrew teachers in the Christian communities, motivated, Christian scholars began to look towards the Jewish community and the rabbis. Jewish physicians, who served the Church’s bishops and cardinals, often would take on a student or two as a personal favor, to pass on their language. Many were initially reluctant to tutor Christians, out of fear of being accused of attempting to convert Christians, a serious crime.  

Through these beginnings of cross-cultural dialogue and a growing number of competent scholars in the Hebrew language, Christian scholars began to explore using rabbinical commentaries and utilizing Jewish knowledge. This kind of exploration into Jewish thought led to the discovery of new concepts that fascinated Christian scholars, like Kabbalah. For the first time since the early Church Fathers, such attempts were not the isolated projects of the curious scholar, but were widespread efforts. Instead of one or two students studying the language, these students then began to produce grammars and dictionaries, to increase accessibility for other Christians to learn Hebrew, leading to an entire industry of Christian-produced works for learning Hebrew and the printing of Jewish texts, such as the Talmud, by Christians and for Christian consumption. A prime instance of this is that almost all of the Hebrew grammars published in this age contained copies of “at least the Pater Noster and usually also the Creed, the Ave Maria, and some other New Testament passages, ostensibly as examples of usage as well as devotional incentives for the study of biblical language.” An interesting example for the benefits of Hebrew study, given that none of those texts were originally in Hebrew to begin with.

\[\text{252} \text{ Benjamin Uffenheimer and Hanning Graf Reventlow, ed. Creative Biblical Exegesis: Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics through the Centuries, pp. 12-58} \]

\[\text{253} \text{ ibid} \]

Such a move was unprecedented and was much more controversial than the parallel movement with Greek. While Greek culture and philosophy had been appropriated and woven into Christian theology, Jewish scholarship had always been treated with much more suspicion. Judaism posed dangers to Christianity precisely because of the closeness of the religions. No Christians were able to forget that their faith had descended from the Jewish people and their wisdom, and that made the Jews, who read the same Biblical text but without the Christological implications, dangerous in the eyes of many Christians. Hailperin observes that “the Jews stood in an indissoluble connection with the Christian people on account of that inheritance which was always present, though in varying degrees, in their common Old Testament Scriptures.” They worshipped the same God, shared the same stories, and read the same prophecies. Greek philosophy did not pose the same threat because it served a separate, supplementary purpose; it was not a religion that the Christians had to fear competition with, whereas Judaism and Christianity, because of their overlap, were always in tension.

Hebrew was viewed as an extension of Judaism itself, and rabbinical commentaries certainly were viewed that way. Christians had never seen the commentaries as valuable, because what would it say if an unbeliever had insights into the text that they did not? The interpretations of non-Christians could not be trusted on their own Bible. The Jews were well-aware that Christians had hobbled themselves intellectually by refusing to use Hebrew and Jewish sources. As one Jewish scholar said, “You [the Christians] have not kept a single sign or testimony, as if you were thieving and ashamed of your descent…[Y]ou have left us the lineage and the nobility. For we keep all those—the law, the script, the language of the Book of Torah, which is the conclusive and main evidence for the Jewish faith. You have left us the original and taken for

Therefore, the reconnection of the Jewish and Christian scholarship, while beneficial, natural, and likely inevitable, was still a radical departure from a centuries-old approach. The rapidity with which the change took place only amplifies the dramatic nature of this reversal.

The most fundamental change that this produced was in the attitude of Christian scholars, who were acknowledging for the first time that the Jewish people had something to offer to Christian scholarship. It required a loosening of the supersessionist theology that had been prevalent since the later writings of the New Testament. Christians had always, through their recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, thought that they possessed a monopoly on scriptural and religious wisdom. Christians were now admitting that there were skills that they lacked, ways they needed help, and they were willing to look outside their own traditions to learn what they were missing. As Price writes, “suddenly the Renaissance ideal of returning ‘to the sources’…the methodology that would soon undergird the religious reform movements, expanded to include the recovery of Hebrew Scriptures. Despite explicit repudiations of Judaism, this development amounted to implicit acknowledgment by Christians that Jewish tradition and learning possessed value for them.”

Out of this dialogue came a changed relationship between Christian and Jewish communities. It was not always much better, but it was different. Some Christian scholars now had colleagues who were Jewish rabbis and scholars; they were able to see them as colleagues, kindred spirits at times. Some Christians began to try to approach Judaism not through the lens of their own faith, but on its own terms. Some scholars, such as Reuchlin, stopped viewing conversion as a

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257 David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 4
prerequisite to morality for Jews. Such individuals still were the minority, but there were now small, tenuous links between individuals who previously had avoided interaction. While this kind of cross-religious academic discourse had never been absent in its entirety, the most fundamental change that this period marks is the time at which it became a standardized tool and where the study of Hebrew and Jewish scholarship became systematized. Instead of one scholar studying for his own edification, the scholars were now seeking ways to transmit the information to hundreds of students through textbooks and professorships.

In this process, despite the development of the beginnings of respect, the majority of scholarship retained its appropriative nature. Interesting though Hebrew and the Old Testament was, it was interesting for what it told them about the New Testament and about Christianity and Christian doctrine. Reading texts in Hebrew did not stop Christological interpretations of prophecies or biased translations.

With the spread of Humanism and the continued call for *ad fontes*, to go back to the source of Christian life, there had never been a time with such a diverse number of theological views. Fringe groups such as the Wycliffites and the Hussites, calling for a changing approach to scriptural study and Church doctrine, were deemed heretical, but survived and gained momentum. As students studied the Bible, they began to measure the Church’s doctrines against scriptural evidence and compare the wealthy, bureaucratic organization to the religion of a wandering carpenter. Many concluded that a Church that sanctioned the use of indulgences, of using wealth to reach heaven, was one that had lost its way.

The reform movement reached its tipping point in the person of Martin Luther (1483-1546), a Biblical Studies professor at the newly founded University of Wittenberg, who set off a chain of events by nailing a list of arguments, entitled the Ninety-Five Theses, of protest to a church door
in Wittenberg, Saxony, in 1517. Luther marks a shift in Christian thought. He personified the growing theological trend by building his argument on scriptural evidence. Whereas scholars traditionally had used scripture as one authority among many, Luther made scripture the sole source (sola scriptura), rejecting tradition as an acceptable religious argument. He rejected Papal and sacramental authority for salvation, undermining the entire structure that proposed that faith was something that could be given by an earthly authority. He maintained that only faith (sola fide) and only grace (sola gratia) could assure it, as Paul the Apostle had stated. Scripture became a fundamental authority and was no longer used simply to justify the Church’s practice, but as a tool of subversion against Catholic orthodoxy. His approach was humanist, in shifting from the model of an “established tradition of interpretation” to one of the “text-oriented individual scholar.”

This reliance on scripture was emulated by other reformers such as Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and John Calvin (1509-1564). Martin Luther marks a break, not simply within the Catholic Church, but within the humanist movement. Humanists suddenly found themselves forced to take sides in the Reformation movement and became divided based on their theological unity with the Church. Ozment speculates that “If man increasingly became the measure of all things, it was because the church increasingly came to be no measure at all.” The study of the humanities “became for Protestant theologians what Aristotelian philosophy had been to late medieval theologians—the favored handmaiden of theology.”

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258 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, pp. 223-224.  
262 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 315.
Renaissance Hebraists: Nicholas of Lyra, Johannes Reuchlin, and Philip Melanchthon

This thesis chooses three theologians to explore further: Nicholas of Lyra, Johannes Reuchlin, and Philip. All three were Christian Hebraists, two were integral in the Christian Humanist movement. The three of them typified differing scholarly approaches and the growth of these approaches over the course of the Renaissance that different Christian scholars took when studying Hebrew and Judaism during this time. The movement of Christian Hebraism in the Renaissance can be followed through the trajectory of these three scholars.

Nicholas, a master Hebraist, is known mainly as a polemicist who was concerned with converting Jews to Christianity. Yet, unlike many of his contemporaries, he produced a literal exegetical commentary on the entire Bible, utilized Rashi and other rabbinical scholars, learned Hebrew, and strove to use that knowledge to correct the text of the Latin Vulgate. Nicholas, though living and writing a century before the other two figures, serves as a proto-Humanist. His focus on the accuracy of texts and translations served as a forerunner to later methods of textual criticism. His strong emphasis on the literal sense of the exegesis, above, for instance, the more popular allegorical sense, would become a hallmark of later Biblical exegesis, particularly at the beginning of the Reformation. Nicholas is able to function as a transitional figure, simultaneously working as the culmination of medieval Hebraism and the foundation for Renaissance Hebraism, with aspects of both fully integrated into his work.

Reuchlin was less of an exegete or polemic, but instead had a more pure academic mindset. He studied Hebrew and Kabbalah, producing a Hebrew textbook (containing a grammar and dictionary) that would go on to become the most popular text for learning Hebrew. It allowed for the study of Hebrew to start to be more widely available for Christian scholars. He wrote two
Kabbalistic dialogues between Christian and non-Christian characters, but his later work did not end in conversion for his Jewish characters, a radical departure from the contemporary norm. Reuchlin was a classic humanist of the Renaissance, influenced by the height of the Italian Renaissance in the Florentine Academy. Reuchlin demonstrates humanist principles matured. He was more interested in learning and studying for the acquisition and development of knowledge, instead of being interested in Hebrew only for how it might be used for the purposes of conversion. These values led to his own ill-wished fame as the defender of Jewish books.

Melanchthon walked a path in between Lyra and Reuchlin, using his Hebrew knowledge to produce numerous commentaries. He approached Hebrew and Judaism with more respect than many of his contemporaries, but with clear interests in Christian appropriation and its integration into a Christian framework. Like most Humanists, he was an academic with practical concerns. While Reuchlin and Melanchthon are contemporary, in the same way that the Renaissance and the Reformation are, the overlaps do not erase the distinctions in mindsets and concerns. Melanchthon was focused on using Hebrew to create systems of theology for the Reformation. A devoted follower and student of Martin Luther, and he utilized his expertise to codify the Lutheran movement and theology after its founder’s death. Here, Hebrew once again is valuable for a Christian purpose, but this case involved using Hebrew and scripture not for arguments against Judaism, but for internal debates within Christendom and for constructing new theology. Oddly enough, with the study of Hebrew becoming more and more common, Melanchthon represents a shift away from inter Christian-Jewish academic dialogue, as, with the advent of Christian educators in Hebrew, Christian scholars felt less of a need to engage in discourse and learn from Jewish scholars.
Melanchthon, it should be noted, was a particularly hard figure to research, surprisingly given that, of the three, he is the most well-known in modern times. For whatever reason, there appears to be pitifully little scholarship on his work on the Old Testament or Hebrew. This is particularly puzzling given that any work on Melanchthon makes sure to emphasize that he wrote several influential commentaries on the Old Testament. The only article that directly addressed the question of this thesis was by Timothy Wengert, and it expressed its own puzzlement at the complete lack of exploration of such an important aspect of a major figure’s work. There was one other article that Wengert had referenced and which I had come across previously but, unfortunately, the article was in German and therefore inaccessible to me. This contributes to why the exploration of Melanchthon is more limited in this thesis.

The three of these men exemplify three stages in the Christian Humanist transition in Christian Hebraism. They represent a growth in Christian thought, a measured, but increased, openness to join in dialogue, and the maturation of a new approach to Biblical studies that integrated Jewish scholarship and the Hebrew language into Christian exegesis. They, and the movement they embody, are emblematic of the drastic changes that were taking place in the Christian world during the Renaissance.
Chapter II: Nicholas of Lyra

Many facts about Nicholas of Lyra’s life are debated, starting with the date of his birth. Most scholars put his birth date around the year 1270, though the variance in proposed dates can often be by more than a decade. What is sure is that he was born in Lyre, Normandy, died in 1349, and that in the year 1300, Nicholas entered a Franciscan convent at Verneuil in Normandy, a “monastery nearby the town of Lyre.” This designation of convent rather than monastery seems to be a reference to Nicholas’s likely affiliation as a Conventual Franciscan.

In 1301, Nicholas was first sent to Paris for further study, finishing his studies seven years later in 1308, achieving a masters of theology from the University of Paris. During that time of study, Nicholas lived in the Parisian Franciscan convent with a fellow student who had arrived at the same time, the famous Duns Scotus who would become held up by later Humanists as typical of the Scholastic movement that they opposed.

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263 Ibid, The Age of Reform, p. 69
265 James Kiecker, “Comparative hermeneutics”, p. 116
267 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 137
268 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture, p. 4
270 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 82
From 1308-1309, Nicholas held the “Franciscan chair in theology” before achieving a more established position on the theological faculty at the University of Paris and beginning his first exegesis of the New Testament book of Hebrews. After that, “Lyra rose quickly to high administrative position in his order.” Over the next two decades, he held numerous positions of authority, such as serving as the provincial minister of Paris (1319), Burgundy (1324) and his theological opinion was highly sought on contemporary spiritual matters. His role as provincial minister is not to be underestimated. Service in the Paris province included overseeing all Franciscans in the areas “of Paris, Champagne, Artois, Vermandois, Lorraine, Flanders, Normandy, and Reims.” His Burgundy duties included “the custodies of Lyon, Dijon, Besancon, Lousanne, Vienne, and Auvergne.” He “maintained close relationships with the Franciscan hierarchy, the papacy, and the French royal family,” being considered a “moderate within the order concerning absolute poverty.”

Nicholas began his writing career at the beginning of the fourteenth century with commentaries on Daniel and Hebrews. In 1309, he completed *Quaestio de adventu Christi*. This text sets out to prove that the Old Testament, on its own terms, proves the nature and coming of Christ. Klepper maintains that identifying this text as written in 1309 demonstrates that “Nicholas’s Hebrew- and Rashi-inspired exegesis to have been firmly in place from his

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272 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 170
273 Ibid, p. 169
274 Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, p. 138
276 Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, pp. 30-31
earliest years at Paris.” Yet, Geiger writes that in this “polemical work…Nicholas discusses at length on the issue of Jewish distortion of the biblical text via corrections found in the Jewish Masoretic notes, such as qerê and ketêb or tiqqun soferim or by changes in the punctuation and pronunciation of the words. According to his claim, the Jews made such emendations in places such as Jer 23:6, Isa 9:5 and Hos 9:12.”

Between 1322 and 1332, he commenced on the work that would define him in history, a commentary on the entirety of the Bible, Postilla Litteralis. He resigned from his academic post in 1330 in order to better devote himself to his scholarship.

It was in 1332 that Lyra completed his major work: Postilla litteralis super Biblum (Literal Commentary on the Bible) Postilla litteralis was a huge undertaking, a true magnum opus that took over a decade of work. The work was also known as the Postilla Perpetuae (the Continuous Commentary) due to its nature as “a running, continuous commentary on the Old and New Testaments.” The “postilla” was a genre of medieval writing and a method of organizing a text. It functioned as a gloss or collected marginalia, particularly with regards to scripture. The term’s etymology is unclear, but it “may perhaps refer to the fact that the comment was written out as a continuous gloss, interposed between the loci of the text.”

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278 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 84
279 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, pp. 157-158
280 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 170
281 James Kiecker, “Comparative hermeneutics”, p. 116
282 The scholarship consistently differs about whether to use one t or two in spelling litteralis versus literalis. I have chosen litteralis.
283 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 167
284 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 138
286 Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, p. 270
Due to Lyra’s habit of dating his manuscripts, one can trace his early Genesis commentary in 1323 up through his Ezekiel commentary in 1332, allowing scholars to mark his progression through the Biblical text.\(^{287}\) It was a commentary that sought to collect the best scholarship on the Bible with regard to the literal sense of the text and in the process it integrated huge amounts of Jewish scholarship. Hebrew grammar and vocabulary was crucial to being able to elucidate the true literal sense. His Postilla was one of the first of its kind of attempt to apply the literal sense to the whole of the Bible.

A year after Postilla litteralis was published, Nicholas wrote a small work summarizing his literal commentary (Tractus de Differentia nostra translationis ab hebraica littera veteri testamento, or Tractate on the Difference Between our Translation and the Hebrew Text of the Old Testament)\(^ {288}\) that was intended for students who would not be able to afford the whole work.\(^ {289}\) The work placed a particular emphasis on variations between the Vulgate translation and the original Hebrew.\(^ {290}\) Nicholas wrote in the prologue of the book:

> I…determined to apply my pen to indicate the places in the Old Testament in which our translation seems to differ from the Hebrew text—having been much moved to do this for a threefold reason. The first is because although in writing on the Old Testament I had touched on such differences in many places, yet in this work I propose to cite more, and to insert certain brief explanations now and then for a better understanding of the truth. The second (reason) is because although previously in writing on the Old Testament I had striven after consciousness as much as I was reasonably able, yet the whole work on account of its bulk cannot easily be acquired by poor students; however, the great opusculum can be acquired by any student whatsoever. The third (reason) is because the said differences can be seen more readily as soon as they are set down separately from other (materials).”\(^ {291}\)

\(^{287}\) Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, p. 138  
\(^{288}\) Ibid, p. 139  
\(^{289}\) Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 200  
\(^{290}\) Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, p. 139  
\(^{291}\) Ibid
It is clear that Nicholas’s goal in his exegesis is not simply to create good scholarship, but to create work that can be used by other scholars. He is concerned as a teacher that his works are accessible to the average student trying to study the Bible.

Several years after the *Postilla litteralis* was published, Nicholas published a *Postilla moralis* (Moral Commentary) written, between 1333 and April 23, 1339, that attempted to be “a handbook for lectores and preachers.” Nicholas noted that this work was meant to be far from comprehensive but was intended to “provide brief comments on those aspects that he thought would be of special interest to readers.” Hailperin writes, “Like Rashi Lyra was not an extreme literalist in interpretation. Just as Rashi had made a thorough use of *derash*, as cases required it, so Lyra thought it proper to expound many passages of scripture *mystice*.” Nicholas wrote: “I propose (now) to expound this scripture a second time according to the *sensus mysticus*. The work was considerably shorter than its literal equivalent and much more theological in nature.

In 1333, Nicholas published “a treatise on the beatific vision,” called *De visione divine essentie*. In 1334, he published a treatise entitled *Responsio ad quondam Iudeum ex verbis Evangelii secundum Matthaeum contra Christum nequiter arguentem*, an anti-Jewish work likely responding to a Hebrew polemical work written by the twelfth-century Jew Jacob ben Ruben.

Hailperin makes the highly dubious claim that the anti-Jewish nature of these tracts are not truly offensive, writing, “Now it is to be noted that the small polemical tracts are ‘anti-Jewish’ for the

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293 Deeana Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers*, p.37
294 Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, p. 141
295 Ibid
296 Ibid, p. 142
297 Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 200
298 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, p. 8; Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 200
most part only in the academic, scholastic sense; they are apologetic mainly; they attempt to clarify the Christian religion for Christians as well as for Jews.”\textsuperscript{299} \textsuperscript{300}

Nicholas is most well-known for Hebraic studies, particularly in an age where such scholarly interests marked him as unusual, if not dangerously heretical. At the time that he was working, Jewish books were frequently being burned and he lived through the expulsion of the Jews from France. This is part of what makes his studies so unusual. Nicholas utilized not only the Hebrew language, but Jewish postbiblical, rabbinical works that were increasingly viewed as “suspect” and were often subject to public burnings. He put Jewish knowledge at the forefront of his scholarship, using it as a foundation for his exegesis. As Klepper writes, “It is ironic that at the very moment when Jews were being pushed further to the margins of western European society—both figuratively and literally—Jewish biblical interpretation was more accessible to a Christian audience than ever before through Nicholas’s literal commentary.”\textsuperscript{301}

Nicholas stands at an interesting point in Christian Hebraist history. He is the last of the medieval Hebraists and the earliest who could be considered part of Renaissance Hebraism. Described as “the second Jerome,”\textsuperscript{302} Nicholas was considered one of the few great Hebraists prior to the modern era. He is one of the “only four Western Christians who attained anything like real Hebrew scholarship” identified by Charles Singer.\textsuperscript{303} Nicholas is able to function as a transitional figure between medieval Scholasticism and Renaissance Humanism. His work allowed Renaissance scholars to improve upon his techniques. His worldview was still medieval

\begin{footnotes}
\item[299] Herman Hailperin, \textit{Rashi and the Christian Scholars}, p. 140
\item[300] James Kiecker, “Comparative hermeneutics”, p. 116
\item[302] Deeana Klepper, \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}, p. 32
\item[303] Pinchas E. Lapide, \textit{Hebrew in the Church}, p. 6
\end{footnotes}
and scholastic, but his methods showed characteristics of the Renaissance such as insisting on the primacy of the text and its literal meaning, but he did not go as far as later Humanists and Reformers who sought to reimagine the entire theology of the text. As Hailperin writes, “Lyra set the pattern for the exegetes of the Renaissance. There is a clear Lyra tradition down into the eighteenth century; he outlasted the Middle Ages, even as St. Jerome had outlasted ancient times.”

It remains unknown where Nicholas acquired his skills in the Hebrew language. The once-popular theory, now debunked by the majority of scholars, was that Nicholas himself was of Jewish descent. At the time that Nicholas was writing, it was not conceivable to many people that a Christian, who was not a Jewish convert, could be capable of such Hebrew mastery. While there is speculation that Nicholas might have learned Hebrew near where he was born in “Evreaux’s centers of Jewish learning,” the most plausible theory is that Nicholas received his education in Hebrew and Jewish studies from local converted Jews in Paris. At this time, Jewish converts to Christianity were the main conduits between the Christian and Jewish worlds and the way that the majority of Christians at the time acquired their knowledge of the Jewish culture, religion, and the Hebrew language. Hailperin notes that “they were accessible personally and even socially.”

The fact that Nicholas does not appear to have fully mastered the language also supports the theory that he was not a native speaker. For instance, Nicholas made the mistake, also made by Andrew of St. Victor, of trying to use grammatical cases that did not exist in the Hebrew

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304 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 263
305 Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 199
306 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 172
307 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 144
language, such as declensions. Geiger notes that Nicholas often “makes severe mistakes in the process of emending the Latin text, thus revealing his misunderstanding of Hebrew.” Despite this, however, he had a much deeper understanding of Hebrew than any of the so-called Hebraists of his time. Besides vocabulary, Nicholas was “aware of peculiarities of Hebrew, including vocalization and morphology.”

Debate continues among scholars about whether or not Nicholas continued to need Jewish help in understanding the scripture even after he had learned the language. Geiger asserts that while Nicholas could read Hebrew, he could not understand it without aid, stating that: “Despite his knowledge of Hebrew, undoubtedly impressive, he too required the assistance of persons with a Jewish background. Only in modern times would there be Christian Hebraists who, with their easier access to a broad variety of Jewish texts, would develop an independent ability to read and understand them.” Geiger writes that “despite the understanding which [Nicholas] demonstrates, he did not achieve the requisite level in this area for the full comprehension of difficult biblical words. He therefore required the services of a Jewish scholar, as he himself records.” Geiger goes on to argue that although “Nicholas had access to a copy of the Hebrew text, he was unable to comprehend it properly and needed assistance in this area. Even with such assistance, Nicholas did not successfully locate all the instances where the Latin text differs from the Hebrew one, and in those instances where he did locate a discrepancy, he did not always discern the correct meaning of the Hebrew text.” He also states that “it seems that this great exegete did not have sufficient qualifications for learning Hebrew sources, and he had to be

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308 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 173
309 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 148
310 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 172
311 Ibid
312 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 172
313 Ibid, p. 149
assisted by an expert in the Jewish tradition, whether a Jew or a convert, who either helped him with his reading from the Hebrew Bible or instructed him orally.”

Hailperin also supports this theory, arguing that while Nicholas “certainly could read the Hebrew Bible, and the rabbinic commentaries, too…he undoubtedly had a Hebrew guide for many years.”

Nicholas of Lyra’s work throughout his life continued to show the influences of the Franciscan-Aristotelianism of the time. Nicholas’s later, literal, Hebrew exegesis built upon Franciscan concerns. As Klepper writes, “Franciscans as a group demonstrated a particular interest in…literal historical exegesis specifically. They served as a driving force in the exploitation of Hebrew and Jewish traditions in literal exegesis. The intersection between these two interests…comes to the fore when we look ahead to the work of Nicholas of Lyra.”

His method of the literal-historical sense was increasingly unusual for the time and he sought to use this literal-historical reading as a foundation for any spiritual interpretations (though he occasionally found the passage that he felt could only be read metaphorically, even in its most literal sense: for example, the Gospel passage about cutting off one’s hand if it causes one to sin). In his own words, Nicholas writes: “Just as a building which begins to part company with its foundations is inclined to collapse, so a mystical [spiritual] exposition which deviates from the literal sense must be considered…inappropriate….So, those who wish to make headway in the study of holy scripture must begin by understanding the literal sense.”

Nicholas himself noted that “in the truth of the letter there are contained many mystical truths.” Klepper notes that:

314 Ibid, p. 148
315 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 144
316 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, p. 69
317 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, pp. 80-81
According to Ocker, medieval exegetes increasingly introduced substantial metaphorical and mystical material into their literal commentaries because the meaning of the letter itself had been opened to include theological presuppositions and dialogue with the whole of Christian tradition. Nicholas, for the most part, resisted this maneuver.

Klepper goes on to write that Nicholas intentionally avoided “theological concerns” since he acknowledged that the letter could contain multiple layers of meaning, preferring to place the theological layers outside of the literal sense. She ends with the observation that “Nicholas’s conservative exegetical approach may have left him outside the trend towards increasingly ‘spiritual’ literal readings.” He also “wished to avoid the harmonizings of Scriptural passages and the accumulation of references on a word or subject (concordatia), the object of which was to bring them into agreement.”

He maintained the practice of previous exegetes of avoiding speculation on the end times in his literal interpretations. While his work was much more systematic in the use of the literal sense than any of his predecessors, it was also a culmination of the previous work on the literal sense.

Nicholas created the division of the literal sense into two separate senses: the literal-historical sense and the literal-prophetic sense. This division was called the double-literal sense, or the duplex sensus litteralis. He was building upon Thomas Aquinas who had a “rudimentary” double literal sense. Thompson described the purpose of this subdivision by saying it “gave a higher profile to the original historical situation of OT texts while it preserved a prophetic

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319 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 144
320 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, pp. 30-36; Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 170
322 James Kiecker, “Comparative hermeneutics”, p. 118
323 Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 211
reference to Christ."\(^{324}\) For instance, a Hebrew Biblical passage could refer simultaneously to
the socio-political situation of Israel and its kings and be a Christological reference to the coming
Messiah, “so when in the Old Testament something is predicted to be fulfilled in some other
person in the Old Testament, nevertheless more truly and perfectly it is fulfilled in someone in
the New Testament. Thus there is a two-fold literal sense.”\(^{325}\) A passage could simultaneously
refer, literally, to both David and to Jesus. This was part of the way that Nicholas was able to
balance both Jewish and Christian historical interpretations of the text without risking heresy.

It appears that “Nicholas demonstrates, on the one hand, a concern for history and context
and on the other a primary concern for doctrine.”\(^{326}\) Nicholas believed that the theological was
dependent on the historical, without this foundation, the theological readings could not be
accurately built. Hailperin, however, believes that “[t]he whole work of Lyra is characterized by
his attention to historical meanings…The insistence of Lyra that this historical meaning must be
ascertained before a passage can be made (according to the various senses) the basis of
argumentation and proof is, when one remembers the intellectual milieu of his time, a matter of
the greatest significance.”\(^{327}\)

Nicholas insisted that the “Christological meaning of various Old Testament passages was
perfectly clear in the literal sense without recourse to any particular insight provided by
grace.”\(^{328}\) Nicholas is arguing that the Christological meaning, instead of being a spiritual

\(^{324}\) Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 47; Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas
of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 200
\(^{325}\) Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 211
\(^{326}\) Ibid, p. 212
\(^{327}\) Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 258
\(^{328}\) Deeana Klepper, The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish text in the Later
Middle Ages, p. 89
understanding, is directly embedded into the text itself. However, the Christological reading is one of multiple readings, each of which is valid and accessible to the reader.

James Kiecker explains how Nicholas was able to identify the Church in Hebrew passages:

“If Lyra assumes that the author of the text (ultimately God) intends these identifications, then in his own mind Lyra is giving a literal, not a spiritual interpretation.”

For as Nicholas himself stated: “the literal sense is this, not that which is signified by the words.”

Nicholas explained his focus on the literal in his introduction to the *Postilla*, writing:

the literal sense…seems to be greatly obscured in these modern times, partly through the fault of scribes…partly through the fault of scribes…partly it is the fault of lack of skill on the part of correctors…partly it is due to the manner of our translation. For often the translation has something different from the meaning of the Hebrew text, as Jerome explained…according to Jerome…in order to obtain the true text in the Old Testament one must have recourse to the Hebrew manuscripts….it is safer to have recourse to the Hebrew text, as being the original, in order to make it clear which is the true text.

Nicholas was influenced in his literal designations by the contemporary Aristotelianism around him and by utilization of Jewish sources. The Aristotelian approach led to a more empirical and literal approach to texts, whereas the Platonic readings tended towards the more symbolic and allegorical.

Nicholas frequently references Aristotle in his commentary on the Book of Genesis: “Lyra’s cosmos is that of the *Physics* and his view of natural law is that of the *Ethics*.”

Klepper writes,

“Nicholas’s immersion in rabbinic interpretation was, as it had been for the Victorines, linked

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329 James Kiecker, “Comparative hermeneutics”, p. 118
330 Ibid pp. 120-122
331 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 152
332 James Kiecker, “Comparative hermeneutics”, p. 119
333 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, p. 23
with his determination to highlight the literal sense of Scripture.” He preferred rabbinic exegesis, often Rashi, “as the most immediate or direct connection to the literal sense of the text.”

Despite his focus on the literal text, it is important to remember that Nicholas was not an “extreme literalist.” Nicholas resorted to the moral and spiritual senses when he found them necessary, but he simply placed the literal as the foundation and therefore the most crucial.

Nicholas, in his ongoing exploration of Jewish and Christian integration, spent much of his work exploring the relationship of the Mosaic Law to the Jews, biblically and contemporaneously. He described the law as “our teacher in Christ” and asserted that, prior to Christ, Judaic laws and the practice of circumcision were capable of providing grace. This interest in the law likely encouraged his ongoing fascination with, and focus on, history.

Nicholas was not afraid to argue with authorities, even with the Church Fathers who loomed so large in the contemporary theological landscape. Most of his critiques of the patristic writings were made in support or defense of a rabbinical interpretation. While he integrated the patristic writings into his own work he had “less dependence upon and quotation of Church Fathers than most contemporary writings.” A typical method in his exegesis would be to

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334 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 169
335 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 38
336 Eugene H. Merrill, “Rashi, Nicolas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis”, p. 70
337 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 171, 174
338 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 37
339 Ibid, p. 38
340 Ibid, p. 38
“[provide] two illustrations, one conveying the interpretation of the Christian doctors and one conveying the opinion of Jewish doctors, or Rabbi Solomon specifically.”

**Nicholas in Dialogue: Influences and Critiques**

Nicholas drew inspiration from both Christian and Jewish sources. For Christian inspiration, he heavily relied on the Victorine tradition, though he critiqued Andrew of St. Victor’s exegetical approach as being “too ‘Jewish.’” Van Liere writes:

Nicholas of Lyra frowned on Andrew’s judaizing tendencies. In Nicholas’ view, Jewish exegetes were often mistaken about the literal sense of Scripture, since they were unable to see how Scripture alluded to the coming of Christ, deluded as they were by their own Talmudic exegetical tradition. Nicholas quoted the Targum Jonathan to show that, if only the Jews would understand their own exegetical tradition in the right way, they would see that the Messiah had already come in the person of Christ.

Nicholas advocated for the use of the Jewish sources, but with clearly delineated boundaries and constraints upon their usage.

Van Liere describes further separation between the two exegetes, such as:

Another feature that distinguished Andrew was the former’s scholastic, Aristotelian emphasis on text division when explaining Scripture. According to fourteenth-century university regulations, the *cursor biblicus* should give special attention to the division of the text, before treating the text verse by verse, and then discuss any questions that might arise from it. Some of Nicholas’ most substantial comments concern the division of the text, breaking it down into smaller ‘sense-units’.

For example, when dividing the Book of Daniel, Nicholas identifies chapter seven with the “time before the first advent” and chapters seven through twelve “refer to the second advent of

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341 Ibid, p. 41
342 Ibid, p. 200
343 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, p. 80
344 Ibid, p. 74
Christ.” He divides Daniel’s visions into three types: sensible (example: the “handwriting on the wall”), imaginary (example: “the four beasts”), an intelligible (example: “Where the vision is related through angelic discourse”).

From there, his “commentary first divides the book of Daniel accruing to the Aristotelian four causes”: **subjectiva, effectiva, finalis, and formalis**. Zier writes, “God is in the first three: subjectiva as creator; effectiva as Revealer of Knowledge, finalis as the goal of the beatific vision. In Daniel, God is subject as the book declares the supereminence of the kingdom of Daniel. God is final cause…God works through secondary causes.” For the formal cause, Daniel is divided into **forma tractatus** an “arrangement or organization of the work, the way its author had structured it” and **forma tractandi** “the writer’s method of treatment or procedure.”

The **forma tractatus** “is the division of the book into the ten visions. He notes that the two narratives at the end, Susanna and Bel and Dragon, are not included in the division, as they are not recognized by the Hebrew in their Bible.” Whereas the **forma tractandi** “refers to the understanding of the visions.” Nicholas thought “Daniel was fundamentally about the history of the Jews in relation to the empires and a prophecy of its history during the empires with typological anticipations of Christ and the AntiChrist in chapters 7-12.”

Roger Bacon had influence on Nicholas’s writings, particularly his epistemology and Aristotelianism. Hailperin writes that “Lyra, in his student days, certainly heard of what Roger Bacon was saying about the proper method of studying the Bible. We have in mind here

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345 Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 209
346 Ibid, p. 208
347 Ibid, p. 207
348 Ibid
349 Ibid
350 Ibid
351 Ibid, p. 206
particularly Bacon’s criticism of those who study and lecture on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard instead of the text of the Bible.“³⁵² This critique of using Lombard’s work instead of the Bible would be one that later Humanists, such as Erasmus, would also bring up. Bacon had frequently drawn from Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroes, Alhazan (965-1040), and Robert Grosseteste (c.1170-1253) in his work.³⁵³ Nicholas was also influenced by Aquinas, and Nicholas’s logic often seemed to follow Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* when doing interpretive work on the New Testament.³⁵⁴ At times Nicholas appears to identify with the work of a fellow Hebraist, Raymond Martini (1220-1285), a converted Jew whose polemical tracts enjoyed popularity at the time.³⁵⁵ In Jeremy Cohen’s portrayal “Lyra is a mendicant in the tradition of Raymond Martini whose *Pugio Fidei* provided a broad array of rabbinic texts in Latin translation for the purpose of overturning the Jewish arguments about Scriptural interpretation.”³⁵⁶

Of the Church Fathers, Nicholas, unsurprisingly, identified most with Jerome, another Hebraist. Nicholas frequently cited Jerome to justify his study of Hebrew, appealing to patristic authority for his theological inquiries.³⁵⁷ However, Nicholas did not hesitate to disagree with Jerome’s translations when he felt it was necessary. For passages with uncertain readings, while Nicholas usually found Jerome’s translation valid, he “almost always favored a Jewish understanding over the Latin in such cases.”³⁵⁸ Nicholas’s work on Hebrew does not mean he in anyway discounted the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible, as a valuable, at times even

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³⁵² Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, p. 143
³⁵³ Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, pp. 31, 62
³⁵⁵ Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 201
³⁵⁶ Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, p. 153
³⁵⁷ Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 171
³⁵⁸ Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 44
superior, text. He defended its Hebrew discrepancies by saying that the translation “was made ‘sense from sense’ rather than ‘word from word.’”\(^{359}\) Klepper does not expand on what Nicholas might have meant by this comment, but one can speculate that it means that the translators took the general meaning of a phrase rather than a direct word-to-word translation. When the argument was raised that this translation was not authoritative among Jews, Nicholas replied that it had been authoritative with the Jews during the time of Paul. Finally, for all his emphasis on the *hebraica veritas* of the original text, “[i]n several passages, Nicholas cites the Septuagint as a more effective witness to messianic intent than Hebrew Scripture itself.”\(^{360}\)

While Nicholas continued to rely upon his own religious tradition, he also was heavily influenced by Jewish sources. Almost every page of his commentaries references either the Hebrew Bible or a rabbinic commentary.\(^{361}\) He likely had completed limited readings of Maimonides,\(^{362}\) and used sources such as Rabbi Moses Hadarshan, an eleventh century exegete who influenced Rashi’s work and is primarily known for his work on the Midrash.\(^{363}\) However, without a doubt, Nicholas’s greatest influence was Rabbi Solomon of Troyes, more popularly known as Rashi.\(^{364}\) Nicholas stated in the second preface to his *Postilla*, “My intention is to cite the statements not only of Catholic but also of Jewish teachers, and especially Rabbi Solomon, who among all the Jewish exegetes has put forward the most reasonable arguments, in order to illuminate the literal meaning of the text.”\(^{365}\) In Gross-Diaz’s words, “what Nicholas did in his

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\(^{359}\) Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Divine Law”, p. 177

\(^{360}\) Ibid, pp. 176-177

\(^{361}\) Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 30

\(^{362}\) Ibid, p. 49

\(^{363}\) Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, p. 252; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, pp. 556-557

\(^{364}\) Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 14

\(^{365}\) Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 170
postils was seemingly to turn his back on the last century-and-a-half of anti-Talmudic propaganda, and return to a long-abandoned discussion with the long-dead Rashi.”

From Nicholas’s perspective, Rashi’s commentary served the same purpose as the Christian Glossa Ordinaria: “a compilation of the most important Jewish perspectives on the Torah.” Nicholas called Rashi’s commentary the “Glossa Hebraica.” He referred to Rashi as ‘Rabbi Solomon’ throughout his commentary. Nicholas used Rashi’s peshat, or literal, interpretation as the historical sense. Nicholas also “was attracted very much to Rashi, undoubtedly, because of Rashi’s ‘postilla’ system in his Bible Commentary, that is, the elucidation of the scriptural text in verse succession,” the same method that Nicholas would use in his own commentary.

Nicholas and Rashi also had similar styles when it came to translating terms: “Like Rashi, who explained certain biblical Hebrew words by contemporary French terms, Lyra translates Latin terms into the equivalents of everyday speech in the Norman dialect” in a similar manner to later Humanists with their emphasis on the vernacular biblical translations.

While Rashi was popular among other Christian interpreters, Nicholas worked from Rashi in the Hebrew, rather than using a Latin translation of Rashi’s work. Nicholas’s familiarity with Jewish thought generally and Rashi in particular most likely came from from three sources: 1)
the glossa ordinaria 2) Jerome, the Victorines, and Roger Bacon and 3) the polemical work of Raymundus Martini. All three of these sources are Christian, which likely influenced the lens through which he received the text. Nevertheless, he made extensive use of Rashi and relied on Rashi’s Hebrew expertise in all of his analysis.

Hailperin identified five areas where Nicholas depended on Rashi. 1) “word sentence and contextual explanations” 2) “correction of the Vulgate on the basis of Hebrew” 3) “historical material and data” 4) “correction of Jerome or the Catholic doctors” 5) “information from the Talmud and Midrash.”

However, despite his reliance on Rashi, Nicholas did not hesitate to diverge from Rashi, including non-Christological theology. He “was not prepared to abandon the foundation principles of his faith based on Jewish sources, as he explicitly states in his second introduction to the Postilla.” Most of his disagreements with Rashi were on Rashi’s derash, or allegorical, interpretations, instead of the peshat, the literal. Nicholas “dismissed the derash exegesis as ‘Jewish fables’ that had no bearing on literal explanation of the text.” Nicholas and Rashi were bound together by a common viewpoint. They “[b]oth saw the Bible as the textus primus, the material to which the various disciplines must be brought and to which they must be made to conform, not vice versa.” Geiger writes, “Nicholas may also have seen Rashi as an exegete

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374 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 142
375 Eugene H. Merrill, “Rashi, Nicolas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis”, p. 72
376 Ibid, p. 73
377 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 171
378 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 196
379 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture, p. 77
380 Eugene H. Merrill, “Rashi, Nicolas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis”, p. 71
close to his heart, one who knew how to incorporate moral points that were not divorced from the language of the text but were in fact based on it.”

However, Nicholas’s use of Rashi led to critique by later scholars, for instance,

Paul of Burgos, a Jew converted to Christianity, asserted that Lyra’s use of Rashi had led him into error and to neglect the consensus of his own tradition. Paul further complained that Lyra’s knowledge of Hebrew was insufficient to really understand the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic tradition because ‘he [Lyra] had learned Hebrew at an advanced age and not as one who had studied it as a young man.

It is unsurprising that Nicholas’s use of Rashi was controversial, given that in the thirteenth century, there is at least one case where “we can find among the books banned for ownership and study Jewish biblical commentaries such as that of Rashi.”

Nicholas frequently cited other rabbis beyond Rashi, but a close look at the texts suggests that those rabbis were actually cited from Rashi. This does not seem to be out of character for Nicholas, who, it has been noted, frequently mixed up his sources. Geiger notes that in his commentary on Lamentations alone, of the nineteen textual comparisons between Latin and Hebrew, nine of those Nicholas confuses Jewish interpretation with the Hebrew Bible. When correcting the Latin text of the Bible, Nicholas was only partially successful in acknowledging the correct Hebrew text. In about half of the emendations he presents a version which reflects some widely known Jewish explanation instead of the Hebrew text itself. At times he seems to equate “popular and accepted commentary among the Jews in Nicholas’ vicinity,” such as the

381 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 177
382 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture, p. 152
383 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 151
384 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 49
385 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 163
386 Ibid, p. 148
commentaries of Rashbam, as the Hebrew text. This view is disputed by Hailperin, who holds that “A careful reading of [Nicholas’] works leaves one with the conviction that Nicolas de Lyra was not only a person of great scholarship, but also a man of integrity. The present writer has found all of Lyra’s excerpts of the Hebrew materials are an accurate and faithful transcription of the Jewish commentators.”

Johann Reuchlin “wrote that not many pages would remain if Nicholas were to excise Rashi from his commentaries.” Hailperin supports this, noting: “It is no exaggeration to say that on the Old Testament Lyra mentions Rashi on almost every page of the Postilla and frequently, several times on a page.”

However, despite these numerous quotations, comparing them against manuscripts of Rashi’s writings suggests that Nicholas’s Rashi quotations might not necessarily have been consistently accurate. Michael Signer argues that Rashi frequently used Rabbi Joseph Kara and that Nicholas frequently quoted Kara but attributed the work to Rashi. Signer concludes that “[w]hen Lyra read Rashi’s commentary on Ezechiel it is likely that he read it from a manuscript which was composed of comments by both scholars.” Geiger doubts the reliability of Nicholas’s Rashi sources, referring to a note in Lamentations, he writes: “from his comments it appears that he did not see an accurate text of Rashi, since Rashi does not ascribe the motif of anger to the biblical text, as Nicholas does, but rather includes it in his interpretation.” However, the importance that these two scholars had on hermeneutics is best described by Eugene Merrill: “Though Rashi and his Christian protégé de Lyra were only the exemplars, through them has

387 Ibid, p. 161
388 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 141
389 Eugene H. Merrill, “Rashi, Nicolas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis”, p. 71
390 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 138
391 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 181
392 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture, p. 155
393 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 162
come the hermeneutical science which to this day is the hallmark of sober, responsible biblical scholarship.”

While Nicholas is associated with Franciscan Hebraism and lived before the momentum of Christian Humanism reached its zenith, Nicholas lived contemporaneously with Petrarch and, in his methodology can, perhaps, best be understood in line with the humanist movement. Nicholas does not seem to fit into contemporary Franciscan scholarship. Franciscan scholarship at his time was influenced by the work of Joachim of Fiore (c.1135-1202) who held a more apocalyptic view, made extensive use of the Book of Revelation, and speculated that the world was entering the final age before the end time. Philip Krey notes that

[w]hat is missing in Nicholas are negative images of the Church and positive images about Francis and the Franciscan order. If there is a focus on the Antichrist as a sign of the trouble and disintegration in the endtime, the real focus is on the victory of Christ and his saints at the end. Thus the commentary is radically Christocentric; such a Christocentric hermeneutic was not unique to the later 16th century reformers.

Nicholas avoided detailed apocalyptical speculation (for instance, calculating when the end time would occur). Instead, his Christocentric work seems to be almost proto-Protestant in nature. However, unlike later reformers, Nicholas drew a sharp line between literal and spiritual readings when advancing church agendas: “Nicholas will allow for calls for reform in his moral commentary but not in the literal commentary. He deliberately avoids any direct correlations between AntiChrist and the papacy…..Thus, the result is a modified Augustinian eschatological perspective.”

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394 Eugene H. Merrill, “Rashi, Nicolas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis”, p. 79
395 Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 213
396 Ibid, p. 204
397 Ibid, p. 213
While Nicholas was undoubtedly an Aristotelian, he “placed the direct study of the Bible ahead of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* or the integration of Aristotelian philosophy into theology,” which were the more common means of education during this time.\(^{398}\) His continual emphasis on the Bible appears to be a precursor to Luther’s *sola scriptura*. The Bible was simultaneously final arbiter and the foundation upon which to build any interpretation. This was noted above when discussing the Bible as *textus primus* for him and Rashi.

Nicholas, like his predecessors, focused on correcting the text of the Vulgate so that it would be more accurate. He wanted to use his Hebrew knowledge to elucidate the meaning of the text, on the principle that “a literal interpretation takes for granted that one understands the literal meaning.”\(^{399}\) Nicholas realized that this was not reflective of the reality of the scholarship of his era. This was why he was so determined to base his exegesis on what the text actually said. He had the same passion for history that was characteristic of the Humanists. When abridging his *Postilla* Nicholas “chose to highlight specifically those biblical passages in which the Latin [v]ulgate version of the Bible differed from the Hebrew.”\(^{400}\) Many of these corrections, according to Hailperin, had their root in the previous work of Rashi.\(^{401}\)

Geiger notes that “whenever possible, Nicholas prefers to avoid *negation* of the Latin text in favor of the Hebrew, and instead, he chooses to *interpret* the Latin word based on the Hebrew text.”\(^{402}\) However, “Nicholas assures us that he never posited a Hebrew explanation of a text without actually consulting rabbis.”\(^{403}\) As he stated in his introduction above, having access to

\(^{398}\) Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 31
\(^{400}\) Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 36
\(^{401}\) Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, p. 139
\(^{402}\) Ari Geiger, “*In Hebraeo Habetur*”, p. 156
\(^{403}\) Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, p. 76
Hebrew manuscripts and using them to correct the Bible and improve the exegesis, was a vital exercise. This was a concern that would take front stage from the beginning of the Italian Renaissance.

**Nicholas’s Relationship with the Jewish People**

Despite his in-depth relationship with Jewish sources, Nicholas had a complicated, and often seemingly contradictory, relationship with the Jews themselves. The Jews fascinated him. While he placed less focus on theology than most of his contemporaries, the bulk of his theological work related to the Jewish relationship with God (both Biblical and contemporary), revelation, law, and salvation. As Klepper describes: “there is a preoccupation with matters of Jewish faith and unbelief that runs through the entire” Postilla. However, “Cohen argues that the Postillae have ‘no systematic treatment of the Jews,’ and focuses on the quodlibets by Nicholas which demonstrate his use of rabbinic material to convince the Jews of the Christian truth.” The quodlibet was “an academic exercise in medieval universities.” It was associated most strongly with the University of Paris, where Nicholas worked. Twice a year, before the holy days of Christmas and Easter, the “master undertook to deal with any questions…raised by the participants….The answers of the masters were afterwards drawn up in writing and published.”

On one hand, he was often viewed as being too sympathetic to Jews and Jewish texts. He was accused by many, particularly by Jacques Lefèvre after his death, of being a ‘Judaizer,’ just

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404 Deana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 43
405 Ibid, p. 42
406 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, p. 152
408 Ibid
like all major Hebraists, from Jerome to Andrew of St. Victor, before him. His literal-historical sense was viewed as dangerous. The Bible was not meant to be studied academically, it was there as a guide to “Christian doctrine and spiritual life.”

Nicholas “built a scholarly career on the assumption that Jews—both biblical and contemporary—held unique insights into divine truth.” His Romans commentary focus on the “value of Jewish knowledge of the Law,” portraying it as greater than the wisdom of the Greeks. “Nicholas prioritizes the direct knowledge of the Jews over the acquired sapientia of the Greeks.” Even when it came to the Aristotelianism,

Nicholas encountered the opinions of Thomas and other scholars from the perspective of a Hebraist enamored of Jewish teaching, and so the Old Law had a slightly different cast in his hands, one that transferred respect for the Law to respect for bearers of the Law, as special guardians of part of God’s revelation.

This argument would be echoed by subsequent Christian Hebraists, particularly and famously, almost two centuries later by Johann Reuchlin.

On the other hand, Nicholas was undoubtedly a Christian polemicist. He believed that by looking at Hebrew Biblical prophecy, well-educated Jewish leaders had to have recognized Jesus as the Messiah. He believed it was possible to recognize Jesus as Christ from a Jewish perspective not just a Christian one, and so he used the Jews words against them in his arguments. He moved the argument away from Jewish unbelief merely by ignorance but to an intentional culpability in Jesus’s fate.

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409 Ozment, the Age of Reform
411 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 172
412 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, pp. 179-181; Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 84-86
Until Lyra, no scholastic theologian was able to “construct proofs [for Christ’s advent in Scripture] that could stand outside a Christian context.”\textsuperscript{413} He did not see any contradiction in both believing there to be heresy in the Talmud and believing that it also contained arguments against Jewish unbelief.\textsuperscript{414} Nicholas wrote: “although writings of this kind are false in great part, that is, the Talmud and the commentaries of the Hebrew doctors, nevertheless we are able through those (writings) to argue efficaciously against them.”\textsuperscript{415}

Nicholas warned in his second introduction to the \textit{Postilla}, that “one must not adhere to the teachings of the Jews except in so far as they are in accord with reason and the true literal meaning.”\textsuperscript{416} As Geiger writes, “There is no danger of imagining that his is a Jewish commentary, for he frequently integrates ideas derived from Christian theology or standard Christian criticisms of the Jews.”\textsuperscript{417} This feeling is echoed by Klepper: “respect for the knowledge of Jews did not equal respect for the Jews as unbelievers, and it would be a mistake to see Nicholas as somehow sympathetic to the Jewish community’s adherence to the Old Law.”\textsuperscript{418} Van Liere argues that “Nicholas’ improved knowledge of Hebrew and respect for Jewish sources was accompanied by an increased hostility towards contemporary Judaism.”\textsuperscript{419}

However, Hailperin argues that

\begin{quote}
It may be said truly that although most of the anti-Jewish polemical writings of the Middle Ages are unscholarly and usually offensive to the Jews, these tractates of Lyra (with their frequent appeal to Rashi, to the Targumim, to Rabbi Moses Hadarshan, to Maimonides, and to the Midrash and Talmud) are noteworthy for the moderation of the polemic and for the power of argument—‘no injuries, no disdain, no trace of conceit, but an admirable clearness of exposition without
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{413} Deeana Klepper, \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}, p. 79
\textsuperscript{414} Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 202
\textsuperscript{415} Herman Hailperin, \textit{Rashi and the Christian Scholars}, p. 140; Jeremy Cohen, \textit{The Friars and the Jews}, p. 181
\textsuperscript{416} Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 194
\textsuperscript{417} Ibid, p. 175
\textsuperscript{418} Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 172
\textsuperscript{419} Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., \textit{Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture}, p. 74
\end{footnotes}
subtlety, a thorough acquaintance with the arguments of the adversary, and a proper sense of the degree to which it is possible to refute.”

Hailperin likely is being overly generous in his assessment of the ‘offensiveness’ of Nicholas’s work.

Above all, the sense one gets of Nicholas is that this is a man struggling to balance his religious beliefs, the culture of his time, and his scholarly interests and instincts. While he was no less supercessionist than any of his medieval contemporaries, he was still able to respect Jewish knowledge. He had to constantly justify why Christian scholars should be concerned with the scholarship of disbelieving Jews, “pausing with some frequency to account for the Jews’ failure to follow the logic of their own presentations to their logical Christian conclusion.” As Klepper demonstrates, his work shows “ambivalence toward Jews as stubborn unbelievers who nonetheless hold indispensable keys to understanding Christian Scripture.” His commentary on Romans indicates a “paradox...that the Jews were a people [who] had and continued to have some sort of special knowledge (*notitia*) of divine things, but were unable to have proper intellection of that knowledge.” While Nicholas used *notitia* to describe the knowledge of the Jews, he used *cognitio* for the Greeks: “On the one hand, the intellectual exercise of *cognitio* represented a more sophisticated actualization of knowledge. On the other hand, the *notitia* that the Jews received without effort was in no small part superior because of its source in the divine.”

In his *Postilla*, while writing on Jeremiah 13:23, Nicholas wrote: “Can the Nubian change his skin color the leopard its spots?...Thus he speaks regarding the Jews, that they were not able to

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420 Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, pp. 140-141  
421 Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 42  
422 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, pp. 169, 179  
423 Ibid, p. 173
revert to good on account of an inclination to evil, since [this] inclination is [their] particular nature.”

This section is briefer than the other analysis due to the limited sources available on this aspect of Nicholas’s scholarship and life. This is an attempt to cobble together a portrait of his sympathies, using comments made in separate contexts to create as nuanced an interpretation as possible.

**Nicholas's use of Jewish sources**

Nicholas made extensive use of Jewish sources in his writings. He was partly able to do this by an ease of access by virtue of his position as a Franciscan. While French Hebrew texts were being confiscated from Jews, they were being given to Franciscan and Dominican orders, allowing the Christian scholars use of the stolen texts that they might not have had otherwise. However, Nicholas believed Hebrew and rabbinic learning to be not just a useful supplement to the Old Testament, but vitally necessary for any true understanding of the text. Evidence of his conviction lies in his work itself, where “it is hard to find a single page of the *Postilla* on the Old Testament that fails to incorporate a Jewish interpretation.” As Klepper writes, “his desire to understand Scripture fully led Nicholas, like Jerome and the Victorines before him, to make direct use of postbiblical Jewish material, including Midrash, Talmud, and contemporary commentary.” These materials were central to his goals. His goal was to unite the Hebrew text with a Christian understanding, which “led him to cite alternative Jewish sources—the Septuagint, the Aramaic Targum, or Josephus—as the language there was often more consonant

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425 Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 49  
426 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 170  
with Christian understanding in messianic passages. Having established these sources as authoritative, he also used them to occasionally to forward a Jewish opinion over a Christian one.\textsuperscript{428} However, “while Lyra uses individual Jewish interpretations, he nowhere displays an awareness of the fundamental differences between Jewish and Christian exegetes regarding the nature of creation, humanity, sin and salvation found in the sources he cites. He picks and chooses among a wide variety of Jewish interpretations, but the criteria by which he makes these choices remain unclear.”\textsuperscript{429} His use of Jewish sources can be characterized as “unpredictable.”\textsuperscript{430}

While Nicholas placed an extraordinary focus on Jewish writings and the Hebrew text for a scholar in his age, we must not assume that he made these decisions purely on ideological grounds. In a way, his reliance on the Jewish exegesis was more a matter of necessity than philosophy: “Intending to write a literal commentary on Scripture, Nicholas ran up against the paucity of Christian literal commentaries and the dearth of commentaries of any type on those books of the Old Testament that seemed less important for Christianity.”\textsuperscript{431} His goal was to write a literal commentary, a task that was not feasible in any true sense of the word with only the use of the Christian sources available to him, even if he had “fervently desired to downplay the Jewish commentators, he would have been compelled to borrow from them if he wanted to write a literal commentary worth of the name.”\textsuperscript{432} Literal commentaries also generally relied on

\textsuperscript{428} Deeana Klepper, \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}, p. 42
\textsuperscript{429} Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., \textit{Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture}, p. 22
\textsuperscript{430} Ibid, p. 22
\textsuperscript{431} Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 171
\textsuperscript{432} Ibid, p. 171
Jewish exegesis due to “the notion that the Jewish tradition had special advantages for literal exegesis.”433

However, Nicholas still struggled with trying to make the religious texts of one faith fit into the theological framework of a second. He was invoking scholarly work in favor of his religion, done by scholars who disagreed with the fundamental premise of the Christian faith. This was particularly problematic when he quoted or used a rabbi who, in the same text, might have argued against Christian religious doctrine. This was where he had to tread very carefully, he “used polemic with precision, careful not to allow it to create doubt as to the accuracy of the rabbis’ other insights.”434 Klepper argues that this use of polemic was actually key to his successful integration of rabbinic exegesis. While Nicholas appears to be progressive in his attitudes towards Jews and the Jewish sources for his time, that is a claim with dubious honor. The assertion that his polemic is merely out of a desire to preserve his own reputation and his ability to conduct his scholarly work seems to be attempting too sympathetic a portrait of his work. While those factors likely contributed to his writings, it seems impossible to speculate on what he did and did not truly mean. Without the ability to ask him, we can only judge him based on his writings, problematic passages and all.

An example of such polemic is his explanation of the rabbis’ refusal to acknowledge a messianic reading of a text: Nicholas reiterated the common charge that Jews had intentionally falsified the Hebrew text to remove Christological proof.435 Geiger points out that, “Following [Nicholas’] comments about the uniqueness of the Hebrew text and his intention to make use of it, he states that one should be careful when using the Hebrew text. For in places where the Old

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433 Ibid, p. 175  
434 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 42  
435 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 179
Testament speaks to the divinity of Christ the Jews have corrupted the text in order to defend their doctrine. Relying on the *Hebraica Veritas* is permitted only in other passages.”

Nicholas’s work seems to be contradictory, in that he asserts the value of rabbinical insights into the historical and literal senses while simultaneously perpetuating and utilizing anti-Semitic myths.

As Geiger writes, “there is a link between Nicholas’s intimate knowledge of Jewish texts and his anti-Jewish polemics.” As Kevin Madigan writes, “Zier concludes that Nicholas arguably shows more respect for and facility in using the Hebrew commentators, but, more importantly, he uses Jewish sources to argue that the Old Testament prophecies literally, historically, and scientifically prove the coming of Jesus Christ." Yet, this is fascinating when put beside an argument that Nicholas makes on Hebrew letters. Nicholas takes issue with Jerome’s view (continued in Christian exegesis throughout the medieval age) that the Hebrew letters had a spiritual sense, a view that the Jews do not hold and he “insists that the Hebrew letters ‘belong’ to the Jews; if the Jews, unlike the Christians, do not hold this idea, their view must be accepted on this point.” Geiger notes that he “rejects the accepted Christian doctrine…for several hundred years, which originated from Jerome, based solely on the Jewish tradition.” While he is undoubtedly appropriating Jewish texts and scholarship for his own purposes, he is able to acknowledge the maintenance of Jewish ownership of this work.

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436 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 156
437 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 201
438 Philip D. W. Krey, “Nicholas of Lyra’s commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill”, p. 211
439 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 194
440 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 153
Generally, unless there was a recognized Christological reference in the text, Nicholas preferred the rabbinical interpretation over the Christian interpretation.\footnote{Deeana Klepper, \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}, p. 41} He avoided reading in Christological meanings, for example, “Lyra avoids most of the typeological and ecclesiastical interpretations of Gen. 1-3…For instance, he provides no reference to the spread of the church in his interpretation of the command to ‘increase and multiply’…Lyra also does not assert Christ’s co-operation in creation.”\footnote{Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., \textit{Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture}, p. 24} However, Nicholas tended to utilize Jewish works primarily in a purely textual, exegetical context, rather than theologically.\footnote{Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 194} As Geiger writes, he “endeavored to protect his readers against the latent dangers of the rabbinic writings, by limiting the credit he allowed Jewish exegesis to those cases where it did not contradict Christian belief and warning that one must not rely on it for Christian verses where the Jews have falsified the Biblical text.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 171}

Nicholas does not use all Jewish texts equally. Most of his direct references to the Talmud or Midrashim are passages that he drew from the body of Christian polemics, and are used, indeed, in a polemical way.\footnote{Ibid, p. 172} For example, in Genesis “49:10, whose interpretation hangs on a textual variation, where the Jewish Targum agrees with the Catholic Vulgate over the non-Messianic Hebrew text, Lyra accuses the Jews of being ‘obstinant’ in their refusal to see Christ in this text, although the text is clearly about Christ. ‘The Jews endeavor to subvert it in various ways,’ presumably by changing the Hebrew text away from the Messianic meaning.'\footnote{Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., \textit{Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture}, p. 22} His “appropriation of Jewish exegesis in the whole Genesis commentary is limited by the fact that for him the ultimate message of the book is that the text points to and is fulfilled ultimately in

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{441} Deeana Klepper, \textit{Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages}, p. 41  
\textsuperscript{442} Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., \textit{Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture}, p. 24  
\textsuperscript{443} Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 194  
\textsuperscript{444} Ibid, p. 171  
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid, p. 172  
\textsuperscript{446} Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., \textit{Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture}, p. 22}
Nicholas’s “[c]itations of Jewish sources throughout the Genesis commentary exhibit a highly controlled appropriation of this material. Not once is a Jewish interpretation used to refute the overall worldview presented by scholasticism or medieval Augustinianism. On the contrary, Lyra rejects Jewish interpretations he cites at a far greater rate than either Christian or Hellenistic sources.”

His other Talmud references are usually attributed to Rashi, who had quoted the Talmud in his own writings. Whether this is from a deliberate attempt to mask the Talmud with Rashi, given the anti-Talmudic sentiment in Christendom at the time, or whether this is evidence of his ignorance on Jewish texts on a non-superficial level, is impossible to determine. His Postilla “contains almost no passages ascribed to the Talmud.” Nicholas broke with exegetical tradition by explicitly naming the Jewish commentators that he utilized, an unusual practice that time. He also used the Aramaic Targum, an uncommon practice by Christian Hebraists, by emphasizing that the “Jews accepted the Targum as authentic” and it thereby deriving authority from that belief. Van Liere speculates that “Nicholas may be one of the first Christian scholars to make extensive use of the Targumim.”

When working with his sources, Nicholas’s use of Hebrew tended to be divided up into two purposes: to support Christian interpretations and to “correct standard interpretations.” His Hebrew skills “allowed him to appeal directly to the Hebraica veritas to clarify the literal sense of the vulgate version of the Bible,” even though this sometimes led him to challenge Christian

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447 Ibid, p. 21
448 Ibid
449 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 172
450 Ibid
451 Ibid
452 Deeana Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 176
453 Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith eds., Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture, p. 78
454 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 43
He used the Hebrew texts to interpret halakhic sections of the Pentateuch. He relied on them for the inclusion of “linguistic glosses on the text, which provide the first key to understanding it: glosses of words, clarification of difficult syntax, explanations of metaphors and parables.” However, Geiger argues that Nicholas purposefully did not bother correcting variants between the Latin and Hebrew texts when it was not necessary for his exegetical goals. He maintains that “[a]lthough Nicholas is often aware of the difference between the Hebrew and Christian textual tradition of the Bible, yet we find many occurrences where he ignores that difference, however significant.” At times, he notes, “his comments are completely at odd with the *Hebraica Veritas*.”

This question of the systematism of Nicholas’s work remains debated between scholars. While Geiger argues that Nicholas “did not employ the Hebrew for a systematic critique of the text of the Vulgate,” Klepper disagrees and believes that Nicholas “exploited post-biblical Hebrew text more systematically and successfully than perhaps any scholar since antiquity.” Geiger accounts for Nicholas’s Hebrew mistakes, or his failures to edit discrepancies, as misunderstandings on the part of his anonymous Jewish, Hebrew teacher. Beryl Smalley views him as a culmination of the Christian Hebraist tradition and the study of literal exegesis that had begun by the Victorines. To whatever degree to which he attempted to thoroughly use the Hebrew in the literal text, Nicholas saw no reason to utilize the Hebrew when discussing

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455 Ibid, p. 42
456 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 175
457 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 148
458 Ibid, p. 163
459 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas of Lyra and his Jewish Sources”
460 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 167; Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 189
461 Ari Geiger, “In Hebraeo Habetur”, p. 173
462 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 167
the spiritual or moral senses of the text. He was perfectly content to use the Latin when using the non-literal sense in the Hebrew Bible in his *Postilla Moralis*.\(^{463}\)

**Subsequent Influence**

Nicholas’s work had long-lasting influence on other Christian theologians. His *Postilla litteralis super Biblium* was widely available by medieval standards and was the “most widely read Latin commentary.” His work quickly spread into university, courtly, and monastic libraries, becoming one of the “most frequently copied and eagerly sought-after works of any kind in the Latin West well into the early modern period.” It was translated into the vernacular German “as early as 1372.”\(^{464}\) The manuscript evidence supports this.\(^{465}\) After the fifteenth-century, his was the most widespread commentary used by the universities.\(^{466}\) His work was highly respected, though not frequently imitated until long after his death.\(^{467}\) With the advent of printing, Nicholas’s *Postilla* only increased in its diffusion. His book was the first Biblical commentary ever to be printed in 1471.\(^{468}\) Before the start of the sixteenth-century, the *Postilla* had already been translated into French, German, and Italian.\(^{469}\) Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, over a hundred editions of the *Postilla* were printed.\(^{470}\) By the middle of

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\(^{463}\) Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 189
\(^{464}\) Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, p. 139
\(^{466}\) Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 170
\(^{467}\) Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 31
\(^{469}\) James Kiecker, “Comparative hermeneutics”, p. 123
\(^{470}\) Deeana Klepper, *Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages*, p. 32
the fourteenth century, partly as a result of his reputation as a Hebraist, Nicholas “had come to serve as the Christian Bible commentator of first resort.”

His work had a major effect on later Renaissance and early Reformation scholars, particularly for Biblical Humanists struggling to create accurate translations and for the revival of Christian Hebraism started by figures such as Johann Reuchlin. In fact, by the Reformation, “Nicholas was one of the very few medieval Hebraists whose name was still familiar.”

His commentary was used in the translation of the Bible produced by the Wycliffites. He was utilized by Desiderius Erasmus, John Colet (c.1466-1519), and John Calvin. He was frequently used by both Reformers and staunch Catholics in their polemic against the other. He was also used frequently, if ambivalently at times, by Martin Luther. Luther frequently critiqued him, but went back and forth, also calling him “an excellent man,” a “good Hebraist,” and a “fine Christian,” Luther made an exception, however, for when Nicholas followed Rashi’s interpretation, at which point Luther believed that Nicholas’s work became “meaningless and unimpressive.” Luther argued against Nicholas and Aquinas “for whom the actual historical sense was the actual literal sense. [Luther’s] one goal was to find Christ as the essential content of the Scriptures.”

Most assume that much of Luther’s Hebrew knowledge, and certainly much of his interest, was derived from Nicholas. However, Luther “never was ready to concede”

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471 Deeana Copeland Klepper, “First in Knowledge of Divine Law”, p. 168
472 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 32
474 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, 72; David C. Steinmetz, The Bible in the Sixteenth Century, p. 68, 161
475 Deeana Klepper, Jewish Culture and Contexts: Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian reading of Jewish text in the later Middle Ages, p. 38
476 James Kiecker, “Comparative hermeneutics”, p. 124
477 Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, p. 257
one of the proverbs of his lifetime that said, “Rashi and the Tossafists made Nicholas de Lyra and Nicholas de Lyra made Luther.”

It was common practice in the Middle Ages to add honorary Latin epithets to theologians, for instance, Thomas Aquinas was dubbed Doctor angelicus. Nicholas’s epithet was Doctor planus et utilis, “the plain and useful doctor.” He was valued for his role as a “highly effective conduit for Jewish traditions into Christian exegesis and awareness” while also, in the years to come, “played a vital role in shaping Christian responses—both positive and negative—to those traditions.” In this way he was the foundation that the fifteenth and sixteenth century Biblical Humanism relied upon. He was a vital connection between the medieval tradition and the modern method. As, Geiger writes, Nicholas’s commentary “serves as a bridge between the Hebraism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the revival of this phenomenon at the start of the modern age.”

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478 Tosafot were additions (the literal translation of the word) to the Talmud that were written primarily in France and Germany between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. They not only build upon the work done by Rashi (the movement was considered to have been initiated by the grandchildren of Rashi), but are “a continuation of the dialectics of the Talmudic process itself.” The practitioners of Tosafot in this period were known as Tosafists. (Encyclopaedia Judaica)

479 Eugene H. Merrill, “Rashi, Nicolas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis”, p. 79

480 Herman Hailperin, Rashi and the Christian Scholars, p. 144

481 Ari Geiger, “Nicholas and his Jewish Sources”, p. 203
Chapter III: Johannes Reuchlin

Johannes Reuchlin was a Swabian nobleman, a lawyer, and a Hebraist. He was “known at court as one of the foremost jurists and legal scholars of his day. He “served most of his adult life as the chancellor to the duke of Württemberg.” He was also a humanist, an enlightened thinker, and like his friend Erasmus of Rotterdam, an impassioned student of classical philology and philosophy.” His studies in Hebrew have led him to be discussed as the “precursor of all modern Hebrats.” He was attacked for his perceived pro-Jewish leanings, but this did not stop him from becoming “Europe’s foremost Christian authority on Hebrew learning and a most credulous devotee of the magical arts of cabala.” He is credited by Price as the progenitor of the practice of Christian engagement in Jewish studies. He was known as Rabbi Capnion, Capnion being the Hellenized version of Reuchlin (“little smoke”) and created a Hebrew transliteration of his own name (יוהנן). Reuchlin was a major member of the early Northern Humanists and “one of Germany’s first experts in classical Greek.” He “described the maturity of his interests from a preoccupation with Latin style to the study of Greek and Aristotelian philosophy, his reaction against scholasticism and finally his

482 While there is some suggestion that Reuchlin preferred Johann over Johannes (Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, pp. 50-51), I have gone with the most common usage in the secondary literature
483 David C. Steinmetz, The Bible in the Sixteenth Century, p. 83
484 Goddman, Anthony and Angus Mackay, eds. The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe. New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 211-212
485 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 2
486 Pinchas E. Lapide, Hebrew in the Church, p. 203
487 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 82
488 Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, p. 303
491 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 51,
devotion to Hebrew. ‘Pledge to Christ,’ he concluded, ‘I devoted everything to the Christian Church...I am led by genius and the love of piety.’”

Johannes Reuchlin was born on January 29, 1455 in Pforzheim, Germany. Reuchlin was the son of Georg Reuchlin and Else Eck. Reuchlin’s mother was highly religious, a trait that she likely passed onto her son. His father was “an administrator for the Dominican order for in Pforzheim,” an ironic fact, given Reuchlin’s later dealings with the order. Reuchlin’s earliest education was at the Pforzheim Latin School, the same school that would later educate his relative, Philip Melanchthon. Reuchlin spent his education studying the Greek language and the law in Freiburg, Paris, and Basel. On May 19, 1470 he matriculated at the University of Freiburg in Breisgan at the age of fifteen before going onto study at the University of Paris three years later. He was able to receive this Parisian education after he was sent as a companion to the local margrave’s son, Frederick. While in Paris in 1477, he learned Greek from an emigrant named Georgius Hermonymus, the same man who taught Erasmus. He learned the basics of Hebrew from a Northern Hebraist named John Wessel of Gansfort (1419-

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494 Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 50  
495 Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 24  
496 Also spelled as Elissa  
497 Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 50  
498 David Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books*, p. 17  
502 A margrave was historically a hereditary title of a prince  
503 Franco Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 53  
1489), though Franz Posset disputes this.\textsuperscript{506} He received his bachelor of arts in 1474\textsuperscript{507} and then moved onto studies at Basel\textsuperscript{508} for the next four years, where he continued with his Greek studies.\textsuperscript{509} While there, at the age of twenty, Reuchlin published a Latin dictionary known as \textit{Vocabularis Breviloquus (Concise Dictionary)}.\textsuperscript{510} Reuchlin described that this work was meant to help correct the mistakes in the Latin Vulgate by using the Greek or Hebrew original sources. By 1504, his dictionary had been reprinted twenty-five times.\textsuperscript{511}

He received his masters of arts in 1477 from Basel,\textsuperscript{512} before moving onto brief continued Greek studies in Paris again.\textsuperscript{513} In 1479, Reuchlin studied law at Orleans to learn about imperial law, he had left the University of Paris since, under orders from Pope Honorius III, the university was only permitted to teach canon law.\textsuperscript{514} His time at Orleans was followed by later legal studies in Poitiers, where he received his law license in 1481.\textsuperscript{515} That same year he became a professor at the University in Tübingen.\textsuperscript{516} It was during this period in the 80s that Reuchlin became interested in studying Hebrew further, but he had no teacher.\textsuperscript{517} In 1482, Reuchlin went to Rome as the interpreter and advisor to Count Eberhard of Württemberg (c.1447-1504).\textsuperscript{518} Reuchlin

\textsuperscript{506}Johann Reuchlin, \textit{On the Art of the Kabbalah}, p. 10; Erika Rummel, \textit{The Case against Johann Reuchlin}, p. 15; Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 16
\textsuperscript{507}Erika Rummel, \textit{The Case against Johann Reuchlin}, p. 14
\textsuperscript{508}Sources have occasionally spelled this city as Basle. Due to the inconsistency, I have chosen to spell it Basel as it is referred to in modern usage.
\textsuperscript{510}Johannes Reuchlin, \textit{Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books}, pp. 2-3; Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 62
\textsuperscript{511}Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 62
\textsuperscript{513}Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church}, p. 1398
\textsuperscript{514}Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 59
\textsuperscript{515}Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church}, p. 1398
\textsuperscript{516}Ibid, p. 1398
\textsuperscript{517}Jerome Friedman, \textit{The Most Ancient Testimony}, p. 24
was brought on such trips due to his superior knowledge of and eloquence in Latin, causing him to serve in the role of a sort of orator/secretary. The Italians were able to understand his Latin much better than his employer’s.\textsuperscript{519} During that brief visit he was introduced to Marsilio Ficino, as well as Lorenzo de Medici (1449-1452), whose library he effusively praised.\textsuperscript{520} While in Rome, Reuchlin, attempting to improve his knowledge of Greek, went to a class taught by the emigrant Argyropoulos. On learning that Reuchlin was a German, Argyropoulos asked him to read a Greek passage of Thucydides (460 BCE-395 BCE) and interpret it. Reuchlin read the Greek well and successfully interpreted the passage, after which Argyropoulos exclaimed “\textit{Ecce Graecia nostro exilio trans volavit Alpes},” translated as “By our exile Greek has flown across the Alps.”\textsuperscript{521} He returned to teach Greek at Tübingen a year later.\textsuperscript{522} From 1484-1485, Reuchlin received his doctorate in imperial law from Tübingen.\textsuperscript{523}

This same year was when Reuchlin, with the help of any Jewish scholars he could find, began to study Hebrew in earnest and develop a more intense interest in the practice of Kabbalah.\textsuperscript{524}

Kabbalah traditionally refers to “the esoteric teachings of Judaism and for Jewish mysticism), particularly it refers to Kabbalistic work from the twelfth century onwards. The kabbalah means something handed down by tradition. Kabbalah is highly theosophic and “seeks to reveal the mysteries of the hidden life of God and the relationship between the divine life on the one hand and the life of man and creation on the other.” Most Medieval Kabbalists believed that Kabbalah

\textsuperscript{519} Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 64
\textsuperscript{520} Ibid, p. 65; Lewis W. Spitz, \textit{The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists}, p. 61
\textsuperscript{521} A. Pelzer Wagener, \textit{Melanchthon, A German Humanist}, p. 156; Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 67
\textsuperscript{522} Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church}, p. 1399
\textsuperscript{523} Ibid, p. 1399; Erika Rummel, \textit{The Case against Johann Reuchlin}, p. 14
was received by Moses at Sinai from God himself, whereas others have viewed Kabbalah as a philosophy with “concrete…historical development.” Kabbalah is primarily a symbolic philosophy, but it does not function as a singular, unified system with set principles and constraints. It “consists rather of a multiplicity of different approaches, widely separated from one another and sometimes completely contradictory.” Kabbalah is highly dependent on both Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, both in theoretical frameworks and in technical terminology.\(^{525}\)

It was in 1486 that a Jew, known only to history as Calman, taught Reuchlin the Hebrew alphabet and gave him his first Hebrew manuscript for his collection.\(^{526}\) Reuchlin supported himself as a jurist and a lawyer as he studied.\(^{527}\) In this capacity, “he represented the Dominican Order pro bono for over two decades. In 1519, as yet another response to the Dominican attack, Reuchlin published a set of letters from Dominicans thanking him for his generous legal assistance in past years.”\(^{528}\) It appears that prior to the confrontation over Jewish books, Reuchlin had been on good terms with the order, even being a participant in the Dominican order’s prayer fraternity.\(^{529}\) In 1490, Reuchlin made his next trip to Italy where he was introduced to the Italian humanist, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and began to study Hebrew with Obadiah Sforno (1475-1550).\(^{530}\) While there, Reuchlin also “collected Hebrew manuscripts and books, still a rarity north of the Alps.”\(^{531}\)

\(^{525}\) “Kabbalah”, Encyclopaedia Judaica

\(^{526}\) Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 76; Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, p. 62


\(^{528}\) David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 17

\(^{529}\) Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 107

\(^{530}\) Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. 15; Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 93

\(^{531}\) Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. 15
Two years later on a trip to the imperial court, Reuchlin met and began to study Hebrew with Emperor Frederick III’s (1415-1493) Jewish court physician, Jacob Yehiel of Loans in Linz (1440-1495). That same year, Reuchlin “finally” was able to buy a complete Hebrew Bible. Reuchlin remained in contact with Loans and “over the next decade Reuchlin repeatedly expressed his admiration for Loans.” With some urging on the part of Loans, the emperor gave Reuchlin a 51 by 33 centimeter manuscript known as either Codex Reuchlin 1 or “the Reuchlin Bible.” It was a nearly-complete Bible, missing only the book of Ruth and the Song of Songs. The “codex contains the Pentateuch with the Targum Onkelos, which is the oldest complete Jewish Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch.”

That same year, the emperor made ennobled Reuchlin, giving him the title of “papal court palatine.” Reuchlin was given the authorization across the whole empire to grant doctorates, swear in notaries, or legitimate non-noble offspring born out of wedlock. For his coat of arms, Reuchlin chose an image of “an altar of sacrifices of the Old Testament, corresponding to his interests in the Hebrew language and religion.”

In 1496, Reuchlin moved to Heidelberg to study, before taking a two-year trip back to Italy to study with Sforno in Rome. In 1500, Reuchlin wrote Loans a letter in Hebrew to demonstrate to his old teacher the progress that he had made in the language.

\[532\] Also spelled as Iacob ben Iehiel Loans  
533 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 117  
535 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 112  
536 Ibid, p. 109  
537 Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1399  
538 Johann Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, p. 10; Jerome Friedman, Most Ancient Testimony, p. 24  
539 Johann Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, p. 10
In spring of 1510, Jewish books were banned in Germany, setting off a series of events that would be known in history as “the Reuchlin Affair” after Reuchlin took a stand against the confiscation and destruction of Jewish books.\textsuperscript{540} From that point forward, Reuchlin’s life was never truly free. For the next decade he would be on trial by an inquisitor for supporting the Jews in his writings.\textsuperscript{541} In 1513 he was tried for heresy,\textsuperscript{542} and a year later his works were “condemned to be burned.”\textsuperscript{543} That year he published \textit{Calrorum Vivorum}, known in English as \textit{Letters of Famous Men}, a collection of letters of support from other scholars.\textsuperscript{544} By 1516, Leo X had “set a date to proceed against Reuchlin.”\textsuperscript{545}

Yet in 1517, a shift occurred that relieved some of the pressure from Reuchlin. In October of 1517, Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to a church door and, suddenly, the Church had other priorities beyond Reuchlin. Luther had previously encouraged Reuchlin in his struggles, but Reuchlin “later expressed gratitude that Luther had now attracted the hostility of the monks, taking the heat off him!”\textsuperscript{546} Reuchlin wrote: “God be praised…that now the monks have found someone else who will give them more to do than I.”\textsuperscript{547} He kept himself out of the storm that was the Luther controversy, except with regard to his nephew, Melanchthon.\textsuperscript{548}

In 1520, the same year that Reuchlin’s works were condemned by the Pope (reversing a previous ruling) for his defense of Jewish books,\textsuperscript{549} Reuchlin moved to the University of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[540]{Erika Rummel, \textit{The Case against Johann Reuchlin}, p. 11}
\footnotetext[541]{David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 80}
\footnotetext[542]{Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church}, 1399}
\footnotetext[543]{Johannes Reuchlin, \textit{Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books}, pp. 22}
\footnotetext[544]{Erika Rummel, \textit{The Case against Johann Reuchlin}, p. 19}
\footnotetext[545]{Johannes Reuchlin, \textit{Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books}, pp. 22}
\footnotetext[546]{Anthony Goodman and Angus Mackay eds., \textit{The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe}, p. 212}
\footnotetext[547]{Lewis W. Spitz, \textit{The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists}, p. 77}
\footnotetext[548]{Ibid}
\footnotetext[549]{Johannes Reuchlin, \textit{Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books}, p. 22; Jerome Friedman, \textit{The Most Ancient Testimony}, p. 27; Lewis W. Spitz, \textit{Luther and German Humanism}, p. II 45}
\end{footnotes}
Ingolstadt to teach Greek and Hebrew, where his Hebrew classes had high student demand. He used Moses Kimhi’s (d.11900 Mahalakh for his students’ Hebrew textbook. A year later he also became a professor at the University of Tübingen. By the time of his death, Greek was taught in almost all German universities, as opposed to the utter dearth of Greek resources while Reuchlin was being educated. He died at age 65 in 1522 of jaundice, a “dedicated foe of the Reformation” and a devout Catholic.

Reuchlin’s life was centered around Biblical humanism and its use of languages, particularly Hebrew. He appropriated Jewish thought for Christian purposes by identifying the study of Hebrew as a culmination of church teachings. Reuchlin was described as “an enthusiastic student of [Jewish] sacred literature, for in it he saw the spiritual foundation of Christianity.” He saw the study of Hebrew not merely as a useful skill in exegesis, but necessary, stating that “I assure you…that not one of the Latins can expound the Old Testament unless he first becomes proficient in the language in which it was written. For the mediator between God and man was language, as we read in the Pentateuch; but not any language, only Hebrew, through which God wished his secrets to be made known to man.”

While he was interested in ancient Greek throughout his entire life, his interest in Hebrew only truly matured after spending time with Italian Humanists such as Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. As Elisheva Carlebach writes, “When he returned to German

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550 Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. x; Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 28
552 Ibid, p. 90
553 A. Pelzer Wagener, Melanchthon, A German Humanist, p. 156
554 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 28; Anthony Goodman and Angus MacKay eds., The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe, p. 212; Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1399; Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 50
555 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 84
556 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 3
557 Johann Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, p. 10
558 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 3
lands, Reuchlin became aware of the gap between the advances in humanistic knowledge made in Italy and the status of German Humanism. Aware that the Germans lagged far behind their Italian counterparts, he advocated the study of Hebrew, along with Greek and Latin, as a prerequisite for any authentic encounter with the texts that formed the basis of Christian civilization.”

He “was the first rightly to bear that triple linguistic tiara—Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.” He is also known as “the first educator of Germany to promote the study of the Greek and Hebrew languages.” Reuchlin wrote: “I was the first to bring Greek studies back to Germany and the first to present and teach the art and study of the Hebrew language to the universal church.” He struggled to “[structure] biblical Hebrew as a Christian language.”

There is no doubt that he himself followed his own advice, Reuchlin could write and speak in six different languages: German (Swabian), French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Italian. Additionally, Reuchlin said that he could read “Chaldaic,” an enigmatic term that directly translated in Greek and Latin meant Assyrian. During Reuchlin’s time, it might have meant Ethiopian or Aramaic, but given his particular scholarly focus, it seems most likely that it was the latter.

Despite his philological and academic focus, there is no doubt that Reuchlin was a profoundly religious man. He frequently used the phrase sola fide in “an epistemological sense,” believing that “only knowledge reinforced by faith is certain knowledge.” Reuchlin’s “study of Hebrew was almost as much a religious experience as a scholarly preoccupation.”

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559 Ibid, p. 15
560 Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, p. 62
561 A. Pelzer Wagener, Melanchthon, A German Humanist, p. 156
562 David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 13
563 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 155
564 Ibid, pp. 61-62
565 Lewis W. Spitz, Luther and German Humanism, p. III 126
566 Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, p. 63
that Hebrew brought him closer to God than any other language….through Hebrew, God conversed with men and men with angels, face to face.”

An example of Reuchlin’s thought can be seen in his attempt to turn the Tetragrammaton into a pentagrammaton. The Hebrew word YHWH (spelled, yud-he-vav-he) is traditionally understood as the literal name of God, and a name so sacred and powerful that pious Jews refuse to speak the name out loud. Reuchlin, in attempting to use the Hebrew to support a Christian interpretation, argued that YHWH was only a letter off from the name of Jesus (Joshua or Yeshua in Hebrew). He argued that with the addition of a shin, YHWH would be transformed into Jesus as YHSWH. However, this analysis in incorrect from the Hebrew point of view since Jesus’s name did not end in the letter he but the letter ayin. In this brief example we can see Reuchlin struggling to, not always accurately, fit Jewish knowledge and spirituality into a Christian framework, an attempt at synthesis that was likely influenced by Pico della Mirandola. Posset asserts that many of his Hebrew mistakes seem to relate to pronunciation, that he and ayin at the end of the word sounded similar. He spelled נצח as the word נזה.

The particular connection between the name of Jesus and God had been remarked upon by his predecessors, both by Nicholas of Lyra and Paul of Burgos (c.1270-1340).

Reuchlin, unusually for such a well-known figure of his time period, was not a prolific writer. He produced only a handful of works. As previously mentioned, he published a Latin lexicon in 1478. Reuchlin also translated several Greek works into Latin, but his best known works were on the subject of Hebrew or Jewish thought. In 1506, he published his most

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567 Ibid, p. 63
569 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 133
570 Ibid, p. 73
571 Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 1398
572 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 3
well-known work, *Rudimenta Hebraica*, a Hebrew grammar and dictionary. In 1512, he published an edition of the seven penitential psalms translated directly from Hebrew to Latin with accompanying commentary as a “companion piece to his grammar consisting of the Hebrew texts of the…psalms plus his own translation and grammatical notes and annotations.” The text was meant as a practice text for students. His edition of the psalms was the first Hebrew text to ever be printed in Germany. Six years later he published *De Accentibus et Orthographia linguae hebraicae*, a Hebrew pronunciation guide. While he received most of his acclaim for his Hebrew work, he produced two works on the study of Kabbalah. The first was called *The Wonder-Working Word*, described by Price as a “fledgling Kabbalistic effort,” published in 1494. The second, over twenty years later, was *The Art of Kabbalah*, published in 1517.

**Reuchlin in Dialogue: Influences and Critiques**

Reuchlin drew on numerous Christian and Jewish scholars, living and dead, in his attempt to master the language of Hebrew. He was heavily influenced in his philosophy by Italian Humanists of the Platonic Academy.

Reuchlin, like most Hebraists, was influenced by Nicholas of Lyra and Jerome. Spitz writes, “In both his attitude toward the Scriptures and in his concern for the conversion of the Jews, Reuchlin reflected many ideas of the Franciscan scholar Nicholas de Lyra (d.1340), whom he

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574 Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 24
575 Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, p. 11
577 Also translated as the “Miracle-Making Word”; David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 81; Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 120
578 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 81
admired intensely.”

However, despite his esteem for them, he maintained that truth was greater than any human authority: “For though I venerate Saint Jerome as an angel and reverence Lyra as my teacher, I worship the truth as God.”

Reuchlin maintained a friendship with Rudolph Agricola (c.1494-1566). The two corresponded on theology and Hebrew. Spitz notes that “As early as November 9, 1482, Rudolf Agricola wrote to Reuchlin about their mutual interest in Hebrew letters.”

Reuchlin turned to Agricola with questions about the divine name of God, inquiring, for example, whether the term ‘elohim’ was a form of salvation, due to the phrase “Elohim, by your name save me.”

Reuchlin was profoundly influenced by his trips to Italy during the height of the Italian Renaissance. Reuchlin met and became friends with Ficino in 1482, eight years earlier than Pico. It was Ficino who originally urged Reuchlin to study Hebrew and the two continued to write letters to each other throughout the years.

Reuchlin and Ficino both held that the Greek philosophy of Aristotle and Plato “derived from the wisdom of Moses and the Hebrews.” They also held that Christ was more important as a source of revelation than redemption.

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579 Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists*, p. 66
581 In source David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, there is a different version of this quotation that says “I revere St. Jerome as an angel, and I respect Nicholas of Lyra as a great teacher, but I worship the (Hebrew) truth as God”
582 Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists*, p. 62
583 Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 71
584 Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism*, p. III 125; Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, pp. 3-4
585 Ibid, p. III 125
586 Ibid, p. II 43
587 Ibid, p. III 128
Reuchlin met Pico in 1490 and was influenced by Pico’s fascination with the study of Kabbalah, along with Pico’s desire to synthesize religions and philosophies with Christianity. During his lifetime, “Reuchlin’s research…sought primarily what ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Christian philosophy and theology have in common rather than what divides them. In contrast to the dominant scholasticism of his time he opted for the symbolic mysticism of the Cabala.”

Pico “connected the cabala with ‘natural magic,’ that is, the study of celestial bodies, but rejected its counterpart, black magic ‘which is rightly excised by the church and has no foundation, no truth, and no basis.’” It was “[f]rom Pico in particular Reuchlin learned that the Christian teachings on the Trinity and on Christ were to be found in the Cabala from which one may learn not so much the Mosaic but the Christian religion.” There is even evidence that Reuchlin was influenced by Pico in his theories on the Tetragrammaton.

Among all the Christian scholars, Reuchlin valued Paul of Burgos, a Jewish convert to Christianity, above all. Reuchlin viewed him as the “most reliable Christian exegete,” undoubtedly because of his knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish sources. Reuchlin said of Paul, “the distinguished teacher Paul, Bishop of Burgos, formerly the most learned man among the Jews, whose later conversion to our faith brought salvation to many people. I am not ashamed to grant him preeminence above all the other (scholars).”

Reuchlin extensively studied Jewish sources, believing them necessary for any true Hebrew study. In the lexicographical section of his grammar, “Reuchlin has frequent recourse to medieval Jewish commentaries and grammarians. He quotes freely from Rashi and from David

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588 Ibid
589 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 199
590 Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. 16
591 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 96
593 Ibid
Kimhi’s *Book of Roots*. He stresses that anyone wishing to make a proper philological investigation of the Hebrew Scriptures should regard such authors as indispensable.”

Reuchlin was very reliant on Kimhi, even modeling his grammar off of *Book of Roots*. Reuchlin also utilized Rashi, like Nicholas of Lyra before him, referring to him as *ordinaries scripturae interpres*. Reuchlin also made use of diverse sources such as Abraham ben Ezra, Solomon ben Gabirol (c.1021-c.1057), Rabbi Moses of Garona, Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (1288-1344), Rabbi Joseph Kimhi (c.1105-c.1170), the Spanish Kabbalist Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla (1248-c.1325), and Moses Kimhi (whose primer *Mahalakha* he relied on).

Reuchlin had two major Hebrew teachers during his life: Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno and Jacob Loans. Both were court physicians, to Cardinal Domenico Grimani (1461-1523) and Emperor Frederick III respectively. Sforno taught Reuchlin for multiple years in Rome as a favor to Cardinal Grimani, who arranged their introduction and sessions. Sforno was highly educated, having studied philosophy, philology, math, Hebrew, Latin, Hebrew grammar, the Bible, the Talmud, Euclid, and Aristotle. Reuchlin seems to have had deep respect for both of his teachers, even going so far as to refer to Loans as “*humanissimus praeceptor meus ille*

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594 Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, p. 11
595 I have chosen to go with the current spelling of “Kimhi” rather than “Kimchi” unless quoting another author.
596 Eugene H. Merrill, “Rashi, Nicolas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis”, p. 68
597 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 84
599 Alternatively spelled Obadya and Obadia, and Seforno
600 Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, p. 10; Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 21; Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 21
602 Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 21
Chapter III: Johannes Reuchlin

The Reuchlin Affair

The Reuchlin Affair centered around a debate over whether the German government should or should not confiscate and destroy Jewish books. Reuchlin, when asked to give his opinion, stood on the side of the Jews and opposed the destruction of the Jews, garnering him fame and controversy across Europe.

The debate was initiated by a converted Jew named Johannes Pfefferkorn (1469-after 1521). While initial speculation identified him as a butcher, modern historians now believe this was false, and “speculate that he was a moneylender.” His level of education is disputed as well, while he maintained that he read and spoke both German and Hebrew, his Hebrew translations were of poor quality. Peter Wortsman says that Pfefferkorn “knew neither Hebrew (the language of the allegedly defamatory books) nor Latin (the language of his published attacks).”

He converted to Christianity in 1504, and three years later he began publishing anti-Jewish attacks. He “called for an accelerated program of missionizing designed to bring about the mass conversion of Jews in German lands. Among his recommendations were economic restrictions on Jewish livelihood, the coercion of Jews to attend Christian sermons and the destruction of

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603 Translated by Leah Ferguson, Class of 2016, Major in Classical Civilization and Computer Science
604 Johannes Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, p. 10
605 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 1
606 Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. 3
607 Ibid, p. 4
608 Ibid, p. 4
609 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 1
Jewish books.”

His argument against Jewish books was twofold. First, he “argued that Jews would not convert to Christianity if they could make use of their religious writings.” With this argument, taking away books was seen as a means of persuasion towards conversion, seeing the Jewish texts as a crutch that was aiding the Jews in their stubborn refusal to convert. Price writes, “Faced with the loss of their books, especially their prayer books and the Talmud, the people of the book would succumb more easily to conversion or, as the Jews themselves soon protested, simply would be unable to practice their religion.” Secondly, he “alleged in various pamphlets that all Jewish writings contain profanities and attacks against the Christian faith.” The Jewish writings were therefore seen as threatening and libelous.

He was supported by the Dominicans of Cologne throughout the controversy. Pfefferkorn might have been the poster boy for the movement, but the Dominicans stood behind him and afterwards he was given a “comfortable” job running a Dominican hospice. Pfefferkorn, throughout the affair, comes off as passionate about the cause and about a zealousness for religious purity, no matter the repercussions. Posset writes, “Pfefferkorn was a fanatic, but he was certainly an honorable man and was convinced that he was doing the right thing.” In fact he seems decidedly anti-intellectual in his writings. He took on Reuchlin, saying, “If someone objects, saying to me, ‘if you are ignorant, why do you set yourself up against a doctor of law and a humanist?’ I reply…learning is no defence against the charge of depravity. All the heretics are proof of this, for they were always the most learned men.”

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610 Ibid, p. 16
611 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 26
612 David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 4
613 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 1
614 Ibid, p. 2
615 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 19
616 Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. 13
In the winter of 1509-1510, Pfefferkorn’s cause was brought before Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519) and received an order from the emperor “authorizing the destruction of all Hebrew books found in the possession of Jews in Frankfort and Cologne.” The decree “order[ed] local magistrates throughout his realm to confiscate Jewish books so as to study their contents,” and determine whether they needed to be destroyed, but not a single person sent by the Emperor to confiscate and study the books knew any Hebrew. This campaign was the first empire-wide attack on Judaism; previous attacks had been initiated by provinces or municipalities, never effecting the whole empire.

However, partway through the process, the emperor stayed his order to confiscate the books. It is possible that the emperor’s conscience got the better of him. His father had been favorable to and tried to protect the Jews of his realm during his reign and he had urged his son to do the same. In June 1510, “the emperor ordered his lord high chancellor, the Archbishop of Mainz, to solicit expert legal opinions from knowledgeable persons.” Two of the three individuals selected were Reuchlin and Jacob von Hoogstraeten (c. 1460-1527), the grand inquisitor of Cologne, “whose foregone conclusions in the matter favored the Pfefferkorn cause.” Aside from his knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism, the fact that Reuchlin was friends with Maximilian from his time at the imperial court likely played a role. Four universities were also called up on to give their opinions on the confiscation: the Universities of Mainz, Cologne, Erfurt, and Heidelberg. The universities “recommended that all Jewish books be

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617 Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 26; Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 2
618 Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 2
619 David Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books*, pp. 3-4
620 Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 2
621 Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 111
622 Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 2
623 ibid; David Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books*, p. 5
624 Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 133
confiscated and examined by qualified theologians. Those considered dangerous or blasphemous were to be burned; the rest were to be returned to their owners. A certain number of copies of the condemned books would be deposited in designated libraries and reserved for the use of scholars.”625 Their recommendations went beyond the narrow question of books and additionally suggested that “the practice of usury be stopped and Jews be permitted and encouraged to practice trades now reserved for Christians. They should be kept from practicing usury and admitted to take up ‘honest work,’ but they should be distinguished from Christians by wearing a clearly visible badge.” Neither of these recommendations were acted upon by the emperor.626

Despite siding against Reuchlin, many of the theologians at the universities took pains to emphasize that this was not personal and that they maintained respect for Reuchlin as a scholar. The theologians at the University of Mainz “stated that they did not intend to inure ‘the honor and reputation of the author, but after mature deliberation, decided unanimously that the said books should be removed for doctrinal reasons that its use should be prohibited, and the books itself condemned.”627 At Erfurt, the scholars “insisted that the books must be suppressed, taken away, and destroyed” but also emphasized that Reuchlin was a “most learned man of singular and preeminent erudition, most knowledgeable in the three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and enjoying an excellent reputation for the integrity of his life and morals.”628 It is worth noting that while Reuchlin was revered for his language skills and his knowledge of Judaism, the other

625 Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. 11
626 Ibid
627 Ibid, p. 18
628 Ibid
scholars over-estimated his knowledge. In comparison to their understanding, Reuchlin, whatever his gaps, seemed to be the authority on Jewish matters.629

Of all the scholars whose opinions were solicited on the question of the Jewish books, Reuchlin was the only one who argued against the burning of the books.630 He was asked by the Jews of Cologne for help in saving their books.631 The criteria that he sets forth for the destruction of the books is revealing: “I am asked to offer my recommendation on whether the destruction of said books would be pious, praise-worthy and useful to our holy Christian Faith, and whether it would indeed be productive in promoting the service of god.”632 To which Reuchlin answers in the negative. He argued that the Catholic Church would not condone book burning (an assertion belied by Europe’s recent history during his time), stating: “Thus the Holy Christian Church, faithful to these dictates, rules in its canonical law…that all books must be preserved so that they may be winnowed and studied, according to the words of the Apostle Paul…But if we burn them, then our descendants will not be able to sift through them for that which is good.”633 He went on to insist: “This we may, no doubt, interpret to mean that our mother, the Holy Christian Church, forbids us to burn any book in which there is some bad mixed in with what is mostly good.”634 He utilizes the Gospel analogy of the chaff and the wheat to bolster his argument,635 while continuously citing Paul as he goes through his logic.636 Reuchlin also made use of his Greek knowledge in his Gospel analysis to further his argument.637

629 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 154-160
630 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 21
631 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 26
632 Ibid, p. 32
633 Ibid, p. 62
634 Ibid, p. 63
635 Ibid, p. 33
636 Ibid, p. 37
637 Ibid, p. 49
Above all, however, Reuchlin used this controversy to expound upon his belief, like a true humanist, that learning Biblical languages was key to being an informed Christian, and he took other scholars to task for their lack of knowledge and their presumption in destroying books they themselves could not read or understand. He says that “one can find many Christian scholars who because of their ignorance of these two languages [Hebrew and Greek] cannot rightly explain [the Scripture] and in this are often made a laughing stock.”

For non-scholars, he reminds people that “there are also many plain and simple folk with no sense whatsoever of lofty thinking; they take and understand their Scripture literally, word for word.”

Reuchlin’s most scathing attack comes later, as he references Aristotle saying: “Similarly, Aristotle writes in his Elencho: that a wise man should possess two qualities, namely the following: that he not lie, and that he be able to counter that which is the stuff of lies. And he should not fly into a rage and burn the books of his opponents if has not studied enough to oppose them with reasoned arguments in sermons or disputations.”

Reuchlin saw his opponents to desire books as a manifestation of their ignorance.

Reuchlin emphasizes, however, that he is not against burning books simply on principle, but that he only believes that most of these books do not fit the criteria. Reuchlin explains,

If such a book is found among the holdings of a Jew who knowingly harbors it, a book that expressly and clearly heaps scorn, offense and dishonor upon our sacred Lord Jesus, his venerable mother, the saints or the Christian Order, then one would have the right by Imperial mandate to confiscate and urn it and duly punish said Jew for having himself failed to tear it up, burn it, or otherwise dispose of it.

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638 Ibid
639 Ibid, p. 65
640 Ibid, p. 41
641 Ibid, p. 35
He argues from a legal point of view, insisting that the Jews’ books could not be considered fraudulent in the legal sense because the Jews honestly believed the works were true and therefore were not intending to commit any fraud. He “present[s] a forceful argument that the Jews were within their rights in owning such volumes and that in any case the books caused no harm to Christendom.”

Pfefferkorn responded by attacking Reuchlin in a pamphlet called The Hand Mirror. By 1513, Jacob Hoogstraeten, “the head of the Inquisition in Cologne, began inquisitorial proceedings against Reuchlin’s opinions.” In the heresy charges, they “alleg[ed]…that his Recommendation was ‘impermissibly favorable to Jews.’” He was able to gain “formal condemnations of Reuchlin’s defense of Jewish writings from major theological faculties, including Paris, Cologne, and Louvain.”

Reuchlin begins his opinion by delineating the different kind of books that were taken and what they consist of. He describes seven categories: the Bible, the Talmud, Kabbalah, glosses and commentaries, sermons and Midrash, philosophy and Sefarim, and poetry, fables, and tales. As Wortsman writes, “by outlining in brief the nature of each of the aforementioned kinds of books, he succeeds in his primary objective, which is to tear away the veil of strangeness and the pall of superstition surrounding these books in the popular consciousness.”

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642 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 26
643 Lewis W. Spitz, Luther and German Humanism, p. II 45
644 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 22
645 David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 5
646 ibid
647 ibid, p. 7
648 ibid, p. 33
Reuchlin starts with the Bible and argues that there is no possibly way that Christians can take and destroy twenty-four books of the Bible because they are Christian scripture as much as anything else. He sees the suggestion as patently absurd and barely worth even considering.\footnote{Ibid, p. 37}

However, with the Talmud, Reuchlin faced a more difficult task in convincing his reader, and he spent more of his time on the Talmud than any of the other seven categories. This makes sense since the Talmud was the primary target of the order.\footnote{Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 26} Reuchlin starts by going through the history of the Talmud and explaining what exactly it is to his reader.\footnote{Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 37} It is interesting to note that in his explanation of the Talmud, Reuchlin is educated enough to know that there is a difference between the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud, a distinction that likely was lost on most of his contemporaries.\footnote{Ibid, p. 38} Reuchlin admits that he has only limited knowledge of the Talmud’s contents, having never had the opportunity to read it: ‘Now, alas, to my great regret, I have never read this Talmud, even though I would have gladly paid double the price for the chance to read it. Thus all my efforts to no avail, I have no direct knowledge of the Talmud itself, but only an indirect knowledge based on our [Christian] books written against it.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 39}

Reuchlin focuses the thrust of his argument on the basis that one cannot argue against something that they cannot understand, referencing both Jerome and Aristotle: “Yet how can anyone argue against a thing which he does not understand—as St. Jerome maintains against Jovinian. Thus someone must at least understand the language of the Talmud before asserting
that it is false or intentionally offensive to us Christians. For ‘whosoever knows not the meaning of words and of their language easily errs in his interpretation,’ says Aristotle.”

Hebrew is a cornerstone of his argument. So few Christian knew the language, but it was necessary for being able to comprehend the books they sought to ban. Reuchlin goes a step farther, however, and asserts that even the Jews cannot fully understand the Talmud: “Since the Talmud contains the characteristics of so many languages, as noted above, ever Jew, even if he is well versed in Hebrew, cannot possibly understand it in its totality. How then can the Christians justify the condemnation of the Talmud, a work which they themselves do not even understand?” This is a text, he asserts, of which he and other Christians have no direct knowledge of, making it impossible to ban in any informed way: “And I know no Christian in all of Germany who has himself actually studied the Talmud. Never, moreover, in my lifetime has there ever been a baptized Jew in the German realm who could either understand or read it.”

He also states that polemic is not sufficient grounds of knowledge to ban the Talmud:

I do not feel bound by what our aforementioned coreligionists have written against the Talmud, being apprised that some of these self-appointed critics have never so much as perused its pages. And so I will not allow myself to be misled by what they have said or written, but will rather in this regard follow the dictates of Canonical Law, which states: ‘We are not obliged to accept the argument and opinions of every commentator, however piously Christian or well-respected he may be, as if it were Holy Writ or established law.”

Reuchlin also argues that the Talmud should not be destroyed because it can be useful to Christians in trying to convert Jews. He starts by saying that “it is good and useful to us that the Talmud exist and be preserved. And the more full of contradictions that Talmud may be, the

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654 Ibid, p. 41
655 Ibid, p. 42
656 Ibid, pp. 39-40
657 Ibid, p. 46
more it empowers us Christians to dispute its truth in spoken word and writing.”

He sees issues in the Talmud as possible weaknesses that can be exploited.

He also argues that the Talmud serves as a way of intellectually sharpening the polemic for the next generation. The Talmud can teach them how to better attack and argue against non-Christian faiths, stating: “It is for this reason that I maintain: The more preposterous and unfit the Talmud is—as our scholars suggest—the more fervently do I wish it to be preserved for our students and theologians, if only as the bull’s-eye of their daily intellectual target practice, so that they become all the more ardent and bold in verbal combat with the nonbelievers.”

He sees the use of the Talmud against the Jews as a long theological past-time and an accepted method for conversion, referencing Nicholas of Lyra in his argument:

This too is the tactic employed by the most learned Dr. Nikolaus de Lyra—a veritable prince of the barefoot order—not only in this analysis of the entire Bible, wherever he may find a useful reference, but also in his own book directed against the Jews, which begins: ‘We first must ask ourselves if [there is any benefit to be derived] from the books that we have inherited from the Jews, et cetera.’ And in that work he writes as follows: ‘Whereas the Talmud and the commentaries of the Jewish scholars do not, for the most part, bespeak the truth, we can nevertheless find effective arguments to be used against them.’

He acknowledges, even, that there are possible passages that might go against Jesus in the Talmud. Reuchlin emphasizes that his defense of the Talmud is not a defense of its heretical passages, but to prevent its destruction: “All this I maintain, of course, not to vindicate the Talmud in those passages in which it ought to be repudiate; but solely to prove my point that it does not merit being burned or destroyed simply because it contains a few irresponsible and

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658 Ibid, p. 41
659 Ibid, p. 47
660 Ibid, pp. 55-56
661 Ibid, p. 39
foolish views common to all disputations particularly when taken literally.” Reuchlin, while believing the Talmud should not be destroyed, does admit that he believes that the heretical portions of the Talmud should be locked away in Christian universities so that they can be studied by trusted scholars, but not be accessible to general public consumption.

Reuchlin also makes the point that if the Talmud was so dangerous, it surely would have been destroyed in the centuries prior to this. He makes use of the patristic precedent, arguing “For had it been deemed necessary to burn the Talmud then it would have been burned many centuries ago, since our ancestors were after all so much more zealous in matters of Christian faith than we.” He continues in this line, stating, “Whereas the others before us, highly learned and well versed in many languages did indeed write sharp criticisms of the Talmud, yet never did they express the wish that it be burned and destroyed.” Given the numerous incidents of Talmud burning in contemporary memory, particularly the well-known incident in Nicholas of Lyra’s day in Paris, one can hardly believe that Reuchlin was unaware that in fact many theologians had expressed the wish that the Talmud be burned and destroyed and had acted on them. One can only assume that since this statement is patently untrue, Reuchlin was likely being somewhat disingenuous on this topic.

On the subject of Kabbalah, which Reuchlin had a particular interest, he says that he could “easily say a great deal on the subject—both for and against it.” He describes it as “the sublime mystery of the pronouncement and sayings of God.” He quotes Pico in defense of Kabbalah, arguing that “There is no body of learning that offers more conclusive evidence of the

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662 Ibid, p. 57
663 Ilona N. Rashkow, “Hebrew Bible Translation and the Fear of Judaization”, p. 220
664 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 8
665 Ibid, p. 47
666 Ibid, p. 64
667 Ibid, p. 34
Godhead of Christ than magic and the Kabbalah.”  

He argued that the “books of the Kabbalah are not only harmless, but also eminently useful for our Christian Faith; and since Pope Sixtus IV ordered that they be translated into Latin for the benefit of us Christians, it will suffice for me to draw the conclusion that therefrom concerning said Kabbalistic books, that neither should they nor may they lawfully be suppressed or burned.”

He argues against destroying the glosses and commentaries on the Bible, since they are scholarship on Hebrew that Christians need. He sees them as works that are actively beneficial to Christian study. Reuchlin writes, “Therefore we should by no means suppress the commentaries and glosses of those who have thoroughly mastered their mother tongue, having studied it since their youth, but rather wherever such commentaries exist we should make them accessible, take pains to preserve them and hold them in high esteem as sources from which flow the true meaning of the language and the significance of the Holy Scripture.”  

Reuchlin’s assertion of Jewish sources as sources of truth is a revolutionary concept. By admitting Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament into discussion of Christian theology, Reuchlin is stating that the Jewish people—whom many people either see as murders of the Messiah or as utterly deluded and misguided—have something to contribute to Christian thought and understanding.

He adds to the importance of the Hebrew, stating: “The Christian Church can and may not cast aside such commentaries, for they keep alive the original Hebrew, a vital element which the Holy Scripture, and in particular the Old Testament, cannot do without; just as we can and dare not do without the Greek language and its grammars and commentaries for our understanding of

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668 Ibid, p. 64
669 Ibid, p. 66
670 Ibid, p. 9
the New Testament.”\textsuperscript{671} He adds, “They explain precisely how every word of the Bible is to be understood in the particularity of its linguistic context—as we find, for instance, in the work of Abraham ben Ezra, Moses ben Gabirol and Rabbi David Kimchi, all of whom offer a grammatical analysis of each word. We should be no more inclined to burn these books than we would be to burn such Latin grammars.”\textsuperscript{672} Reuchlin equates the Hebrew language with the Greek or Latin, saying that we should not treat them differently from one another from an academic point of view.

In terms of the sermons, hymns, devotionals, and Midrash, Reuchlin takes the view that unless the works are libelous, they are simply not the concern of the Christian authorities, writing: “[the Jews] are to be left in peace in their synagogues, ceremonies, rites, habits, customs and devotional prayers, particularly if they do us no harm and display no public disrespect for our Christian Church. For the Christian Church has nothing whatsoever to do with them.”\textsuperscript{673}

Only the categories of fables and tales does Reuchlin acknowledge the possibility of explicitly anti-Christian sentiments that should be banned. However, he cautions people that these works should not be viewed as representative of all Jewish thoughts, because “a poetic work…is the individual expression of its author and not necessarily representative of the collective voices of his people.”\textsuperscript{674} On such blasphemous books, Reuchlin believed that the Jews were themselves ensuring the censorship of these works, stating: “Indeed, I also remember hearing repeatedly in the course of many conversations with Jews at the court of Emperor Frederick III, of blessed memory…that the Jews themselves saw to it that such books were taken and destroyed and that it was forbidden for their own people ever to express anything of the sort

\textsuperscript{671} Ibid, p. 67
\textsuperscript{672} Ibid, p. 66
\textsuperscript{673} Ibid, p. 69
\textsuperscript{674} Ibid, p. 7
aloud or in print.”675 The only anti-Christian Jewish literature that he proposed banning were the
texts *Foledot Yeshu* and *Nizzahou (Victory)*.676 The latter work had been discovered and
‘captured’ in Mainz in “a raid of Jewish homes” in October of 1478.677 Reuchlin himself had
actually read a copy, having received it as a gift from the humanist Bishop Johannes von Dalberg
in 1494.678

As previously mentioned, the controversy created quite a stir and had long-lasting
consequences for Reuchlin personally. He lost his health, his wealth, and his reputation.679 He
also “earned himself the lifelong enmity of countless scholastics and theologians of his day.”680
He was condemned by the Pope, summoned on charges of heresy and slander against the
Dominicans, and viciously attacked in the press by Pfefferkorn and his supporters.681 However,
there were many who condemned Reuchlin’s work and his take on Jewish books, but continue to
support him personally as a scholar.682 The question had shifted from whether or not to burn
Jewish books to whether or not Reuchlin was a heretic.683

Beyond the facts of the case, what is fascinating is the narratives that both sides developed in
arguing their case, constructing a humanist versus scholastic, scholar versus religious, dynamic.
For Pfefferkorn and his supporters,

the Reuchlin affair took on the character of a crusade. Reuchlin rejected this
interpretation of events and supplies an interpretation of his own, intimating that
another issue was at state: the preservation or destruction of historical sources. In
Reuchlin’s eyes, this pitted scholars, who respected books as cultural witnesses,
against boors, who had no appreciation for them, or more specifically, it pitted Reuchlin the humanist against Pfefferkorn and his supporters, the scholastic theologians of Cologne.⁶⁸⁴

As Rummel writes, “The protagonists agreed on the facts but not on their meaning, and variously portrayed the controversy as a battle between orthodox Christians and Judaizers, between Catholics and reformers, or between representatives of scholasticism and champions of humanism.”⁶⁸⁵ Reuchlin himself “perceived his case as the latest instance in a long series of confrontations between humanists and theologians.”⁶⁸⁶ It is important to note that while Reuchlin was “opposed to the dated form of scholastic expression, to their way of obscuring religious truth by multiplying words, to their syllogistic method, to their trifling concerns. He was not opposed to their basic Christian premises and ultimate pious purposes.”⁶⁸⁷ He “was more moderate in his criticism [of scholasticism] than many of his fellow humanists, more sparing than the two viae frequently were of each other.”⁶⁸⁸

This controversy spun beyond Reuchlin’s own arguments, making him a poster boy for reformers, when Reuchlin himself remained a committed Catholic.⁶⁸⁹ In a treatise known as the Defensio Reuchlin “insisted: ‘I did not want and I do not want to think anything else than what the Catholic Church thinks.’”⁶⁹⁰ He had garnered the point of many who would go on to be prominent members of the Reformation. Crotus Rubinanus and Ulrich von Hutten (1488-1523) wrote Epistolae Oscuruorum Vivorum (Letters of Obscure Men), a satirical text of scholastics in

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⁶⁸⁴ Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. VIII  
⁶⁸⁵ Ibid, p. vii  
⁶⁸⁶ Ibid, p. ix  
⁶⁸⁷ Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, p. 66  
⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 65  
⁶⁸⁹ Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 27  
⁶⁹⁰ Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, pp. 3-31
Philip Melanchthon described Pfefferkorn “as a deceitful Jew who pretended to be a Christian and who only sought financial advantages from the confiscation of the Jewish books. According to Melanchthon, this former Jew would have shared any incoming money with the inquisitor.” By looking at who supported him, he was tarred with the same brush. By siding with the Dominicans over Reuchlin, the Church lost credibility with the younger reformers.

While many humanists rallied to Reuchlin’s support (Erasmus even asked his friends at papal court to help Reuchlin as a fellow humanist) most of them cared very little about the fate of the Jews and in fact disagreed with Reuchlin. Price writes that he could not find “a single Christian in the Renaissance [who] claimed that Reuchlin was a great man for having defended civil rights for Jews.” Erasmus wrote in a letter to a friend: “I would prefer…that the whole Old Testament be destroyed than the peace of Christendom be broken on account of the books of the Jews.” Nevertheless, this evidence seems to suggest that by the early 1500s, there was already a fairly organized humanist network in place across Europe that was then utilized in defense of its members, such as Reuchlin.

The Reuchlin Affair garnered criticism and opinions from all over Western and Central Europe, becoming an object of public fascination. Price writes:

By 1513, the controversy was being discussed everywhere across Europe in part because it implicated the champion of the Renaissance humanist methodology for

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691 Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., ed. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1399; Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, 304
692 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 19
693 Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. 16
694 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 28
695 Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, p. 19
696 Ibid, pp. 19-20
697 David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 8
698 Ibid, p. 7
biblical studies. Many authorities tried to influence the outcome of the case, one way or the other—the emperor (Maximilian I), the future emperor (Charles V), the current pope (Leo X), a future pope (Adrian VI), two Kings of France (Louis XII and Francis I) other princes, secular and ecclesiastical, some fifty cities in the Holy Roman Empire, university faculties, professors and scholars all over the continent and even in England.\textsuperscript{699}

Reuchlin was accused by Pfefferkorn of “judaizing,”\textsuperscript{700} and “[s]everal theological faculties argued that the very act of reopening for debate the question of burning Jewish books which had already been approved by two medieval popes, was a heretical step on Reuchlin’s part.”\textsuperscript{701} Both sides published their pamphlets and treatises in the German vernacular to reach a larger audience.\textsuperscript{702}

Reuchlin responded to criticism with a treatise called \textit{Augenspiegel} in 1511,\textsuperscript{703} “in which he argued that Jewish religious writings posed no threat to any believing Christian and were indeed of great value…never before had any Christian authority defended Jews on this matter.”\textsuperscript{704} He had sent his \textit{Recommendation} to the emperor in October 1510, and later included it as “part of a controversial pamphlet entitled \textit{Eye Glasses (Augenspiegel)}.\textsuperscript{705} In 1513, in another defensive treatise, Reuchlin wrote: “I know my adversaries are dismayed because I have called them [the Jews] our fellow citizens. Now I would want them to go berserk even more, their guts may burst open because I say that the Jews are our brothers.”\textsuperscript{706}

The Jews themselves were grateful to Reuchlin for his support. A “spokesman for Jews of the German Empire,” Josel of Rosheir (c. 1478-1554), said: “Our enemies, and the oppressors

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{699} David Price, \textit{Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books}, pp. 5-6
\item \textsuperscript{700} Erika Rummel, \textit{The Case against Johann Reuchlin}, p. viii
\item \textsuperscript{701} Johannes Reuchlin, \textit{Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books}, p.22
\item \textsuperscript{702} Ibid, p. 16
\item \textsuperscript{703} Ibid, p. 22
\item \textsuperscript{704} Jerome Friedman, \textit{The Most Ancient Testimony}, pp. 26-27
\item \textsuperscript{705} David Price, \textit{Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books}, p. 5
\item \textsuperscript{706} Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 1
\end{itemize}
from among our own people [Pfefferkorn], arose to abolish the written Torah; then God demonstrated a double miracle to us, for the Torah was returned to its former glory by a sage among the nations [Reuchlin].”

**Writings**

Reuchlin’s works can be separated into two clear categories: Hebrew and Kabbalah. Reuchlin saw the study of Hebrew as a sacred study, beyond an ordinary language, telling his students that “when he read Hebrew, he ‘shook in dread and terror’ because he could feel God’s presence in each and every letter of that language.”

He used his knowledge of the biblical languages for an exegesis that would bring out the hidden wisdom contained in the deepest meaning of every word and letter. He shared the conviction of those who regarded Hebrew as the oldest and most enduring of languages; born at the dawn of the world and destined to be the language of the entire race at the end of time, it was created directly by God [‘voice of God’, ‘holy language’] along with all other things, because it reflected God’s inner nature.”

He had found his studies difficult to pursue. Beyond the issue of sources, mentioned previously, Reuchlin said that Jewish scholars in Germany did not want to share their language, likely due to the risks highlighted in chapter one, saying: “our German Jews refuse to teach Christians their language, whether out of malice or incompetence. To back their position, they appeal to a proscription in the Talmud.” He also dealt with the stigma of Hebrew study that persisted in his age, emphasizing that “It was not greed for gold that drove me to learn the mysteries of Hebrew, nor was it a desire for mere reputation. Rather, these studies had to be

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707 Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 24
708 Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 20
pursued in secret, because they were considered unworthy of a man of position.” He was fascinated with the intricacies of the language itself, beyond its theological implications, boasting, “I do not discuss the meaning, like a theologian, but rather the actual words, like a grammarian.” He did not hesitate to integrate Jewish (or Jewish-influenced) sources into his work, all of which “reflected dependence upon such traditional Jewish sources and authorities as Kimchi, Maimonides, Nahmonides, Levi ben Gerson, and Nicholas of Lyra and his major source, Rabbi Solomon of Troyes, or Rashi.”

His passion for the language translated into a desire to communicate the knowledge of the language to others. Price says that “Reuchlin believed only Christians should teach Hebrew, Jews would mislead Christian students,” a charge that must be taken with some hesitancy given Reuchlin’s documented loyalty to his own Jewish teachers. He “was motivated not so much to parse ‘the mysteries of Hebrew’ (as the language of the Jews), but the Hebraica mysteria as such ‘the Hebrew mysteries.’” For Reuchlin, he saw the Hebrew language as intrinsically tied to Jewish mysteries and was devoted both to the intricacies of the language and the theology of a Christian Kabbalah.

Posset argues that Reuchlin “represents Catholic lay theology of the Renaissance at its best” as he “transformed the religious philosophy of the Jews (Cabala) into a theology compatible with Catholic dogma.” He adds that “Reuchlin’s Cabala is not a branch of Jewish Cabala because

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711 Pinchas E. Lapide, Hebrew in the Church, p. 5
712 Johann Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, p. 12
713 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 25
715 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 7
716 Ibid, p. 11
his thought patterns are developed from and shaped by the central Christian dogmas with respect to Jesus Christ as true God and true man and with respect to the Holy Trinity.”

In 1506, Reuchlin published *Rudimenta Hebraica*<sup>718</sup> (*Rudiments of the Hebrew Language*),<sup>719</sup> “the first dependable Hebrew grammar written by a Christian scholar in Latin.”<sup>720</sup> While there had been previous efforts, none were of the same quality of his. Of his predecessors, “the best known among them was Conrad Pellican who published a guide to Hebrew studies in 1501, *De modo legendi et intelligendi Hebraeum*, which was unfortunately replete with errors.”<sup>721</sup> On his own work, Reuchlin wrote: “No one before me was able to bring together the rules of the Hebrew language in a book. And should envy break his heart, nevertheless, I am the first. I have raised aloft a monument more lasting than bronze.”<sup>722</sup> Price writes that his grammar was just the first step in a sweeping movement. In the 1510s and 1520s, scholars in the leading centers of humanist culture—Florence, Venice, and above all, Rome—promoted Hebrew scholarship as one of the great promises for a renewal of Christianity. In the 1520s, the inchoate Protestant movement decisively embraced Hebrew philology, and, by the 1530s, Hebrew studies were established at universities throughout western Europe.<sup>723</sup>

Reuchlin anticipated protests against the grammar, writing: “I believe that enemies will oppose our dictionary, in which the interpretations of many are frequently criticized. ‘What a crime!’ they will exclaim. ‘Nothing is more unworthy of the fathers, no crime more cruel, than the attempt made by that most audacious man to overthrow so many…saintly men who were imbued

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<sup>717</sup> Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 1
<sup>718</sup> This text has also been known under the title *De rudimentis hebraicis*
<sup>720</sup> Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 3
<sup>721</sup> Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists*, p. 63
<sup>722</sup> ibid, p. 63
<sup>723</sup> David Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books*, p. 5
with the holy spirit….I reply with these few words: allow me what was allowed to those famous luminaries.”  

The book was divided into two parts: a grammar and a Hebrew-Latin dictionary of Biblical Hebrew. Rudimenta Hebraica was the first Hebrew grammar designed for Christian study, and was described by Price as a “complex manifesto for the biblical humanist movement.”

Reuchlin “presented Jewish scholarship as the key to resurrecting the moribund Christian study of the Bible.” Reuchlin felt that it was vital to create Hebrew works for Christian self-education, due to his worry that the Jews would be exiled from Europe. In his introduction to the grammar, he wrote: “the unfortunate events which we have experienced recently with the Jews— they have been expelled not only from Spain but also from our German lands. In quest of new settlements they have been forced to migrate all the way to the Beduins [Turkey]. As a result it may come to pass that the Hebrew idiom of their sacred writings will undergo great destruction and disappear from our midst.”

Price asserts that Reuchlin Latinized Hebrew in his grammar, by creating Hebrew grammatical equivalents to Latin, (for example declining Hebrew nouns to five Latin cases).

Reuchlin “miraculously transformed the seven stems of Hebrew verbs into the four conjugations of Latin.” This process was not continued by later Hebrew scholars. It is possible that this

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724 Johann Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, p. 13
725 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 24
726 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 81
727 Ibid, p. 83
728 Ibid, p. 84
729 Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony, p. 25
730 Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, pp. 197-198
731 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 84
732 Ibid
733 Ibid
was simply a misguided attempt to make Hebrew accessible for an audience that could only read Latin.

Reuchlin used his Hebrew skills to correct the Vulgate translation of the Bible.\textsuperscript{734} G. Lloyd Jones writes that, “This philological approach led him to criticize the Vulgate’s rendering of the ‘Hebraica veritas’ and to correct it at several points. In the \textit{De Rudimentis} alone there are over two hundred such corrections. Reuchlin justified his action by claiming that where the theologian may err in his interpretation, the philologist will arrive at the truth.”\textsuperscript{735} While Reuchlin is clearly interested in the literal understanding of the Bible and its accuracy, Posset maintains that Reuchlin preferred to “read the Scriptures according to the spiritual sense.”\textsuperscript{736} He mentions in his preface that, “he anticipates the accusation that his studies may ultimately bring disrespect upon the memory of the sainted Fathers whose interpretations of Scripture are thereby called into question. What if, he asks, one does discover that both Jerome and Lyra—the patron saints of Christian Hebraica—on occasion misunderstood the Scripture?”\textsuperscript{737} Yet, he also references these two Hebraists in defense of his own work, for “To those who would discount his efforts because he came to Hebrew only in mid-life, he reminds the reader that both Saint Jerome and Nicholas of Lyra had done the same.”\textsuperscript{738}

This was a crucial first step in Christian Hebraism as Reuchlin sought to bring academic rigor and system to the Christian study of Hebrew. His lexicon of Hebrew words ran to five hundred pages.\textsuperscript{739} David Steinmetz writes that, “it was Reuchlin’s combined dictionary and grammar that gave access to the mysteries of the sacred tongue for that crucial first generation of

\textsuperscript{734} Lewis W. Spitz, \textit{The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists}, p. 66
\textsuperscript{735} Johann Reuchlin, \textit{On the Art of the Kabbalah}, p. 12
\textsuperscript{736} Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 32
\textsuperscript{737} David C. Steinmetz, \textit{The Bible in the Sixteenth Century}, pp. 83-84
\textsuperscript{738} Ibid, p. 83
\textsuperscript{739} David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 84
humanist exegetes, in particular those north of the Alps.”  

This grammar was what garnered him fame among humanists, even though much of the structure and content was taken from David Kimhi’s *Book of Roots*. His grammar “marked a significant moment in the history of biblical exegesis” and “is as appropriate a moment as any from which to date the new era of Christian Hebraist exegesis of the Bible.”

In 1512, Reuchlin published a “companion piece” to the grammar that contained his translation and commentary on the seven penitential psalms. The translation was accompanied by his own “grammatical notes and annotations” on the text. The psalms were meant to serve as a practice piece for other Hebrew students to test their skills on.

In 1518, Reuchlin wrote *De Accentibus et Orthographia Linguae Hebraicae* (Accents and Orthography of the Hebrew Language). The book was on the “subject of Hebrew masorah, the theory of voweling and punctuation.” For vocalization examples, Reuchlin used the genealogy of Jesus. The book was dedicated to Cardinal Adrian Castelesi (c.1460-c.1521), in fact Reuchlin dedicated all of his “major works to Churchmen.”

The other part of Reuchlin’s work consisted of his scholarship on Kabbalah. Reuchlin used Kabbalah to support Christianity, because, like his colleagues Ficino and Pico, he “perceived in it a confirmation of Christian mystical doctrine. What united the Christian and Jewish

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740 David C. Steinmetz, *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 83
741 Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 3
743 David C. Steinmetz, *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 83
744 Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 24
746 Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 25
747 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 84
748 Ibid, p. 88
749 Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists*, p. 64
750 Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism*, p. 18
Kabbalists, despite their considerable theological differences, was the desire to approach God (the Eternal); they saw Hebrew as the living language of God, and as such, the sacred structure of creation, the very foundation of 'eternal truth.'”

Reuchlin described Kabbalah as “a symbolic reception of divine revelation, handed down for the contemplation of God and the separate forms (i.e. emanations) that bring salvation.” He viewed, incorrectly, his attempt to turn the Tetragrammaton into a pentagrammaton as accurate Kabbalah. He regularly read Christian references into the Kabbalah, believing the subject to be highly relevant to Christianity.

Reuchlin also argued that Kabbalah bore resemblance to Pythagoreanism. He “raised Kabbalah to the level of a Platonic philosophical science.” His cosmology was not simply a mechanical recapitulation of the Neoplatonist system. It was more than that. It was at least an attempt to maintain the unique Hebraic distinction between the Creator and creation, based in strong patristic tradition upon the concept of the creation ex nihilo dating from the time of the Maccabees while accepting the Hellenic ontology describing nature as an emanation from an eternal source, being as the undifferentiated ground of all reality.

Reuchlin did not reject any of the philosophies popular in his day, but, under influence of the Florentine Humanists, his work tended more in the direction of Neoplatonism.

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751 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy, and burn all Jewish Books
752 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 87
753 Ibid
754 Ibid, pp. 86-87
755 Lewis W. Spitz, Luther and German Humanism, p. III 125
757 Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, p. 74
Reuchlin believed that Greek wisdom was derived from the Jews, “assum[ing] a migration of human knowledge from its origins in Jewish revelation to Greece and Rome up to the present.”

Posset writes,

Reuchlin’s primary concern was the application of the insights from his Cabalistic studies to the better understanding of the Christian Bible…It is the Cabala that teaches that the Sacred Scriptures are the source of all wisdom. Although Reuchlin was fascinated by the meditation on numbers which he found in both the Pythagorean and Cabalistic theories, he realized that early Greek (Pythagorean) philosophy flowed from the Hebrew wisdom. Reuchlin’s frame of mind was set quite in agreement with the humanist imagery of the Hebrew source that feeds the Greek rivulets which run into the Latin swamp waters. In a less provocative way he rather refinedly declared in 1517: ‘Pythagoras channeled from the infinite sea…of the Cabalists his river…into the fields of the Greeks from which we finally are able to irrigate our own studies.’

For another example, he “claimed that Moses invented the art of writing and the Jews were the first to record history.” Reuchlin believed that “Plato encountered this Hebrew name of god during his journey to Assyria and translated it for the Greeks with the two letters ‘o’ and ‘n’ to form the Greek word ‘on’ of which Plato wrote in his Timaios.”

Of all Reuchlin’s work, his Kabbalistic theology was the least respected and the most concerning to the other scholars of his age. His “contemporaries were—to a large degree—unable to appreciate his efforts of connecting Jewish Cabala and Catholic theology. From their reaction one can tell that they highly esteemed Reuchlin as a trilingual scholar, but less so as the emerging Catholic Cabalist.”

In 1494 Reuchlin wrote The Wonder-Working Word (De Verbo mirifico), his first Kabbalistic work. His thesis was that Jesus was the wonder-working, miracle-making word. The title was

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758 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 162
759 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 126
760 David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 15
761 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 132
762 Ibid, p. 161
taken from Isaiah 9:6:”A child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him wonder-working, *admirabilis consiliarias* [in the Vulgate version; in Reuchlin’s own Latin translation it is *nomen mirificum*].” As previously mentioned, his theory of the Pentagrammaton was based on the assertion that it was only with the insertion of the *shin* into the holy name that it became pronounceable. This theory is articulated in more detail in this work. Posset writes,

> The Hebrew consonant ϒ is part of the first letter of the Hebrew word for ‘oil’, שlemen (*shemen*), and it is also contained in the Hebrew word *Messiah*, ‘the anointed one’, who is Christ. The ‘oil’ of Ps 44,8 (‘God has anointed you with the oil of gladness’) is the most pleasant ‘liquid of the divinity’ (*gratissimus liquor divinitatis*) which permeates the human mind and leads to deification since it is the *verbum deificum*.

He adds, “In Jesus’ Hebrew name the letter ϒ (*shin*) is found in the middle of what is God’s name. This letter, therefore, designates the mediator. The incarnation of God in the man Jesus makes him the mediator between God and humanity because in him God and man are made one.” Reuchlin transliterated יהוה as *Ehieh*. He translated the name as *qui ero*, “who I shall be.”

In this work, one can find “a Christ-centered spirituality according to which one should not trust in old relics that supposedly work miracles, but in Jesus Christ alone who as the Word (Latin *Verbum*, Greek *Logos*, Hebrew *Dabar*) is sent from God.” The book is structured as an exchange of ideas between three wise men: Capnion (Reuchlin), Sidonius, and Baruchius whereby Capnion dominates their conversations. They are convinced that the human mind can gain a connection with God only through faith (*per fidem*). What gives security of mind is what one reads in the

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763 Ibid, p. 120  
764 Ibid, p. 147  
765 Ibid  
766 Ibid, p. 132  
767 Ibid  
768 Ibid, p. 120
Bible...Capnion for the moment sums up the results of their conversations: ‘Everything is uncertain unless it is fortified by holy faith.’

Wonder-Working has a very humanist anthropology, quoting David in Psalm 8:6: “You have made him little less than a god, crowned with glory and honor.” Reuchlin used the Hebrew ‘elohim’ instead of the Vulgate’s ‘angels.’ His framework places humans as the link between God and the animals, part of both realms. Reuchlin “synthesized the thoughts of Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite, Florentine Neo-Platonism, and Jewish source material in order to hammer out his own non-magic, Catholic Cabala.”

He “re-interpreted the entire Cabalistic symbolism, and thus changed the Jewish concepts into Christian ones especially any messianic teachings, in order to fit them into his Catholic faith in Jesus Christ as savior of the world. In doing so, he ended up with his own Catholic Cabala which appears far removed from the original presuppositions and goals of the Jewish Cabala.” He recommends “several medieval Jewish scholars” for study, such as Abraham Ibn Ezra, Moses Kimhi, and Rashi.

Reuchlin refers to his theories of Hebrew as the source of all human wisdom, “lectur[ing] about what the people have learned in their search for God and in ‘tasting the run-offs’ until they arrived at the source (fons) in Judea where they could drink of the ‘purer divinity.’” Reuchlin, in the persona of Baruchius, maintains that “infallible knowledge” cannot be acquired on its own but “depends upon ‘divine tradition’ (divina traditio) which the Hebrews call ‘Cabala’, that is, ‘reception.’” Reuchlin translates Kabbalah into Latin as receptio, ‘reception,’ making it

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769 Ibid, p. 121
770 Ibid
771 Ibid, p. 124
772 Ibid
773 Ibid, p. 123
774 Ibid, p. 122
775 Ibid
intrinsically something that is received.\footnote{Ibid, p. 122} Reuchlin “lets Baruchius say that Cabalistic insights are not human, but divine.”\footnote{Ibid} He lists five examples of those who have received Kabbalistic insight: 1) Abraham, the biblical patriarch 2) Simon ben Iohai, the assumed author of the Zohar, 3) the kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (1240-after 1291) 4) The kabbalist Nahmanides and 5) the kabbalist Menahem ben Benjamin.\footnote{Ibid, p. 123} With this work, Reuchlin “declared the Sacred Scriptures of the Jews to be Jacob’s Ladder which stands on the earth and with its top reaches the heavens.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 124}

The work is structured as a three-day dialogue, with conversion occurring on the second day. Baruchius was Jewish, Sidonius pagan. Capnion instructs Baruchius to ‘cleanse’ himself of the Talmud, insisting that he wash and become clean. While Posset rejects the notion that this is a baptismal allusion, it personally seems a compelling one.\footnote{Ibid, p. 127} After the conversion, all three men “praise the one God with Hebrew and Greek attributes: Adonai (Hebrew for Lord), Basileus, pantocrator protogenethos (Greek for King, All-Ruler, First-Born).”\footnote{Ibid, p. 130} Reuchlin made numerous Greek references in his discussion of Christianity. For instance, the book contains “a discussion on trinity as an uneven number of which Pythagoras and Virgil affirmed that ‘God enjoys the uneven number.’”\footnote{Ibid, p. 133} After the conversion, Capnion commands Baruchius and Sidonius to worship, using “the preferred expression of his contemporaneous humanists for ‘worship’” or colite, but “which is a word used already by the late medieval exegete, Nicholas of Lyra.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 152}
According to Heiko Oberman, this early work can and should be viewed as one of many anti-Talmudic discourses of the time. The polemical text, “condemned the devotions, liturgy, and beliefs of contemporary Judaism.” Through the character Capnion, Reuchlin discusses God’s covenant with the Jews, and he is “clear about this covenant, namely that this covenant has been broken by the Hebrews/Jews as he quotes Jer 31,31-32…The covenant of the Tetragrammaton-God is replaced by the covenant of the Pentagrammaton-God. With the discovery of the Cabalistic heritage, which is being scrutinized by both Jews and Christians, the path is opened up to the shared new covenant with God.”

Reuchlin wrote, “You Jews have perverted the holy mysteries and for this reason you murmur your prayers in vain; in vain you call on God, whom you fail to venerate as he would have you. You flatter yourselves with your concocted ceremonies and persecute us who truly serve God, with immortal hatred.

Reuchlin’s 1517, *Art of Kabbalah* (*De arte cabalistica*) took a much less harsh tone towards Judaism. As, Price writes, “*Art of Kabbalah* characterizes the entire history of Jewish scholarship and piety including Judaism of 1517 as an ongoing study of God’s people. The Jewish search for God, be it in Biblical study, meditation, or devotion, has integrity and differs from that of Christianity only in its historical accidents, not in its essence.” Posset views this work as Reuchlin’s creation of his own Catholic Kabbalah. He argues that the “main purpose of Reuchlin’s book is to present spiritual, allegorical exegesis of the Scriptures in the form of a

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784 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 82
785 Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 142
786 Heiko A. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism*, p. 27
788 Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 629
Christian Cabala.” This allegorical approach is then disrupted by Reuchlin’s frequent critiques of the Latin translation of the Old Testament.

The text, similar to its predecessor, is a fictional dialogue between a Christian scholar (Philolaus), a Muslim scholar (Morranus), and their Jewish teacher, a Frankfurt Rabbi named Shimon ben Eleazar (based on Reuchlin’s Hebrew teacher Loans) that occurs over three days. Noteworthy is the fact that in his previous work, Capnion, the Christian, is the teacher to the Jew, and in this later work, the Jew is the teacher, the Christian the student. To complete the work, Reuchlin relied on traditional Kabbalist texts such as the Zohar (Book of Splendor) by Moseh de Leon, Joseph Kitallia’s Sha’arei Orah (The Gates of Light), and Ginnat Eyoz (The Garden of Nuts). The text proved to be the “foundation” for Christian Kabbalah. Incredibly significantly, the book ends without conversion to Christianity, a rarity in theological literature of the period. The book explored the notion what Posset terms as a “Cabalistic Christology,” working through the notion that the Kabbalah reveals Jesus as the Messiah.

Reuchlin saw his study of Kabbalah as work on a grand scale, particularly as it related to the Greek philosophy of Pythagoreanism. This was evidence in The Art of Kabbalah, even going so far to equate the two. He “was convinced that the cabala is nothing else, speaking in the manner of the Pythagoreans, than a symbolic theology in which the letters are not only the signs and names of things, but are truly the things themselves.” His motivation can be summed up in his own words: “Marsiglio (Ficino) produced Plato for Italy…Lefèvre d’Étapes restored

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789 Ibid, p. 657
790 Ibid
791 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 86; Johann Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, p. 18
793 Ibid, p. 81
794 Ibid, p. 88
795 Johann Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, pp. 19-20
796 Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, p. 70
Aristotle to France. I shall complete the number and...show to the Germans Pythagoras reborn through me.”

**Reuchlin’s Relationship with the Jewish People**

Reuchlin’s relationship with the Jewish people, like most contemporary Hebraists, was complex. The issue becomes particularly problematic when acknowledging that Reuchlin’s views appear to have changed over time, growing more tolerant as he aged.

Rummel writes that, “[m]ost humanists, like Erasmus and Reuchlin, shared in the prejudices of their time. Their attitude was modified only by an appreciation for the source texts in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and resulted in their promotion of language studies, including Hebrew. If they served Jewish interests it was on the basis of cultural politics rather than the principle of toleration.” Wortsman asserts that “despite his admiration for their scholarship, Reuchlin is not concerned with the protection of the Jewish people, per se, but rather of Jewish books which he considered the foundation of Christian culture.” Reuchlin is certainly anti-Jewish if one considers believing in supersessionism and conversion to be anti-Jewish, as Wortsman believes, saying, “Reuchlin himself, it should be noted, was not a particular friend to the Jews, whom he, like other enlightened Christians of his day, hoped to convert to the ‘true faith’ by ‘reasonable’ (i.e. noncoercive) means through debate and disputation.”

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797 Anthony Goodman and Angus MacKay eds., *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe*, p. 212
798 Erika Rummel, *The Case against Johann Reuchlin*, p. 7
799 Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 9
800 Ibid, p. 3
Reuchlin, at least early in his career, certainly thought that baptism was necessary for Jews to receive spiritual wisdom. Rummel demonstrates some of the tension scholars struggle with, writing.

On the one hand [Reuchlin] expressed the greatest respect for his Hebrew teacher, Iacob ben Iehiel Loans, whom he addressed in a letter as his ‘lord and master, guide and friend,’…On the other hand, a tract entitled Why the Jews Have Lived in Misery for So Long (1505), repeats the conventional view that they were justly suffering for their forefathers who had murdered Jesus, and were paying for their own stubborn refusal to convert to Christianity.

Reuchlin, at times, however, while praising the Jews, also seems to be purposefully oblivious to Jewish oppression in his homeland. He writes, “there is no people on earth that accords them [the Jews] greater freedom and welcomes them more readily than do the Christians, as we may find affirmed in canonical and secular law.” This seems to be a statement that Reuchlin must be aware is patently false, and deliberately ignorant of the reality of Jewish lives in Christendom.

However, in many other ways, Reuchlin seems like a man ahead of his time, showing unusual toleration and acceptance in matters such as the law. Carlebach writes with regards to Reuchlin’s Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Burn, and Destroy Jewish Books that “[p]recious few documents penned in the sixteenth century, refer to ‘uns’ and ‘unser’ (‘we’/’our’…) placing Jew alongside Christian as part of the universe of discourse of legal and humane rights.” Reuchlin wrote that, “[s]ince the members of both sects [Judaism and Christianity] belong to the Holy Empire as citizens of the Empire….Therefore the Imperial Law is equally binding for Christians and Jews, each in his own way.”

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802 Erika Rummel, The Case against Johann Reuchlin, pp. 6-7; David Price, Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books, p. 22
803 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 43
804 ibid, p. 26
805 ibid, pp. 36-37
as equal under a non-sectarian law was a radical assertion. Hoogstraeten, the inquisitor of Cologne, "argued that Reuchlin was wrong to regard Jews as concives, fellow citizens; they were servi, servants of the Empire." Reuchlin argued that “[f]rom the point of view of imperial law, both religions were ‘sects,’ and their adherents were equally subject to the law of the empire. Reuchlin reached back to the image of the multiethnic and multireligious Roman Empire.”

Reuchlin argued that Jews were to be their own spiritual judges, not Christians, stating: “The Jews…in matters concerning their faith, must answer to none but their own judges. No Christian can or may pass judgment on their scriptural affairs, except in connection with a secular trial initiated by a proper accusation brought before an established court of law….For they [the Jews] do not belong to the Christian Church and, consequently, their faith is of no concern to us.” Reuchlin’s writing demarcated a clear line between church and state that is centuries ahead of the first amendment. He argues that “we find among certain Jews the view that every nation ought to be allowed to practice its own faith; and just as we are not bound by the Laws of Moses, so they are not subject to the laws of Jesus.”

Reuchlin also emphasizes that the Jews are not heretics, because one can only be a heretic if one has been a Christian, which the Jews have not. He writes, “The Jews are not strictly speaking, heretics—for they have never held the Christian Faith and have, therefore, never left it; for which reason they may also not be called heretics, nor can their practice be labeled heresy.” He also argues that since the Jews truly believed their faith, it could not be considered false in any sort of legal sense, stating, “If ‘false’ means a deliberate suppression or alteration of the truth with malicious intent…then I know of

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806 Erika Rummel, *The Case against Johann Reuchlin*, p. 20
807 Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 18
808 Ibid, p. 64
809 Ibid, p. 13
810 Ibid, p. 63
811 Ibid, p. 40
no people on earth that takes a greater pain to assure accuracy in copying the Holy Scripture than do the Jews.”\textsuperscript{812} It seems clear that Reuchlin did not hold the popular view that the Jews altered scripture to fit their own needs.

Reuchlin maintained that religious faith and opinions could only be true if they were freely adopted. Wortsman writes, “True faith…Reuchlin firmly believed, cannot be imposed; and herein lies the justice of the man: for though he viewed the Jewish faith as wrong or misguided, he nevertheless supported the right of the Jewish people to adhere to it.”\textsuperscript{813} For Reuchlin, faith must be “grounded in reason and sired not by crude coercion but by the free and open exchange of ideas.”\textsuperscript{814} For while Reuchlin believed “that Christianity superseded Judaism and Christian society should seek to convert Jews, Reuchlin rejected every vestige of force.”\textsuperscript{815} Reuchlin wrote,

\begin{quote}
I have suffered innocently for many years…because of my immense desire to strengthen the orthodox faith and my most ardent desire to enlarge the Catholic Church, because I felt that those who were outside the faith, the Jews, Greeks, and Saracens, would not be attracted to us by insults. For I thought it was not suitable for the church that they should be driven to holy baptism by tyranny or severity.\textsuperscript{816}
\end{quote}

He “viewed himself as a defender of Christian truth, an apologist who had discovered the best foundation on which to build a new support for the faith.”\textsuperscript{817}

Reuchlin believed that Jewish piety could be a source of enrichment for Christians, and that Jewish faith did not necessarily lead to condemnation before God.\textsuperscript{818} Reuchlin wrote, “The Jew is as worthy in the eyes of our Lord God as am I. If he stands upright, he stands before his Lord.

\begin{footnotes}
\item 812 Johannes Reuchlin, \textit{Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books}, p. 10
\item 813 Ibid, p. 13
\item 814 Ibid, p. 12
\item 815 Ibid, p. 18
\item 816 Lewis W. Spitz, \textit{The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists}, p. 66
\item 817 Ibid
\item 818 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, p. 87
\end{footnotes}
If he falls, he falls before his Lord. Every individual will have to answer for himself. How can we pass judgment on the soul of another? God is surely mighty enough to lift him up.”

Reuchlin also “cited from the Alcaron the saying: ‘Who prays to the eternal God and lives virtuously, he may be a Jew, Christian, or a Saracen, he receives the grace of God and salvation.’ ‘Therefore,’ [Reuchlin] asserted, ‘he is religious, right living, pious, who has a pure heart. All else is smoke.’”

Reuchlin also accorded the Jews a special place for their role as keepers of a sacred language and tradition. Wortsman writes that “For Reuchlin, the Jews themselves were not so much a living people as the archivists of our common heritage.” Reuchlin described it more eloquently, saying: “For the Jews are in a certain sense our Capsarii, our book-keepers and librarians, who preserve for us those books which we may derive proof for our faith”

Reuchlin was particularly concerned that ignorance of Jewish customs and language could lead to physical harm to the Jews. Criticizing Pfefferkorn’s pamphlets, Reuchlin cautioned that “one may easily incite hatred against the Jews among unlearned people…so that their [the Jews’] lives and possessions are endangered.”

**Reuchlin’s use of Jewish Sources**

Reuchlin believed in the importance of Jewish sources. While he held classic supersessionist theology, he thought that Hebrew had a divine nature as the language of God. He “contended that Hebrew was a means of mediation between God and humanity, in particular that articulating

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819 Erika Rummel, *The Case against Johann Reuchlin*, p. 80
820 Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism*, p. III 127
821 Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 12
822 Ibid
823 Erika Rummel, *The Case against Johann Reuchlin*, p. 17
824 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, pp. 82-83
the Hebrew name of God created a ‘bond of words’ between God and humans, which is possible because ‘God is the breath (“spiritus”), the word is the breathing (“spiratis”) and the human is the breather (“spirans”).’

He held that Jewish philosophy should be judged by the same standards as Latin or Greek philosophy. He held that Jewish philosophy should be judged by the same standards as Latin or Greek philosophy. 826

Reuchlin continued to “[insist] on the primacy of the Hebrew Bible in Hebrew, without the mediation of a Christian translation.” He relied on Jewish scholarship because it relied on the Hebrew more than the Christian scholarship did. 828 Reuchlin cited canonical law, saying: “Many of our scholars have frequently contradicted each other. It is, therefore, necessary and imperative that we turn to the Jews and seek out the truth at its source, rather than its trickle.” He wished to use the Hebrew to correct the Vulgate, believing that a new Biblical edition was necessary and “reject[ing] the authority of the Vulgate.”

Subsequent Influence

Reuchlin’s work itself was quickly “superseded over the next two decades” by Munster, Pagnini, and many others. However, he provided a starting place and a foundation of modern Hebraism that could be used going forward by the Humanists and Reformers. As Jones writes, “Reuchlin’s importance in the field of biblical scholarship is that he established philology as a recognized and independent discipline entitled to discuss the meaning of words in the Bible.” He contributed to the trend of treating the text philologically instead of simply theologically. He

825 Ibid, p. 82
826 Johannes Reuchlin, Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books, p. 69
828 Ibid, p. 82
829 Ibid, p. 82
830 David H. Price, “Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”, pp. 81, 86
831 David C. Steinmetz, The Bible in the Sixteenth Century, p. 83
832 Johann Reuchlin, On the Art of the Kabbalah, p. 12
was instrumental in creating a method that others could follow, use, and build on. He also set a
tone for increased toleration towards Jews going forward, since, as Carlebach writes, “It is no
happenstance that some of the important voices raised in the following generation in support of
decent treatment of Jews in German lands were those of Reuchlin’s disciples Andreas Osiander,
Philip Melanchthon and Wolfgang Capito.”

Reuchlin taught many students, among them Jacob Jenas, George Timter, Johannes Eck,
Johannes Forster (1496-1558), Jacob Ceporinus (1499-1525), Johannes Hillebrand, E. O.
Schrenchenfuchs, Robert Wakefield (d.1537), Conrad Pelikan (1478-1556), Sebastian Munster
(1488-1552), and Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531). Both Luther and Ulrich Zwingli
(1484-1531) used *Rudiments of Hebrew Language* to study the Bible.

Luther’s “Biblical humanist rested on the work of Lefèvre and Reuchlin.” Reuchlin’s
work on Hebrew was utilized in Lutheran schools, though they avoided his theological work on
Kabbalah. As Spitz notes, “One of Reuchlin’s favorite students, Johann Forster, worked with
Luther as a Hebraist on the translation of the Old Testament.”

Erasmus was influenced by Reuchlin in his studies of Greek. Price argues that “Reuchlin,
arguably the pioneer in the northern European recovery of Greek, was Erasmus’s precursor as
advocate of the direct study of Greek sources for theology, including the Christian Bible in
Greek.” Erasmus borrowed a manuscript from Reuchlin in order to complete his Bible.

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833 Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and burn all Jewish books*, p. 21
Ancient Testimony*, p. 24
836 Anthony Goodman and Angus MacKay eds., *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe*
838 Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists*, p. 77
839 David Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books*, p. 7
Reuchlin lent him an almost complete Greek New Testament codex (it was missing a few verses in Revelation), that Reuchlin had received from the Dominican order. The transfer between the two men was facilitated by the printer, Froben.\footnote{Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 82} However, Erasmus did have misgivings about Reuchlin’s scholarship, particularly his fascination with Kabbalah, the integration of which, Erasmus feared, could make Christianity “too Jewish.”\footnote{David Price, \textit{Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books}, p. 7} Posset suggests that Erasmus “must have had Reuchlin’s elaborations on the name of God and Jesus in mind when in \textit{The Praise of Folly} in 1511 he ridiculed an anonymous old man’s thesis on this subject….Nevertheless, in the end, Erasmus, too, will praise Reuchlin in the way other humanists did, as the ‘glory [\textit{decus}] of our Germany.”\footnote{Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 161} Upon Reuchlin’s death, Erasmus wrote a eulogy entitled \textit{The Apotheosis} “canonizing him as the patron saint of Renaissance Hebrew studies. In his flattering vision of the scholar’s reception in heaven, St. Jerome ushers the Hebrew scholar into paradise to spend eternity as his celestial colleague, in close proximity to God.”\footnote{David Price, \textit{Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books}, p. 7} 

Reuchlin’s most well-known disciple was his own relative, Philip Melanchthon, whom he recommended for a Hebrew professorship.\footnote{David H. Price, \textit{“Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism”}, p. 89} Melanchthon gave a eulogy about Reuchlin that scholars now contend “contains too many factual mistakes and is all too lop-sided. Melanchthon turns out to be a promoter of an image of Reuchlin as the Hebraist, but not as the cabalist, religious philosopher, and lay theologian. He succeeded, however, in presenting Reuchlin as the monumental expert in the biblical languages.”\footnote{Franz Posset, \textit{Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography}, p. 18} Posset writes, “Reuchlin’s life and work is a prime example of the genial theory about Church History, namely that Church History is the
theological struggle over the proper interpretation of the Scriptures and its ramifications.”

“The modern Jewish historian Gershom Scholem” (1897–1982) described Reuchlin as “the first scholar of Judaism, its language and its world, especially the Cabala…the man who nearly five centuries ago, brought to life the discipline of Jewish studies in Europe.”

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847 Ibid, p. 6
848 David Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books*, p. 5
Chapter IV: Philip Melanchthon

Philip Melanchthon is best known as the right-hand man of Martin Luther and one of the foremost theologians of the Reformation. Melanchthon “combined the latest literary techniques of Renaissance Humanism with developments in Reformation theology to produce some of the most important commentaries of his age. His unique approach, especially in Paul’s epistle to the Romans, combines rhetorical analysis of letters with a dialectical understanding of the main themes of Christian theology.”849 He was “second only to Martin Luther as a theologian of the Reformation, second only to Erasmus of Rotterdam as a humanist and scholar, and the premier teacher in early modern central Europe.”850

Melanchthon was born in Southwest Germany in the town of Bretten,851 on February 16, 1497.852 Melanchthon’s father, Georg Schwartzerdzt was the armorer/ornaments minister known as a Rüstmeister to the prince of Palatine.853 Georg named his son Philip after his employer, Prince Philip.854 His mother was an “upper class” woman named Barbara Reuter.855 When Melanchthon’s father, Georg, died in 1508, he left Melanchthon, aged 9 and his brother orphans.856 Melanchthon and his brother move in with Reuchlin’s sister.857 Reuchlin was

851 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 319
853 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 319
854 Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 67
855 Ibid
856 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, pp. 50, 319
857 Ibid, pp. 319-320
related to Melanchthon by marriage and is typically described as his great-uncle. Melanchthon’s mother, Barbara, was the step-daughter of Reuchlin’s sister, Elisabeth. He was raised in Reuchlin’s household and educated by him.

Melanchthon’s first school was the Latin school in Pforzheim. While at Pforzheim, he was educated “by two outstanding pioneers of Greek instruction from north of the Alps: George Simler, whom Greek instruction in Germany had to thank for the first comprehensive Greek grammar, and Johannes Reuchlin, whose knowledge of Greek had even evoke amazement in Rome from the exiled Greek, John Argyropulos.” He completed his education at Pforzheim in 1509 after having established himself as a natural student of both Greek and Latin.

To reward him for his excellent progress in Greek, Reuchlin gave the young student a Greek grammar with his name, Philip Schwartzerdt, Hellenized as Philip Melanchthon. Melanchthon, translated, means “black earth.”

On October 14, 1509, at the age of twelve, Melanchthon enrolled at the University of Heidelberg, “enrolled in the faculty of the via antiqua (as Reuchlin had done).” While still at Heidelberg and a young teenager, Melanchthon published both Greek and Latin grammars that sold well and were used by schools in the classroom. He completed his studies in the shortest

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858 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 24; Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform, 311
859 Franz Posset, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography, p. 52; Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, p. 76
860 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 50
861 Ibid, p. 320
862 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 150
863 Ibid, p. 24
864 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, pp. 50, 320
866 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 25
possible amount of time, but due to his youth, he was not allowed to start an M.A. He graduated with a Bachelors of Arts on June 10, 1511; he was fourteen years old.

On September 17, 1512, Melanchthon enrolled at the University of Tübingen to earn his Masters of Arts. This time, he studied the via moderna. He studied at the university with George Simler, his old teacher. While at Tübingen, Melanchthon published his first commentary, “an edition of Terence with an introduction insightful enough to gain the attention of Erasmus of Rotterdam.” During his time at the university, Melanchthon helped at the press of a man named Thomas Anselm. He obtained the job, as a copy editor, because of the relationships that Anselm had with both Reuchlin and Simler. In 1514, he helped edit the defense of Reuchlin in the campaign to destroy Jewish books, Clarorum vivorum epistolae latinae graecae et hebraicae variis temporibus missae ad Ioannem Reuchlin Phorcensem LL doctorem. He completed his masters on June 25, 1514. Between 1514 and 1518, Melanchthon taught at the university.

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867 Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 68
868 A. Pelzer Wagener, Melanchthon, A German Humanist, p. 156
869 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 320; Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 7; Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 68
871 Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 68
873 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 7
874 Alternatively spelled Anshelm. Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 7; Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 320;
876 Ibid
877 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 8; Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 320; Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 68
From that point on, Melanchthon became a prolific writer. In 1517, Melanchthon wrote *De artibus liberalibus*, a year later he produced a Greek grammar (*Grammatica Graeca*). On August 25, 1518, Melanchthon began to teach at the University of Wittenberg where he would stay until his death. When he arrived, he announced his intention to produce a trilingual version of the Book of Proverbs. He wanted to focus on “one simple meaning instead of a four-fold sense.” Scholars seem to believe that Melanchthon went to Wittenberg already in command of his own ideas. John Schneider writes, “when the young Melanchthon went to Wittenberg he was already in command of a Christian philosophy that reflected fairly sophisticated reformist thinking in theology and a highly developed system of theory on the liberal arts in a Christian context.” He was already an accomplished scholar who had “successfully completed studies in scholastic philosophy and Humanism.” He received his position at the University by virtue of a recommendation from Reuchlin. Reuchlin was hired to teach Greek. He “understood his professorship in Greek language and literature to include responsibility for the New Testament.” He created a curriculum based on Paul, the Biblical text, and patristic writings instead of Lombard’s *Sentences*. He taught, in addition, Latin,

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878 Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism*, pp. II 54
879 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 54, 329; Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, p. 151
880 Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism*, p. 21; Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 311; Timothy Wengert, “Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany”, p. 110
881 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, p. 122
882 Ibid
883 Ibid, p. 21
884 Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 67
885 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 320
886 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, p. 7
887 Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 68
888 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 325
rhetoric, and dialectics. He also filled in as Wittenberg’s Hebrew professor until a permanent candidate could be found (a search he participated in).

At “his inaugural lecture on Greek at Wittenberg (1518) the young Melanchthon exhorted his audience to abandon the ‘frigid glosses, concordances, and discordances’ of the scholastics.” The scholastics frequently found themselves the target of Melanchthon’s polemic. He accused scholastics of “corruption of classical rhetoric and dialectic” and of a lack of respect for the subject of Greek. Melanchthon wanted his students to study the “classical philosophers, rhetoricians, and poets, especially Plato, Homer, Virgil, Horace and the true ‘historical Aristotle’ (as distinct from the Aristotle of scholastic commentaries).” Melanchthon called Aquinas, Scotus, Durandu, and Bonaventura “barbarians.”

Early in his career at Wittenberg, Melanchthon began to study with Martin Luther. Scheible argues that Melanchthon was attracted to Luther because he was using the method of *ad fontes*, back to the sources. As Luther began to gain a reputation, Reuchlin wrote to Melanchthon, warning him to stay away from Luther and the other radicals. By 1519, Melanchthon “had broken with Reuchlin and appeared in Luther’s corner at the Leipzig debates” with Eck. After Melanchthon’s move to Wittenberg and the beginning of his association with Luther, Melanchthon and Reuchlin never saw one another in person again. From Leipzig, Melanchthon wrote his friend Oecolampadius with his newfound determination that “A council

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889 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 320
890 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, p. 118
892 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 311
893 Ibid
894 Ibid, p. 310
897 Franz Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522): A Theological Biography*, p. 15
cannot establish any new article of faith.”898 His later work reflects this belief, as he wrote: “It is not necessary for a Catholic to believe any other articles of faith than those to which Scripture is a witness. The authority of councils is below the authority of Scripture. Therefore not to believe in the character indelibilis, transubstantiation, and the like is not open to the charge of heresy.”899

In 1519, Melanchthon published a rhetoric handbook, *De rhetorica libri tres*.900 That same year, he received his first and only theological degree, a bachelor of the Bible.901 This degree “gave him license to lecture not only on the Greek text of the Bible (which he could already do in the arts faculty), but also on the content of the Bible (using the Latin).” From now on, he began his scriptural lectures.902 “As a result, for the rest of his career, Melanchthon lectured in both the arts and theological faculties.”903

In 1521, he published *Loci Communes Theologicae*,904 (reluctantly as it turns out, since its publication was in response to several of his students publishing his lectures on Romans without his knowledge or consent).905 *Loci communes* translates as ‘common places’. They were used as “bases of arguments or proof, and thus it is related to definition in dialectics…They also denote the principles and essence of a particular intellect and subject.” He “used loci communes in his biblical interpretation, not simply as ethical topics for rhetorical use, but as axioms derived from

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898 Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 68
899 Ibid
900 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 322; Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, pp. 7, 29
901 Ibid; Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 68
903 Timothy Wengert, “Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany”, p. 111
904 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 327
the central principles and essence of theology."\textsuperscript{906} His \textit{Loci} focused on three topics: sin, law, and grace.\textsuperscript{907} He wrote to a colleague that his “main purpose was to systematize the Scriptures under certain headings in the hope of leading students away from ‘the subtle prati-
gs of Aristotle’ back ‘to the doctrine of Christ,’ because ‘he is mistaken who seeks the form of Christianity in any other source.’”\textsuperscript{908}

In 1522, Melanchthon published annotations on both Corinthians and on Romans.\textsuperscript{909} As Wengert writes, Melanchthon believed

\begin{quote}
the exegete must not simply inquire after the definition of a thing (intimately related to its \textit{locus communis}), but also after its effect or impact on the hearer. According to Schneider (1990: 73) such a combination paralleled concerns of Erasmus for the affective aspects of biblical interpretation. In fact, the deep concern for a thing’s effect or purposes, especially as it ‘moved the heart,’ marked much of Renaissance humanism.\textsuperscript{910}
\end{quote}

The next year, Melanchthon became the rector of the University of Wittenberg, becoming the first married rector of a European university.\textsuperscript{911} In 1524, Melanchthon converted Philip of Hesse to Protestantism,\textsuperscript{912} and published a Hebrew edition of Lamentations with a preface.\textsuperscript{913} In 1525, he returned to biblical lectures.\textsuperscript{914}

In 1533, Melanchthon created the University of Wittenberg’s theological curriculum, with a focus on reform.\textsuperscript{915} He viewed education reform as a religious problem.\textsuperscript{916} He believed

\begin{footnotes}
\item[906] Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., \textit{A History of Biblical Interpretation}, pp. 324-325
\item[907] Clyde Leonard Manschreck, \textit{Melanchthon: the Quiet Reformer}, p. 84
\item[908] Ibid
\item[909] Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., \textit{A History of Biblical Interpretation}, p. 321
\item[910] Ibid, p. 326
\item[911] Ibid, p. 320
\item[912] Steven Ozment, \textit{The Age of Reform}, p. 334
\item[913] Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., \textit{Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary}, p. 125
\item[914] Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., \textit{A History of Biblical Interpretation}, p. 320
\item[915] Ibid, p. 329
\item[916] Steven Ozment, \textit{The Age of Reform}, p. 311
\end{footnotes}
education was tied to piety and the humanities and theological studies were intertwined.\footnote{Ibid} He was determined his students would be well-educated. He thought “one could not understand the scripture without a firm grounding in grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. Many arguments in the church today, he added, arose from ignorance of these matters.\footnote{Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 107} Melanchthon “reorganized the theological faculty at Wittenberg and included in its statutes the requirement for lectures on Romans, John, the Psalms, Genesis and Isaiah, as well as on Augustine’s On the Spirit and the Letter.”  

This has only included a cursory look at Melanchthon writings. An online cache of his writings reveals several hundred titles. It also appears that several of Melanchthon’s works were published by Luther without Melanchthon’s permission, a fact that Luther made no attempt to hide.\footnote{ibid, pp. 109, 119} However, it is necessary to mention Melanchthon’s assistance on Luther’s German Bible.\footnote{Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, pp. 321, 323} He “had given the impulsive for this Bible translation and had worked on it with Luther for more than twenty years.”\footnote{Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 69} While it is unclear what extent he contributed to the rest of the Bible, it is generally accepted that he translated both books of Maccabees.\footnote{Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 112} He devoted much of his time to trying to understand the Biblical historical context.\footnote{Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, pp. 33, 54} Steinmetz writes: “more than either Luther or Oecolampadius, Melanchthon argues the necessity of examining the history in the writings of the prophets and the consideration ‘in partibus historiae’ of the church in all times. The history contains examples for the present which inspire fear of God and confirm our
faith and hope.” He argued that there were two “reasons for interest in this history: to understand the Bible and (related to the first) to decipher the End Times.”

Melanchthon’s role as a humanist is debated. While Maurer argues that Melanchthon can best be understood as a humanist philosopher, Wengert disagrees, preferring instead to see Melanchthon not as a scholar championing humanism and its philosophical perspective, but rather as a humanist committed to ‘a common methodology an approach to text marked by a concern for the sources (*ad fontes*), for history, and for poetics, and by a proper use of the classical languages (Latin, and later Greek and even Hebrew) and their literatures’…Wengert argues that Melanchthon used the methods he had learned as a humanist to present his Lutheran convictions about the biblical texts he interpreted.

This seems to be the most likely explanation. A closer look at Melanchthon’s views on philosophy appears to put him at odds with classic humanist thought.

Melanchthon, like Luther, thought philosophy and Scripture, had “incompatible views on law, sin, and grace.” While he exhorted “let us love both Plato and Aristotle,” as we shall see later, he had very harsh words for the Neoplatonists. “According to Melanchthon, platonic confusion also sprang up as a result of a school of interpretation that Christianized Plato’s philosophy and thereby confused the fundamental difference between *philosophia platonica* and the gospel, between Pagan reason and Christian revelation such tasteless interpreters darkened and destroyed the gospel—thus Melanchthon argued in his harshest polemic, which was aimed above all against the interpretive framework of the Florentine neo-platonists.” He dismisses Ficino, Pico, and his Uncle Reuchlin’s attempts at syncretism. Melanchthon was afraid of views

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925 David C. Steinmetz, *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 30
926 Timothy Wengert, “Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany”, p. 128
927 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 51
928 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 313
929 Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism*, p. II 44
930 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, p. 162
that held philosophy to be superior to theology.\textsuperscript{931} He became very interested in Aristotle, and thought him superior to other philosophers, but he “was no dogmatic Aristotelian.”\textsuperscript{932}

Philosophy had its role, but it was subordinate to and should not be confused with theology.

Some of Melanchthon’s most well-known work also focused on dialectics. Melanchthon considered dialectic to be the “mother of all the arts.”\textsuperscript{933} “Dialectics involved weighing and reconciling contradictory or associated arguments for the purpose of arriving at an answer which would resolve the conflict. Melanchthon’s methodological interest in using a combination of rhetoric and dialectics had a powerful impact on his biblical interpretation.”\textsuperscript{934} Classical dialectic theory had three categories: demonstrative, deliberative, and judicial. Melanchthon added a fourth: didactic.\textsuperscript{935} Melanchthon was concerned with adding a category involving teaching “to the three classical genres of speech. The basic rules of didactics come not from rhetoric, but from dialectics.”\textsuperscript{936}

Melanchthon defined methods as “the right way or order for investigating and explaining either simple [dialectical] questions or propositions.”\textsuperscript{937} ‘Methods’ consisted of “dialectical arguments on the theological topics (loci).”\textsuperscript{938} Scholars Fraenkel, Wengert, and Wiedenhefer argue that “the two most important dialectical questions for Melanchthon were ‘Quid sit?’ an ‘Quid effectus?: What is the thing? And What are its effects?’”\textsuperscript{939} His concern for cause and effect is another manifestation of his Aristotelianism. He wanted to break down the text to

\textsuperscript{931} Steven Ozment, \textit{The Age of Reform}, 313
\textsuperscript{932} Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 73; Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., \textit{Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary}, p. 25
\textsuperscript{933} Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., \textit{Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary}, p. 27
\textsuperscript{934} Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., \textit{A History of Biblical Interpretation}, p. 52
\textsuperscript{935} Ibid
\textsuperscript{936} Ibid
\textsuperscript{937} Ibid
\textsuperscript{938} Ibid
\textsuperscript{939} Ibid, p. 326
understand it, and then understand how it was able to affect the reader. Melanchthon “concerned himself not only with the text’s definition but also with its effect as it alternatively terrified or comforted the conscience.” Melanchthon “was the first Christian exegete to organize Romans thoroughly on the basis of standard rule of rhetoric.” Melanchthon used rhetorical studies in his exegetical analysis, and “equated [eloquence] with the biblical gift of Tongues.” Melanchthon believed that dialectics and rhetoric were intrinsically related to each other, for “while they are distinct, they are by nature made of the same stuff.” Melanchthon himself wrote: “for both the rhetorician and the dialectician the argument is the same; the one navigates…with sails somewhat more tightly drawn, the other meanders more freely; the langue of the one is suited for teaching, the other to inspiring.”

**Melanchthon in Dialogue: Influences and Critiques**

Aside from the obvious influences of Luther and Reuchlin, Melanchthon was also influenced by Rudolph Agricola, particularly on dialectic and rhetoric. Melanchthon got some of his ideas on *loci communes* from Agricola and Erasmus. He was likely introduced to Agricola’s writings by Jacob Wimpfeling (1450-1528), but the defining turn was when Oecolampadius gave Melanchthon a copy of Agricola’s *De invention dialectica*.

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940 Ibid, p. 327
941 Ibid, p. 321
942 Ibid, p. 51
943 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, p. 107
944 Ibid, p. 31
945 Ibid
947 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 324; Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, p. 26
948 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, p. 24
949 Ibid, p. 26
Melanchthon and Erasmus corresponded throughout their lives, starting early in Melanchthon’s career.\textsuperscript{950} Despite the strain that Melanchthon’s friendship with Luther put on the relationship, Melanchthon thought “there’s no doubt that Erasmus is to be preferred to all the ancients.”\textsuperscript{951} They “both used humanist methods but to different ends an in the service of very different theological perspectives.”\textsuperscript{952} Melanchthon’s “theological position was somewhere in between Luther and Erasmus,”\textsuperscript{953} which allowed him to smooth the way in the near-constant disputes the two theologians ended up engaging in for the rest of their lives. He was able to serve as a mediator between the two great theologians, utilizing the best of their scholarship. As Manfred Hoffman writes,

Melanchthon so applied his humanist scholarship to biblical interpretation that he could amplify, corroborate and systematize Luther’s theology. Erasmus, on the other hand, did not limit his comments on Scripture to philological and moral remarks, but proposed a rhetorical theology of his own—a theology, however, that failed to satisfy Luther. So the difference between Melanchthon and Erasmus is apparently a matter of two different kinds of biblical theory rather than a matter of the difference between a Reformation theology and a humanist moral theology.\textsuperscript{954}

Like most of his contemporaries, Melanchthon also made use of the Church Fathers. His “most important patristic source” was St. Augustine.\textsuperscript{955}

Additionally, Melanchthon utilized Ambrose, Athanasius (c.297-373), Basil (329/330-379), Chrysostom (c.349-407), Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian (c.200-258), Cyril of Alexandria (c.376-444), John of Damascus (c.675/676-749), Gregory of Nazianzen (c.329-390), Gregory of Neocaesarea (c.213-270), Hilary of Poitiers (c.310-c.367), Irenaeus (d. c.202), Jerome, Justin,
Origen, Tertullian, Theodotus, and Vigilius. While he avoided many medieval sources, in later years he appeared to be more open to their value and “even cited Peter Lombard directly.”

Of course, Melanchthon also was highly influenced by Luther with regard to sin, grace, law, and scripture—he wholly permeates Melanchthon’s theology. Melanchthon and Luther’s theologies were so intertwined that scholars often refer to them interchangeably, equating Melanchthon with Lutheran theology and tracing Luther’s theologies back to Melanchthon. This chapter has aimed to explore Melanchthon as a theologian as distinct from Luther as possible.

**Old Testament Exegesis**

Melanchthon made use of Luther’s law/gospel hermeneutic system. However, he made sure to “emphasize that both law and gospel may be found throughout Scripture. It was never the case for either Melanchthon or Luther that they equated law with the OT writings or the Gospel with the NT.” For Melanchthon “as for Luther, this hermeneutical distinction had direct results for both biblical interpretation and the central Christian teaching of justification.”

Melanchthon, with this method, was building on Lyra. Melanchthon wrote: “These are the two chief works of God in [human beings], to terrify and to justify and quicken the terrified. One or the other of these works is spoken of throughout Scripture. One part is the law, which reveals, denounces, and condemns sin. The other part is the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace.

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956 Ibid, pp. 31-82
958 Ibid, p. 319
959 Ibid, p. 327
960 Ibid, p. 327
961 Ibid, p. 53
granted in Christ.” Clyde Manschrek notes that the “law terrifies man with the demands which he cannot keep; and the gospel of grace consoles man in the love of God.” As Wengert writes, “The exegete’s task was no longer to penetrate (or escape) the killing literal sense in order to discover the spiritual meaning of a text. Instead, the text itself, as God’s destroying and creating Word, affected death and life (or terror and comfort) in the hearer.” Death stood for the law, life for the gospel. While Luther had two designated uses for law, Melanchthon created three, which ultimately led to Calvin’s three. Luther had “buil[t] on…Nicholas of Lyra for uses of Law in Israel, Luther expanded it to God’s two uses of the law among all people: a first, or civil, use to keep order in the world and restrain the wicked; a second, or theological, use that puts to death, or terrifies, the conscience by revealing its sin.” Melanchthon added the third category that, among Lutheran theologians, became known as the “didactic use.” Wengert goes on to write, “In this use, not so much God (as in the first two uses) but Christians themselves ‘used’ the law to discover God’s will and to conform their lives to it.”

Melanchthon also “differentiate[d] between moral, legal and ceremonial laws. Not all legal and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament retained validity for the Church. In contrast, the moral laws have. The Ten Commandments fall under the moral laws and form the basis of biblical morality.” He “had to assist in explaining why the moral law (of the Old Testament)

962 Ibid, p. 327
963 Clyde Leonard Manschrek, The Quiet Reformer, p. 86
964 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 327
965 Ibid, p. 328
966 Ibid, p. 328
967 Ibid, p. 328
had retained its authority over Christians and what the prerequisites for obedience to the Ten Commandments were.”

He gained a reputation as an Old Testament exegete, though he was “not as prolific as Luther in commenting on Old Testament books Melanchthon did treat them extensively.” When possible, he avoided the allegorical sense and “generally preferred the simple reading of a text,” following in the footsteps of other literalist Hebraists. While he is frequently associated with the ‘simple’ sense, this seems to be inaccurate. While it is true that Melanchthon did avoid allegorical and tried to focus on the letter of the text, his theology and exegesis was far from simplistic and was in fact sophisticated and complex. For instance, he developed nine different grades of transgression against the first commandment. He felt that “Christ wanted the first three commandments…to be explained from the perspective of love for God.” However, unlike Nicholas of Lyra, Melanchthon “displayed no compulsion to explain the relationship between God’s way of working in the Old Testament and his completion of his revelation in Christ.” He did work on Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, the Psalms, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. However, his work on Isaiah and Jeremiah was limited, “[f]or the most part, Melanchthon’s work on the

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969 Ignatius W. C. van Wyk, “The first commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism: Theological insights of Philipp Melanchthon and Zacharius Ursinus”, p. 3
970 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 54
971 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 70
972 Ignatius W. C. van Wyk, “The first commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism: Theological insights of Philipp Melanchthon and Zacharius Ursinus”, p. 5
973 Ignatius W. C. van Wyk, “The first commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism: Theological insights of Philipp Melanchthon and Zacharius Ursinus”, p. 3
974 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 204
975 Ibid, p. 124
prophetic material is rather sparse consisting of little more than introductions.”

976 Of all the Old Testament books, he produced the most commentaries on Proverbs.

Melanchthon relied on previous commentators a lot, particularly in the Old Testament where he used Augustine frequently. His “published commentaries often set the framework for later exegetical debates, while preserving important aspects of medieval and patristic biblical interpretation.” He respected both patristic and medieval interpretation, but he respected the Church Fathers more. As Meijering writes, “According to Melanchthon the theology of the Fathers is fairly close to Scriptural revelation, not as close as Melanchthon himself claims to be, but certainly much closer than the Scholastics.” Melanchthon’s use of the fathers was criticized by Meijering for being too “[eclectic]. Unlike Erasmus, who worked to create a consensus patristicus, Melanchthon picked and chose only those statements that supported his views.” However, Fraenkel has argued that Melanchthon’s work on the patristics might be termed a historical hermeneutic. According to Fraenkel, Melanchthon was convinced that from the time of Cain and Abel the church has always been under attack by those who tried to import human reason and philosophy into its message of good news. Origen had introduced Plato into Christian theology, a fatal mistake that tainted even some of Augustine’s work. In the Middle Ages, Aristotle replaced Plato, but the result was the same. Thus, Fraenkel argues that Melanchthon’s supposed eclecticism actually arose out of a very sophisticated view of history that contradicted his Roman Catholic opponents, including Erasmus, whose patristic consensus excluded Lutheranism’s justification by faith alone.

976 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, pp. 124-125
977 Ibid, p. 121
979 Ibid, p. 319
980 Ibid, p. 54
981 Ibid, p. 329; Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 109
982 E. P. Meijering, Melanchthon and Patristic Thought, p. 93
983 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson eds., A History of Biblical Interpretation, p. 334
984 Ibid, pp. 334-335
Melanchthon’s Relationship with the Jewish People

Melanchthon’s relationship with the Jewish people, like Reuchlin and especially like Nicholas of Lyra, cannot be easily categorized. As Wengert writes, “On the one hand, Melanchthon could admire Jewish scholarship, defend Jews’ unique role as God’s people, and dismiss certain unfounded charges against them. At the same time, on the other, he called them pejorative names, passed on misinformation, and expressed disapproval at their being allowed back into certain territories of the Empire.”985

Melanchthon disagreed with the prevailing view that the Jews were guilty of the death of Jesus. While he believed that historically they were guilty, he “consistently connected their guilt to that of all people.”986 He believed that the failure was not of the Jews, but of humanity. All of humankind ultimately held the burden for the murder of Christ. He saw it as another example of where people had failed to act and prevent injustices, citing past and contemporary persecutions of saints.

In 1510, thirty-eight Jews were “burned at the stake for allegedly having desecrated the sacramental bread of the Eucharist” in Brandenburg. The elector of Brandenburg used these executions as a pretense for exiling the Jews from the region. Almost thirty years later, Melanchthon “argued that the Jews had been unjustly condemned” to the current elector, Joachim II, the son of the elector who had exiled the Jews. Joachim II, as a result of that conversation, allowed the Jews back into his province.987

Arguably, to a certain degree Melanchthon’s “thought mirrored Luther’s, who also changed his opinion at least regarding the possibility of Jewish conversions to Christianity. However, in

985 Ibid, p. 106
986 Ibid, p. 113
987 Ibid, p. 112
the one matter that triggered the worst of Luther’s anti-Jewish comments—the alleged conversion of Christians to Judaism—Melanchthon remained unfazed and consistently criticized rumor-mongering."^988 Wengert adds that “[i]f Melanchthon learned anything from his relative Johannes Reuchlin, it was a certain level of toleration for Jews and their writings. The sources are simply too scanty to determine completely the depth of his conviction."^989

On the other side, Melanchthon engaged in the stereotypes of Jews as greedy, such as his attacks on Pfefferkorn during the Reuchlin affair. Melanchthon wrote, “Modern-day Jews plainly also condemn, persecute, and denounce the Gospel. They deny that the Messiah is the Son of god and that the Messiah is the one who suffered. They hold pertinaciously to their dream of a Messiah’s political reign. They condemn this resurrected Son, and hold to many other terrible errors.” This language would not seem out of place in a Lyra-esque polemic, however, arguably, Melanchthon takes it a step further by not simply stating that the Jews are wrong or even willfully wrong, but by suggesting that they “persecute…the Gospel.” This then makes Jews enemies attacking the Gospel and the Church, rather than being unfortunately misguided.

He emphasized that part of the error of the Jewish people was their faith in the Law rather than the Gospel. His loci in John’s Gospel, in the story of the Samaritan woman, uses “the location and justification of the Gentiles over against the works-righteousness of the Jewish law.”^990 He continually critiqued Jewish Hebrew teachers for “misunder[anding] the Hebrew Bible and [teaching] salvation by Law not Gospel.”^991 Such criticism applied to Christian

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^988 Ibid, pp. 106-107
^989 Ibid, p. 111
^990 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 64
^991 Timothy Wengert, “Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany”, p. 120
teachers as well: Melanchthon complained about a professor of Hebrew at Wittenberg, Paul Phrygio, for being “overly dependent on the Jewish interpretations of the Old Testament.”

Wengert argues that Melanchthon’s dispute with the Jews was chiefly theological in nature and grew out of his understanding of the nature of the Church. He dismissed their beliefs out of hand and even went so far as to recommend Luther’s harshest tracts against them on theological grounds. But he also engaged in exegetical disputes with them, both face-to-face and in his writings. This maelstrom of conflicting approaches, far from arising out of a weak personality (the standard explanation for many aspects of Melanchthon’s behavior), reveals the intricacies of Melanchthon’s own thought. He unwaveringly championed the Christian Church, its doctrine, and its interpretation of the Bible. At the same time, he found ways to tolerate a variety of views on this (for him) bewildering religious and social issue and to indulge in some of his age’s worst and most hackneyed expressions of contempt.

Melanchthon’s conflict with the Jewish people appears to be rooted in fear, in a sense of being persecuted: “under even some of the most abusive language Melanchthon employed for Jews, lurks this view of the Church under attack.” The habit of lashing out against others when feeling vulnerable is one that we see on display even in our country today. While the direct threat was from the Church, Melanchthon appears to have projected this fear onto the Jewish people. Wengert writes that “Melanchthon’s view narrowed, so that the more clearly he applied Romans 9-11 to the persecuted, evangelical Church the less room he gave to God’s conversion of Jews before the End.” The more that he identified with being persecuted, the less willing he was to grant an interpretation that gave room for the salvation of the Jews. When listing enemies of the church, Melanchthon wrote: ‘impii Iudaei et alii athei’ (‘impious Jews and other

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992 Ibid, p. 121
993 Ibid, p. 106
994 Ibid, pp. 115-116
995 Ibid, p. 106
Melanchthon’s comments seem a far cry from Reuchlin’s discussion of the Jews as fellow worshippers of God.

**Melanchthon’s use of Jewish Sources**

Melanchthon does not appear to have had the friendly relationship with postbiblical Jewish sources as Reuchlin or Nicholas. Lapide notes that the Hebraist Munster had to defend “the scholarly value of Jewish religious literature…against the attacks of such scholars as Philip Melanchthon, who refused to find in it any philological value at all.” Melanchthon’s issues with Jewish exegesis seem to be theological. He does not seem to be able to get beyond the theological differences between the two religions. For example, “The presence of the Son…before the incarnation was one of Melanchthon’s most important criticisms of Jewish interpretation of Scripture. Jewish exegetes could not accept this notion and thus dismissed not only the prophecies of Christ’s incarnation but also the comfort and guidance that God the Son brought the patriarchs and the people of Israel.”

Melanchthon relied on his knowledge of Hebrew when making his exegetical arguments in the Old Testament. For instance, when troubled by God’s ability to harden hearts, Melanchthon “mounted not only theological objections…he also formulated a grammatical objection, based on his understanding of the Hebrew verb.” Melanchthon firmly believed that “learning Hebrew

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996 Ibid, p. 116
997 Pinchas E. Lapide, *Hebrew in the Church*, p. 54
998 Timothy Wengert, “Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany”, p. 126
999 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, p. 204
helps the exegete combat Jewish misinterpretation.” He appears to have found Paul’s use of the Septuagint rather than the original Hebrew to have been highly suggestive. However, his entire system of thought was permeated by a sense of God’s having created by his word (verbum) and thus as having put the very stamp of that word upon the whole of creation. But Melanchthon was most interested in the revelatory and redemptive works of God through Jesus Christ, who, he stressed, was the very word of God in living flesh.

This appears to possibly be a lingering influence of Reuchlin, who also believed that Jesus was “the very word of God in living flesh.” Reuchlin also was fascinated by the Hebrew language as the word through which creation was initiated, something that seems to have permeated Melanchthon’s worldview. Reuchlin’s love for the Kabbalah, however, does not seem to have been passed down.

Melanchthon “seem[s] truly divided on the issue” of Kabbalah. On one hand, in a rhetoric textbook in 1531, “Melanchthon warned readers to avoid neologisms, not only those of the scholastics, philosophers, and heretics, but also those of the Kabbalists. ‘Not less inept are the Kabbalists of the Jews, who invent new words and promise wondrous mysteries, when they teach pure nonsense.’” However, at a later date, Melanchthon mentioned the theory of the three ages of two millennia before the end as a saying of the prophet Elijah, handed down through the Kabbalah. Melanchthon went on to describe the Kabbalah—‘teaching passed down by hand’—as a collection of sayings of the prophets, especially Elijah and Elisha, who said far more than is recorded in the biblical witness. Of course, Melanchthon did not accord this collection nearly as much authority as the

1000 Timothy Wengert, “Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany”, p. 122
1001 Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham eds., Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary, p. 205
1002 Ibid, p. 44
1004 Ibid
Thus, he warned his listeners, ‘I recount this saying not as an indubitable proof but as a conjecture.’

Wengert observes that “[c]ompared with Reuchlin, Melanchthon’s assessment of the Kabbalah in later years was extremely wary, if not downright hostile. Such skepticism, however, did not prevent him from using it. He accepted some of its content (sayings of the prophets) while rejecting its methods of biblical interpretation.”

**Subsequent Influence**

Melanchthon influenced numerous reformation theologians such as Ulrich Zwingli, John Brenz (1499-1570), Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), John Calvin (1509-1564), Georg Major (1502-1574), and Caspar Cruciger Sr (1504-1547). He and Erasmus traded exegetical critiques, but continued in dialogue with one another. Whereas, Calvin’s “sense of history and of historical example may be viewed as a development of Melanchthon’s emphases.”

In fact, much of Reformation theology can be said to be a development of Melanchthon’s work, which is what makes it difficult to quantify. He was a true ‘Renaissance man’: a philosopher, theologian, exegete, professor, preacher, historian, writer, and leader of what would become a continent-wide movement, in addition to being a husband and father. His opinion was solicited by theologians of all stripes and by kings and princes. He was able to turn Luther’s new theology into a system that defines the denominations of over a third of the worldwide Christian population. Luther himself admitted that Melanchthon articulated his vision in a way that he himself was not able to. When Melanchthon was being critiqued by their Reformer colleagues,

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1005 Ibid, p. 110
1006 Ibid
Luther rebuked them by writing on a table with chalk: “Substance and words—Philip. Words without substance—Erasmus. Substance without words—Luther.”

In terms of Hebrew and Jewish sources, Melanchthon and Luther’s attitudes would set the tone going forward for later Protestant exegesis and Protestant-Jewish relationships. Towards the latter, they certainly did damage. Towards the former, Melanchthon was able to make Hebrew a valuable and necessary part of Protestant Biblical interpretation and ensured that Hebrew studies would be part of the translation of the Bible into the vernacular.

Ultimately, though, Melanchthon’s greatest influence might be beyond his Reformation systems and in his intense encouragement of the importance of secondary education.

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1008 Heinz Scheible, “Philip Melanchthon”, p. 71-72
1009 Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism*, p. II 59
Nicholas of Lyra, Johann Reuchlin, and Philip Melanchthon were all highly influential figures in their time, all represent the movement of Hebraism over the course of the Renaissance, from its earliest beginnings in the late medieval age, all the way through to the Reformation.

During the medieval era, Jews and Christians appear to have had sporadic academic contacts, with the occasional figures utilizing Jewish postbiblical sources and the Hebrew language into their exegetical scholarship. However, towards the end of the Middle Ages, it is clear that the delicate status quo between the two religions was facing a massive disruption and relations between both faiths were at a dangerous tipping point at the start of the Renaissance. Jewish writings were being burned and the Jewish people, including their scholars, were being systematically exiled from Europe, making any potential study of Judaism by Christian scholars increasingly difficult.

Nicholas of Lyra began his work at this moment; he chose to make use of Jewish sources at the moment when such a practice was becoming less and less accepted. Nicholas of Lyra’s use of Jewish sources was undoubtedly Christian in motivation. These sources were unarguably taken with an agenda in mind. Nicholas’s interest in Hebrew and the rabbinical commentaries seems to have grown out of his interest in the literal sense of Biblical exegesis (as opposed to the more and more popular ‘spiritual’ senses). The correlation between the literal sense and use of Jewish sources is well-documented prior to Nicholas’s scholarship. It is understandable, given
the fact that an interest in the true literal word of the Bible would likely translate into an interest in the Bible’s philology, linguistics, and historical context. Once a scholar wanted to understand the literal meaning of Biblical words, Hebrew studies were necessary, and it was necessary to look to Jewish sources rather than Christian ones in order to get any sort of real understanding of the language. Christian sources were simply not sufficient for any literal interpretation of the text.

Nicholas of Lyra serves as a transitional figure between the medieval scholastics and the Renaissance humanists. While the philosophical and theological milieu in which he worked was undoubtedly still medieval, the methodology with which he approached the texts bears traces of proto-humanism. His focus on philology and the Hebrew language--along with his dedication to correcting the Vulgate on the basis of original languages, and his willingness to contradict previous authorities in the name of the literal sense of the text--are all concerns that would define the Christian Humanist textual criticism of the Old Testament. His concern for methodology over theology serves as a precursor for later movements. His work also unquestionably laid the groundwork for all subsequent Hebraists for the next several years. All later Hebraists, from the Renaissance to the Reformation, appear to have utilized Nicholas’s commentaries and used him as a model for their work.

His relationship to the Jewish sources and the Jewish people are certainly not without controversy. He certainly was anti-Semitic, but I believe no more than any of his contemporaries. While on most things Nicholas was willing to subordinate the theological to the philological, he drew the line at any non-Christological interpretations. This is clearly when his attempt to be systematic and scholarly was overridden by personal insistence. The same Jewish scholars whom he consulted, praised, and utilized throughout his commentary, become ill-
informed and ignorant when it comes to Christological verses. It certainly seems like inconsistent logic. He argues for respect for Jewish knowledge on one hand and criticizes their ignorance on the other. His direct writings on Jews seem to be incongruous in nature, frankly. While on one hand he appears to be constructing arguments that hold the Jews culpable for the death of Jesus and for willful ignorance, on the other, he appears to, in other places, negotiate a way for Jews to have not realized the meaning of Jesus and to find ways through which they aas justified by the law. However, as entangled and contradictory as Nicholas’s approach was, it set the tone for many later Hebraists who simultaneously appropriated and respected Jewish sources while disrespecting the people who had created them.

Nicholas was a polemicist. Several of the scholars, such as Klepper and Hailperin, have suggested that much of that polemic was what allowed him to study Hebrew without molestation by ecclesiastical authorities. While that is certainly possible, it is a theory that does not have enough evidence to substantiate and we have to assume that Nicholas meant, at least to a certain degree, his own words. Yet despite this polemical role, Nicholas still was a serious scholar and kept the door open for Hebrew scholarship in a Christian context.

With Reuchlin and his contemporaries, Hebrew had become much more accepted as a scholarly discipline for Christians. While it was still stigmatized, such a study now had the support of the humanist movement and its network of scholars behind it. Initiated by Nicholas and brought to fulfillment by Reuchlin, Hebrew studies were now being approached in a systematic way, rather than as an eccentric hobby. Reuchlin’s focus was on taking his Hebrew skills and codifying them into material that could be translated to Christian scholars. With his creation of the Hebrew grammars, he was not studying Hebrew simply for himself, but was
intending to train scholars to come after him. This was meant to become a standardized aspect of a Christian scholarly curriculum.

Additionally, Reuchlin, of all three of the figures explored in this thesis, was the most open-minded in his tolerance towards the Jewish people. Reuchlin’s early work shows the same polemical instincts that characterized much of medieval literature (a dialogue between Christians and non-Christians that ended in conversion), but his later work shows a much greater tolerance. Instead of the Christian lecturing the Jew, the Christian is learning from him. There is no conversion. His respect for his own Jewish, Hebrew teachers is well-documented. His Recommendation describes the Jews with respect, treating them as equal citizens and as people of faith before a common God. His work appears a tremendous step forward from Nicholas and represents a gradual opening up of Jewish-Christian relations through mutual dialogue.

Yet, by the time one reaches Melanchthon, a mere generation later, progress appears to have gone backward in terms of interfaith discourse. One could speculate that it is partially a manifestation of the common phenomenon by which a countermovement pushes backwards after leaps forward in progress. Melanchthon appears to have been what could be considered tolerant by the standards of the early sixteenth century, but he was far from accepting or welcoming, and his comments often contain explicitly anti-Semitic sentiments.

Melanchthon and Luther’s focus on the plain text of the Bible can be seen to be a continuation of Nicholas’s work to recover the literal sense of the Bible through the use of Hebrew. Nicholas had worked to bring Christian theology back to a textually-based system, but Nicholas, like Reuchlin, was willing to work within the system and within existing theology, instead of attempting to completely revolutionize the theological system.
By the time of Melanchthon, through the work of Reuchlin and other scholars, Hebrew had become an accessible language for Christian scholarship. There were now grammars and more and more Christian professors. With the full integration of Hebrew into Christian scholarship, many Christians, such as Melanchthon, appear to have declared the battle for Hebrew studies won. It appears that once they had (what they viewed as) sufficient resources to learn Hebrew, they felt confident in their own abilities and stopped feeling any need for Jewish aid in their interpretations and language studies. Jews, who had been necessary for the studies of Nicholas and Reuchlin, became irrelevant. Any insights they had were believed to have been fully explored. As Christians became more sure of their own knowledge, they appear to have felt more comfortable becoming dismissive of the Jews.

Yet, despite Melanchthon’s movement away from engagement with the Jewish people and much of Jewish scholarship, it is clear that moving forward Hebrew was viewed as a necessary and vital part of Christian education. It became a permanent aspect of Biblical scholarship and education. Scholars had come to view scripture as something that could be empirically, objectively studied and analyzed through a recognized process and methodology.

These three scholars together show the development of Christian scholarship on Hebrew texts and the language itself at the dawn of the modern era. They allowed for the reintegration of Jewish scholarship into a Christian theological and interpretive framework in a way that was unprecedented since the early Christian Church. The incorporation of the Hebrew sources into Christian methodology led to a greater focus on the literal sense of the Bible. This focus, with the literal sense becoming primary, can be seen, even as early as Nicholas and Reuchlin, to be setting the foundation for Luther’s sola scriptura and the shift from a church-based theology to a text-based theology.
This integration required reflection reassessment on the nature of, and the goals for, Christian and Jewish relationships. Jews could not be wholly discredited when Christians were forced to admit that they brought something valuable, indeed necessary, to the table. Like most progress, this came about as the result of a need. The Christians realized they needed help in order to accurately interpret their own Scriptures, and such a goal was important enough to get many of them to sit side by side at desks with Jews and learn from them and engage in discourse about words and God.
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