

White Jesus and Antisemitism: Toward an Antiracist and Decolonial Christology

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Abstract

This article argues that traditional Christology is intimately bound up with a triumphalist agenda that denies Jesus' Jewishness and is structurally antisemitic. Taking an antiracist stance, the article argues that systemic rethinking of Christianity's theological resources is needed, which must be anti-antisemitic and antiracist. This involves reconfiguring how we take on board Jesus' Jewishness in a post-Holocaust context and recognizing Jesus as a Jewish prophet. From this, it is tentatively suggested that rethinking the role of the Messiah involves understanding a Levinasian Messiah who does not come, but rather calls upon us to act in a Messianic role before the Other as an ethical imperative.

Keywords

Christology, antisemitism, antiracism, historical Jesus, decolonization, decolonial theology, prejudice, Emmanuel Levinas

Introducing a Problem

It is a truth that hardly needs stating: Jesus was Jewish and so were his disciples and early followers. Moreover, we may add, he was a Middle Eastern, even Palestinian, Jew.¹

¹ For some contemporary Palestinian Christians, recognizing Jesus as both a victim of suffering and a Palestinian resonates with their experience. See Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2017), 38. The identification of Jesus as Palestinian may be controversial for some, but that Jesus was born in Roman Palestine makes it a possible way of speaking of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth.

However, while academic theology has, more or less,² taken this on board, we still face the white (dare one say Aryan?) Jesus as normative in theological and ecclesial language and culture. In what has been described as the Latin captivity of the church, a Eurocentrism has become normative.³

Today, against this, it is generally accepted that we need to inculturate Christianity to local contexts around the world.⁴ However, such inculturation is often focused not upon the Jewish Jesus, but upon the white Jesus. That is to say, inculturation is seen to be something that happens when Christianity, as it has been transported from Europe, becomes indigenized elsewhere, in Asia, Africa, and so on. Within academic theology, in both research and teaching, the canon remains centred on a Euro-normative corpus;⁵ whether it is Barth, Tillich, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Hauerwas, or Rahner, such white, Western writers remain the standard works. Non-Western theology, when it is included, remains a footnote as contextual theology.⁶

Certainly, there are other trends. Werner Ustorf has spoken of the field of intercultural theology, for example, as the “theological repentance of the North,” recognizing that inculturation also applies to European forms of Christianity. Meanwhile, comparative theology, as advanced by figures such as Francis X. Clooney, has sought

² I say “more or less” because, as a colleague and I noticed at the time, at least one professor of theology’s jaw was seen to drop in a talk within the last decade during which a speaker, quite uncontroversially, stated this fact. The location and identities shall be kept anonymous.

³ See Robin H. S. Boyd, *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church: The Cultural Context of the Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); and on thinking theology from outside the West see, variously, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, “Asian Ecumenical Contributions to Theologies of Justice and Peace,” *Ecumenical Review* 69:4 (2017), 570–84; Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “African Culture and the Gospel: Inculturation from an African Woman’s Perspective,” in *One Gospel – Many Cultures: Case Studies and Reflections on Cross-Cultural Theology*, ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Hendrik M. Vroom (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 39–62; Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (London: SCM, 2005); and Joshua Samuel, *Untouchable Bodies, Resistance, and Liberation: A Comparative Theology of Divine Possessions* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

⁴ See Paul M. Collins, *Christian Inculturation in India* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

⁵ I still use “Euro-normative” here, though it certainly is a corpus that now includes North American writers, but this may be said to still maintain the predominantly white, northwestern European lineage that has dominated both theology and academic theorizing more generally. See Syed Farid Alatas, “Academic Dependency and the Global Division of Labour in the Social Sciences,” *Current Sociology* 5:1 (2003), 599–613.

⁶ See Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM, 2010), 44–52.

to open (Western) Christianity to wider global resources.⁷ Nevertheless, such fields and global theologies as a whole remain at best marginal to the mainstream of academic and ecclesial theology and practice. This is despite the moves, long noted, of the rise of the churches of the global South as the new demographic centres.

This paper locates itself in these debates by specifically questioning the image of Jesus in relation to Judaism, but it also raises wider questions about the “white Jesus” of the Christian imagination. I will suggest that images of Jesus, the biblical text, and notions of Christology more generally remain problematic from an antiracist perspective in relation to both antisemitism and racism stemming from a white, Eurocentric Jesus. As such, I will suggest that Christians may benefit from envisaging Jesus as a Middle Eastern Jewish prophet. Importantly, as a baseline for this, I argue that aspects of Christianity, deeply rooted and ingrained, mean that what we may term structural and cultural antisemitism are embedded in the Christian psyche and tradition and hence in the cultural forms and expressions to which this leads.

This is not, in and of itself, an attack on Christianity (or, rather, the many Christianities found around the world), nor does it aim to find fault with Christians themselves per se, though some Christianities and some Christians are more at fault than others. Rather, it is to highlight an awareness of tendencies and ingrained habits within the churches and their theologies that can give weight to antisemitism, and therefore invite them to be alert that they still need be combatted: as a recent article in this journal noted, “the churches still have much work to do on the Christian West’s primal instincts toward anti-Judaic discourse.”⁸ This is an attempt at what many may term today an antiracist approach and reading of Christianity with a particular focus on the person of Jesus and in relation to Judaism and antisemitism.

The paper will begin by unpacking some conceptual issues, which will include what is meant here by such terms as “prejudice” and “antiracism,” why antisemitism is racist,

⁷ Werner Ustorf, “The Cultural Origins of ‘Intercultural Theology,’” *Mission Studies* 25 (2008), 229–51. See Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010). In both cases, though, we still, arguably, see elite white theologians (which is not their fault, of course) being the voices of acceptable theological critique of the white Jesus theology. Where do the Ariarajahs or Cones of this world sit on mainstream curricula or in edited collections alongside such figures? James Cone was particularly known for *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). On the need for subaltern theologians in comparative theology, see Paul Hedges, *Comparative Theology: Critical and Methodological Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). I may note that, while not my focus here, feminist theology and female theologians also remain generally marginal.

⁸ Peter Colwell, “Race, Power, and Privilege: Ecumenism and the Lost Narrative of Interfaith Relations in Post-Brexit Britain,” *Current Dialogue/Ecumenical Review* 71:5 (2019), 650.

and hence its opposition is antiracist. I will tie these to debates around decolonization and so suggest that an antiracist Christology will also be a decolonizing one. Next, I will move to outline some key markers of antisemitism within the Christian tradition, dealing primarily with the biblical text and its treatment, but noting also some key church fathers and leading thinkers of the tradition. This will lead to examination of Jesus as a Jewish prophet, including the biblical support for this and what this may mean in developing an antiracist (anti-antisemitic) Christology. I will also reflect on moves in post-Holocaust theologies to re-envision Christian thought, thinkers, and Christology, but note their general failure to respond adequately and to push at the boundaries of where some of the best thinking in this area leads. I will also sketch some further thoughts toward the implications of this by placing Marianne Moyaert's reflections in relation to Emmanuel Levinas' work, centrally suggesting that we must rethink the term "Messiah" as one who does not come, but instead places upon us an ethical demand. I will bring together key thoughts in the conclusion.

Prejudice, Antiracism, Racialization, and Antisemitism: Concepts and Terms

This article uses the term "prejudice" in ways that develop from the work of Gordon Allport.⁹ To briefly state what this means, prejudice is a catch-all term for undue negative attitudes and behaviours directed against groups and individuals (generally as part of a group) that can move from mild antipathy to severe hatred and at the most extreme may entail genocide. Prejudice may also be subdivided into three parts: stereotypes, the concepts and ideas about a group as cognitive notions; prejudice, which is the active emotional feeling of dislike or contempt based upon such stereotypes; and discrimination, which is action based upon this. Notably, even people without prejudice (or who are low prejudice) will know the stereotypes because they are part of the collective knowledge of a culture, but may not buy into them. However, there may be both explicit prejudice, wherein people readily accept the stereotypes, and implicit prejudice, where people may at times (unconsciously or otherwise) act or feel in ways that accord with the stereotypes, even if they regard themselves as being without prejudice.

⁹ The following draws from a range of sources, including John Dovidio, Samuel Gaertner, and Adam Pearson, "On the Nature of Prejudice: The Psychological Foundations of Hate," in *The Psychology of Hate*, ed. R. J. Sternberg (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2005), 211–34; Bernard Whitley and Mary Kite, *The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination*, 2nd ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2010); Irwin Katz, "Gordon Allport's 'The Nature of Prejudice,'" *Political Psychology* 12:1 (1991), 125–57; and Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1958 [1954]). These are read through a social identity theory lens: see Paul Hedges, *Religious Hatred: Prejudice, Islamophobia, and Antisemitism in Global Context* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming in 2021).

This act of holding a prejudice is, as Allport noted and later studies show, not an aspect of a dysfunctional mind or a pathology, but a normal part of human understanding and social interaction. This is, in part, because we simply cannot process in detail the vast quantity of data we receive on a daily basis (our senses bombard us with millions of pieces of information). As a result, we “create/imagine” groups or stereotypes into which we place things or people that seem to fit into them, and this helps us navigate and make sense of the world.¹⁰ However, as Rogers Brubaker has noted, this may lead to “groupism,” whereby these working types become imagined as fixed, monolithic, and unchanging categories.¹¹ We thus imagine “the Jews,” “Muslims,” “Blacks,” “Asians,” or others to fit within a certain type and to have shared traits that justify prejudice against all of them.¹² This relates to what is termed “racialization,” whereby particular “races” are “created/imagined” (there are, of course, no human races¹³) as equally fixed and monolithic groups. The origins of modern racism, those categories and stereotypes we now typically have of racial/ethnic “groups,”¹⁴ can be traced to the Iberian Peninsula around the 16th century; they became normalized, codified, and ideologically justified over the next few hundred years with the institutions of slavery, colonialism, and the Enlightenment.

Within the matrix noted, European antisemitism evolved into not only a religious hatred but also a racial hatred, with Jews perceived not just as a religious group but also as

¹⁰ See Hedges, *Religious Hatred*, ch. 1. All groups and categories are social constructs arising from our discursive interaction with the world we inhabit. These may be more or less analytically helpful and more or less based in “facts” we perceive, but may also go on to create – insofar as they become part of a widely shared consensus – social realities with real effects in the world. See the next note and also Paul Hedges, *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for Studying Religiously Diverse Societies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming in 2021).

¹¹ Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups,” *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 43:2 (2002), 163–89.

¹² On the specific usage of “the Jews,” which goes back to biblical language and helps to “otherize” them as a distinct group, see Hedges, *Religious Hatred*, ch. 3.

¹³ See Steve Garner, *Racisms: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2017); K. Anthony Appiah, “Reconstructing Racial Identities,” *Research in African Literatures* 27:3 (1996), 68–72; and National Human Genome Research Institute, “Genetics vs. Genomics Fact Sheet” (2018), <https://www.genome.gov/about-genomics/fact-sheets/Genetics-vs-Genomics>

¹⁴ Just as “race” is an imagined construct, so too is “ethnicity,” which is typically understood as a motley assemblage of markers including culture, language, skin tone, and region and came to replace “race” when it was increasingly realized how problematic that term was. However, it too is subject to Brubaker’s problematic of groupism. This is not to say that such things as race and ethnicity are not social realities, in that people identify with them and ascribe them to others, and this has real socio-politico-economic effects. But neither “race” nor “ethnicity” describes a fixed and distinct marker between groups of people beyond their discursive usage within regimes of social differentiation. Neither is, if you like, scientific.

a race or nation.¹⁵ This evolution owes its origins to the Iberian context, where the ideology/statutes of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) meant that even conversion from Judaism (also Islam) to Christianity did not remove the perceived “taint” of the blood lineage. The Jewish *conversos* (“New Christians,” sometimes *morranos*) were seen to be innately prone to backsliding into their former Jewish habits and to be a danger to society and Christianity.¹⁶ The theological implications of this, and the challenge to baptismal theology, may be stated plainly: *contra* Paul’s claim that all people are made anew in Christ (Rom. 6:4), for there is neither “Greek nor Jew” (Gal. 3:28), baptism no longer made a Christian a Christian; rather, there were grades of Christians, with some – based on a racialized blood line – less “Christian” than others.¹⁷ In the late 18th and 19th centuries, this racialization of antisemitism became more evident in the way Jewishness became envisaged as problematic and somehow incompatible with the concept of citizenship within newly emerging nation-states. In texts such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, stereotypes of Jews as running a cabal governing the world became part of the matrix of hatred of “the Jew” as a Semite, often read through a biblical lens.¹⁸ Today, hatred of Jews often manifests in ways that appeal both to earlier Christian antisemitic tropes and to the racialized notion of Jews as a particular ethno-racial group.¹⁹

Particularly in the context of North American (or, more precisely, the United States) Black-white relations and the heritage of slavery, Jim Crow, and reconstruction that occurred there, many activists and scholars have started to say that it is simply not enough to be non-racist; rather, one must be antiracist.²⁰ The point of this is two-fold.

First, even if people regard themselves as not being actively racist or exhibiting explicit prejudice, they can be implicitly racist, where they may – on occasion – make the stereotypes salient for themselves in particular contexts. A person might cross the street at

¹⁵ I use antisemitism as a general marker of prejudice against Jews, though some may distinguish an earlier, more religiously based anti-Judaism and a later, more racially based antisemitism. However, no stark division exists, and much prejudice (at least within the last few hundred years) exhibits both aspects. See Hedges, *Religious Hatred*, “Introduction.”

¹⁶ See Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), and Hedges, *Religious Hatred*, ch. 5.

¹⁷ See Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

¹⁸ See Hedges, *Religious Hatred*, ch. 5. See also Bethencourt, *Racisms*, but especially David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The History of a Way of Thinking* (New York: Norton, 2013), 325–60.

¹⁹ See Deborah Lipstadt, *Antisemitism Here and Now* (London: Scribe, 2019); and Hedges, *Religious Hatred*, ch. 6.

²⁰ See, for instance, Ibram Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (London: The Bodley Head, 2019).

night when they see a group of young people of a particular skin colour, wonder how a young man of a certain ethno-racial profile got that expensive car, or – without consciously realizing it – call back for an interview the person with the more familiar name rather than the more “exotic” one.²¹ We as individuals, therefore, need to be consciously antiracist, as we may need to work on the ways our societies have conditioned us to be implicitly racist – ways sometimes too subtle or ingrained for us to notice.

This leads us to the other side of this, which is what may be variously termed institutional, structural, or cultural racism.²² Racialized norms are built into the fabric of our societies. This has many layers, but here two may be mentioned.

First, differentials in socio-economic outcomes for variously identified ethno-racialized groups are often based upon prejudice against those groups alongside centuries of privilege that have favoured certain other groups. (It should be noted that such prejudice is not simply based upon perceived race; class and gender are also factors in deprivation and the creation of subaltern groups, with white working-class people, often young males, suffering in similar ways from this.²³ In other words, prejudice is intersectional.²⁴ However, here I am focusing upon a particular dynamic, which is not to downplay the significance of these other factors.)

Second, terms such as “epistemicide” have been used to speak about the way that non-Western (that is, configured as “non-white”) ways of knowing, thinking, speaking, and acting have been downplayed, derided, or destroyed.²⁵ The results of this are well described by Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of the “colonial wound.”²⁶ This term is descriptive of the cultural trauma of those whose languages, cultures, and ways of life have been subaltern to hegemonic colonial and neocolonial languages, cultures, and ways of

²¹ On the prevalence of such racism, see Anthony Heath and Lindsay Richards, “How Racist Is Britain Today? What the Evidence Tells Us,” *The Conversation* (1 July 2020), <https://theconversation.com/how-racist-is-britain-today-what-the-evidence-tells-us-141657>

²² Depending upon the author and context, each of these may also carry differing connotations. For instance, institutional racism may refer to the ways discriminatory behaviours and obstacles to inclusion are built into organizations, while cultural racism may refer to worldviews and ideologies which underpin and even legitimize this.

²³ See Justin Gest, *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁴ See Kimberlé Cranshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, Article 8 (1989), 139–67.

²⁵ See Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

²⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987). For a wider discussion on this, see Hedges, *Understanding Religion*, ch. 18; see also ch. 7.

life. Power production, academic knowledge, and legitimated ways of seeing the world have been vested within a Eurocentric matrix of domination tied to colonialism and neocolonialism.²⁷ To be antiracist, or to decolonize our social systems and our very ways of knowing, is therefore seen to be a prerequisite. This has been manifested recently in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the calls for decolonizing university curricula, toppling statues of slavers, and protesting ongoing inequalities that are often part of the embedded social, political, and economic systems in our world. This paper sets this decolonizing and antiracist agenda within the context of theology and ecclesial ways of knowing and thinking. Does antiracism entail decolonizing Jesus?

Decolonization has been mentioned above, but I use it here to speak about how systems of oppression are uncovered and removed to avoid continued unjust or unequal situations. This may refer variously to economic inequality resulting from such things as slavery or colonialism; institutional markers of oppression, such as valorizing slavers, racists, and others, as paradigms within the public sphere; and modes of power relations that keep certain ways of thinking or knowing subservient or illegitimated against others, and often hide or deny a global debt of ideas. In our current context, this primarily refers to the way that Western colonialism and power has dominated the globe over the last couple of hundred years, with resulting damage to those understood as non-white, non-Western, uncivilized, and so on. Decolonization is not regarded here as inherently distinct from postcolonialism, with Walter Mignolo noting that decolonization has been used in African, Latin American, and Black studies, and postcolonialism in Asian studies.²⁸

Christianity and Antisemitism: A Survey and Response

Around two thousand years of Christian antisemitism blights our world. Even if not the cause, antisemitism cannot be denied as a key contributing factor in the Holocaust, Nazi Germany's attempt to obliterate Jewish populations under its dominion. As such, it sits today as a strong marker in Jewish-Christian relations. Christians have acknowledged this heritage and even have institutionally sought to make amends. Theologians such as James Parkes and Rosemary Radford Ruether have written important tracts on this problem. An entire genre of post-Holocaust writings, especially in such areas as theodicy, have arisen. Under the aegis of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has altered its liturgy, placed Jewish-Christian relations within

²⁷ See Alatas, "Academic Dependency," 602; also Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion, and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011). See also Hedges, *Understanding Religion*, ch. 7.

²⁸ See Walter Mignolo, "On Subaltern and Other Agencies," *Postcolonial Studies* 8:4 (2005), 381–407.

ecumenical dialogue rather than interreligious relations, and acknowledged the church's involvement in the antisemitism which led to the Holocaust.²⁹ Beyond this, the many individuals and specific churches involved in dialogue with Jews, seeking to fight prejudice and antisemitism and change the way we speak about Judaism, also attest to the forcefulness with which this awareness has come home to roost. I do not wish to diminish this in any way. Yet, at the same time, many Jews have long felt uneasy in dialogue with Christians and continue to find a number of Christian approaches to Judaism insensitive or flawed in their approach.³⁰ Further, as I will argue, strong antisemitic vestiges remain in the way Christians speak and think.

For the purposes of this paper, I need only to outline a few ways in which the Christian tradition, from the gospels to the ghettos, has been complicit in antisemitism.³¹ The New Testament itself is the basis for Christian antisemitism, for it introduces what becomes the character of “the Jew” as an enemy of Jesus and the nascent Christian community. Of course, as noted above, the contemporary notion of the racialized Jew has been drawn from elsewhere, while the biblical texts have been read within a particular context of the relationship of Jews and Christians, but the West's lineage of antisemitism resulting in the Holocaust is inconceivable without its foundations in Christianity. From among various possible passages, three have often been important: “His blood be on us [Jews] and on our children” (Matt. 27:25); “You [Jews] are from your father the devil” (John 8:44); and “the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). Read by later Christians, distanced from the Jewish

²⁹ For some key works and overviews, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974); Ronald Miller, “Judaism: Siblings in Strife,” in *Christian Approaches to Other Religions*, ed. Paul Hedges and Alan Race (London: SCM, 2008), 176–90; James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (New York: Atheneum, 1977); and James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

³⁰ See Alana Vincent, “Convergence and Asymmetry: Observations on the Current State of Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 4:2 (2020). While tangential to this paper, it may be noted that speaking of Judeo-Christian thought is often one way this is manifested, with, for instance, Jewish thought represented simply by the Old Testament, and Jewish exegesis ignored with texts read in Christian-centric ways. See Arthur Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); also Hedges, *Religious Hatred*, ch. 3.

³¹ The phrase “from the Gospels to the Ghettos” is used as the title of chapter 3 of Hedges, *Religious Hatred*, and what is said here draws from there, with readers encouraged to consult the wider literature cited therein. I would specifically, though, note the following texts: Thomas Kaufmann, *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 31–49; Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983 [1943]); Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Antisemitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Daniel Schwartz, *Ghetto: The History of a Word* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

roots of Jesus and the gospel authors, these have signified a charge of deicide, a pernicious relationship with Satan, and an antagonism with Christians. This was crystallized in the work of theologians such as John Chrysostom, who wrote in scathing terms:

You will learn that they [the Jews] are abominable and lawless and murderous and enemies of God . . . I shall first demonstrate that even if they had not been deprived of their ancestral way of life, even so their fast would be polluted and impure . . . And I shall demonstrate that not only the fast, but also all the other practices which they observe – sacrifices and purifications and festivals – are all abominable.³²

Meanwhile, Saul's midrash on Jesus and the law became a way to contrast Christian freedom with the "dead law" of Judaism,³³ a trope played upon by such figures as Justin Martyr and Tertullian. However, for the Western tradition, Augustine stands as the key figure in determining how Jews would be viewed. He argued that the Jews should be left, as a destitute and denigrated people, as a sign to everyone of the fate of those who turn away from Christ.

Through the medieval and early modern period, Christian antisemitism saw the blood libel allegation instituted, in which many Jews were slaughtered in the belief that they sacrificed Christian children for their own rituals. They were also accused of causing the Black Death, and, as those (in effect) given the role of money lenders (Christians were forbidden from usury), hated as rich Jews, though most remained in poverty. In time, the ghetto was instituted, and while at first it was a somewhat pragmatic – even, arguably, not unbeneficial – arrangement for Jews, it became, certainly within the papal states, an embodied and material manifestation of an Augustinian theology of the Jews in which Jews were kept denigrated and degraded.

A study of Christian antisemitism would not be complete without considering Luther, whose views changed from an arguably benign belief that his reform would bring Jews to Christianity into a deeply virulent antisemitism. He asserted that Jews are "the children of the Devil" who "accuse God of lying and proudly despise the whole world" and whose schools are "nothing but the Devil's nest."³⁴ Further, he set out what he termed his "remedy" for the Jewish question as he perceived it:

³² John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, Oratio 2 (lost section) (2010), Fordham University Sourcebooks, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/chrysostom-jews6-homily2LOST.asp>

³³ It is mistaken to think that Saul's name was changed to Paul with his "conversion," signalling a move from a "Jewish" to a "Christian" identity, for these designations (Shaul/Paulus of Tarsus) would have simply operated concurrently as markers within differing socio-linguistic communities for the same figure. See Miller, "Judaism," 188, n. 3.

³⁴ Martin Luther, *The Jews and Their Lies*, translator unnamed (York: Liberty Bell Publications, 2004 [1543]), 14, 21.

First, their synagogues should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt . . . And this ought to be done for the honour of God and Christianity . . . Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed . . . Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayerbooks and Talmuds . . . Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more . . . Fifthly, passport and travelling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to Jews . . . Sixthly, they ought to be stopped from usury . . . Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the axe, the hoe.³⁵

With this noted, we may observe that there is simply no doubt that the four main strands of Christianity today – Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal – have inherited a legacy that is dripping with antisemitic sentiment. It may even be stated that the blood of the lamb that is meant to save Christians can be identified with the blood of Jews who have paid the price for how Christians have envisaged their salvation, for Christians have killed Jews in crusades, pogroms, and in the Holocaust with a vengeance. That most mainstream churches today have repented such involvement and that many Christians sought to save Jews during the Holocaust, and even that churches and Christians are often at the forefront of fighting antisemitism and in antiracism campaigns, does not assuage the institutional, cultural, structural, and systematic antisemitism of the tradition. If we cannot simply be non-racist but must be antiracist, then it is arguably the case that more work is to be done.

Some may respond that the churches and theologians have already responded strongly. But these responses are often inadequate, sometimes woefully so. Space does not permit a full survey of the relevant literature, so I will note only some representative examples. Starting with the Holocaust, some have argued that many of the “righteous amongst the nations,” Gentiles who saved Jews, were Christians and even Christian priests. The aim of this argument is to show that Christianity is not inherently antisemitic or, moreover, that in such figures we see a pathway toward dialogue between the traditions.³⁶ However, as recent studies have shown, incidents of Christians saving Jews was not in and of itself evidence of lack of antisemitism: a negative evaluation of Jews and Judaism can coexist with a humanitarian hand of rescue.³⁷ Another line taken is that, for example, Luther’s antisemitism was merely a facet of his time, shared with

³⁵ Luther, *The Jews and their Lies*, this translation cited from Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Christian Anti-Semitism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 73.

³⁶ Mordecai Paldiel, *Churches and the Holocaust: Unholy Teaching, Good Samaritans, and Reconciliation* (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing, 2006), 370.

³⁷ See Thorsten Wagner, “Belated Heroism: The Danish Lutheran Church and the Jews, 1918–1945,” in *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, ed. Kevin P. Spicer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 3–25.

humanist thinkers such as Erasmus, and that, for Luther, thinking today's ideas of reconciliation would simply not be possible.³⁸

Certainly this is true; however, rather than dealing with this legacy – and I am not denying that this has been done more deeply by some – certain Lutheran theologians have often sought to deny that Luther was antisemitic because, variously, his interest was in God's love, not hatred of Jews per se, or because his expression was not today's racialized antisemitism. (We could argue that Luther exhibited anti-Judaism rather than antisemitism, but this terminological issue seems to minimize Luther's contribution in antisemitic discourse.³⁹) So we may, for example, read that while “we feel embarrassed that the Luther of grace and freedom could write something as vitriolic as these works,” at the same time “[n]one of us would call Luther antisemitic because that would be ahistorical and wrong.”⁴⁰ In other words, one strong line of Christian apologetic response in what we may term post-Holocaust theology has been to argue that the correct answer for Christians is to more fully recognize the implications of their theology of love and grace in a way that undercuts, diminishes, or subverts antisemitism by showing that such a response is not a full realization of Christian teachings. That is: our theology is not wrong; we just haven't manifested it correctly.

However, I would contend that how it manifests is surely, at least to some degree, related to what it is. As Thomas Kaufmann notes, “Luther's hostility to the Jews was not simply the ‘shadow side’ of . . . his theology . . . for a shadow cannot be separated from the body that casts it. Luther's anti-Semitism as an integral component of his personality and theology can be viewed correctly only through a consistently historicizing lens.”⁴¹ “Historicizing” is being aware not simply of a context, but of the implications and effects of that in ongoing power relations and discourse today.

Below, I shall further argue that much that has become taken as orthodox Christian theological speculation inherently diminishes Judaism, divorces Jesus from his context, and places Christians and Jews in a problematic relationship. In this regard, I would also see issuing what may be seen as an apology without wider structural reforms as an

³⁸ Kaufmann, *Luther's Jews*, 153.

³⁹ On this distinction, see note 15.

⁴⁰ Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, “Response to Jennifer Hockenbery Dragseth's review of Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen (ed.), *The Alternative Luther: Lutheran Theology from the Subaltern*,” *Dialog* 59 (2020), 248. We could cite other examples which equally try to contextualize or diminish Luther's antisemitism; see, for instance, Mark Thompson, “Luther and the Jews,” *Reformed Theological Review* 67:3 (2008), 121–45; and Robert Artinian, “Luther after the Stendahl/Sanders Revolution: A Responsive Evaluation of Luther's View of First-Century Judaism in his 1535 Commentary on Galatians,” *Trinity Journal* 27:1 (2006), 77–99.

⁴¹ Kaufmann, *Luther's Jews*, 156.

inadequate response. So, while I fully take on board the sincerity of the words of the Lutheran World Federation, I would raise further questions when I read this: “The sins of Luther’s anti-Jewish remarks, the violence of his attacks on the Jews, must be acknowledged with deep distress. And all occasions for similar sin in the present or the future must be removed from our churches.”⁴² I will develop this point more fully below when I discuss Ruether’s Christological rethinking and some responses to her regarding how simply changing expressions or gestures of goodwill may not be adequate.

In this section, I will make a final note on Chrysostom. As Jacob Neusner has convincingly argued, the theological diminution and discrediting of Judaism that occurred was not simply an aberration in the realm of ideas, but was intimately linked with Christianity’s “victory” in converting the Roman empire to its side and hence “winning” in its contestation with Judaism. The fact that Jesus was Messiah was clearly proved now that those once persecuted had emerged to conquer the persecutors.⁴³ Historically, this is linked to the creation of what becomes orthodox Christology in the councils beginning under Constantine at Nicea. The cradle of Christology in empire is also the negation of any link with Judaism, when, finally, a clear break between the two traditions emerged.⁴⁴ Christology is part and parcel of Jesus’ Jewishness denied.

White Jesus, Jewish Jesus, Post-Holocaust Christologies, and a Jewish Prophet

From theological tomes to popular culture, it has increasingly been recognized that portraying Jesus as white does not do justice to the first-century Palestinian context of the historical figure known to us as Jesus of Nazareth.⁴⁵ Moreover, in inculturation around the world, Jesus has been portrayed as being racially Chinese, African, Indian, and more. Within such a framing, it may be argued that a blond, blue-eyed Jesus is nothing more than a particularly parochial, northwestern European framing of this figure as another act of inculturation. There is something to be said for this: why should not

⁴² In “Statements from the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Consultation, Stockholm, 1983,” in *A Shift in Jewish-Lutheran Relations*, ed. Wolfgang Greive and Peter N. Prove (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation 2003), 196, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-shift-jewish-lutheran-relations-documentation-48>

⁴³ See Jacob Neusner, *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London: SCM, 1991), 30–64, esp. 47–57.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*; see also Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?* 31–49.

⁴⁵ For an academic discussion, see Joan Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?* (London: T&T Clark, 2018). In popular culture, see <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10157859921805787>

Swedes imagine Jesus as one of them, much as Nigerians imagine Jesus as one of them, and Koreans imagine Jesus as one of them, or as Mary can appear as the Virgin of Guadalupe in the guise of an Indigenous Latin American woman?

However, the global norms of northwestern Europe and the United States have become, as noted above, hegemonic global norms. White Jesus is not simply the Jesus of a certain branch of the Caucasian peoples of the northwestern end of the Eurasian landmass but the image transported globally and enforced in conversion by the cross and the sword, such that one would not be surprised in entering a church in Argentina or Angola, Singapore or Swaziland to catch sight of a white Jesus. Alongside this, in the seminaries and theological imaginaries of Christians in those countries, it is the writings of white male Western theologians about this Jesus that comprise the core curriculum. Today, an English seminarian or a German theology student will meet Nehemiah Goreh, Kwok Pui-lan, Cornel West, or Mercy Amba Oduyoye only if they take certain selected specialist courses – rarely offered and even more rarely taken in universities and seminaries,⁴⁶ whereas across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the work of Barth, Rahner, and others will be assumed to be known by any educated seminarian or theology student. Indeed, one could imagine that it would not be too hard, even today, to complete an undergraduate degree or seminary training without ever once explicitly reading or being told that Jesus was actually Jewish or realizing that theology exists outside a “Western tradition.”⁴⁷ Certainly, the words “Jesus was Jewish” are unlikely to emanate from the pulpit either. Yet as I have noted, it is widely known and accepted. But the question remains of what effect this recognition of Jesus’ Jewishness has had. This may be considered within the wider arguments laid out herein.

For the remainder of this paper, I will turn to address steps ahead toward a decolonized Christology that takes on board the antisemitic legacy within the wider frames noted. To speak only of a Jewish Jesus without considering the wider structural frames of antisemitism would not be truly antiracist. My argument thus resonates with Ruether’s well-known question: “Is it possible to say ‘Jesus is Messiah’ without implicitly or explicitly saying at the same time ‘and the Jews be damned?’”⁴⁸ However, I seek to go beyond Ruether’s answer, because it is not enough to simply redefine a theological

⁴⁶ This is not to deny that some universities and seminaries have taken these issues on board and teach a more inclusive curricula, with a diverse staffing base. Some useful studies on such figures and the issue would include Oduyoye, “African Culture and the Gospel,” and Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*.

⁴⁷ This is, of course, a faulty social imaginary, because what we call Western philosophy, theology, culture, etc. has always been in a global dialogue of ideas that has learned from, inter alia, Africa, the Islamic world, the Buddhist world, Central Asia, India, and China. See Hedges, *Understanding Religion*, especially ch. 7.

⁴⁸ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 246.

formula in Christology to erase Christian antisemitism,⁴⁹ of which we say more below. But even with existing critiques of Ruether, that Christians should move from looking for “better theology” to doing “better deeds,”⁵⁰ I do not believe that enough is done. A move toward an anti-antisemitic Christology demands, I would suggest, a move beyond liberal assumptions that we can naively get to a point where we simply “think better” or “act better” without taking account of how antiracism has educated us about the much wider structural features in the culture of diminishment of Jews in which Christianity is embedded.

Not only was Jesus Jewish, but his thought world and cultural framing were those of an observant Jew. As can be learned from scholars such as Geza Vermes, to take Jesus’ Jewish worldview seriously means to recognize that there is no way that Jesus could have imagined himself as being equal to God, nor could this have been expressed in such a way to the people around him,⁵¹ let alone for Jesus to have had any concept of the much later trinitarian formulas into which he would be embedded. Careful scholars of the historical Jesus have, taking full note of this, sought ways to reconcile Christian conceptions with this, and Marcus Borg, for example, speaks of a pre-Easter and a post-Easter conception of Jesus among the early Jesus movement.⁵² But it is too easy for Christians to imagine Jesus as somehow not like other Jews, to see him in opposition to “the Jews” as the founder of “their religion,” and to absorb the false gospel claims that Jewish people and their leaders were responsible for Jesus’ death – he died as a traitor to Rome, executed for treason, not as a blasphemer under Jewish law (as was Stephen, the so-called proto-martyr).⁵³

To truly think with Jesus in his Jewishness is, of course, to directly counter much of the Christian tradition – it is hard not to think of a father of the church not steeped in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition – but also to run against what has become defined as traditional Christology. It is to think heretically, to adopt what some may see as a Judaizing trend toward what has been termed an Ebionite theology.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 246–57.

⁵⁰ Thomas A. Idinopulos and Roy Bowen Ward, “Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic? A Critical Review of Rosemary Ruether’s: ‘Faith and Fratricide,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45:2 (1977), 210.

⁵¹ The classic work is Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospel* (London: Collins, 1973). More recently, see Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2006). See also such studies as Francois P. Viljoen, “Jesus’ Teaching on the Torah in the Sermon on the Mount,” *Neotestamentica* 40:1 (2006), 135–55.

⁵² Marcus Borg, “Jesus before and after Easter: Jewish Mystic and Christian Messiah,” in Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 53–77.

⁵³ See Geza Vermes, *The Passion* (London: Penguin, 2005).

However, it is, I would argue, thoroughly biblical. I do not think it is problematic to assert that what is generally considered the earliest of the gospels, that of Mark, teaches an adoptionist low Christology,⁵⁴ while in Acts it plainly states – if one adopts a plain meaning of the text hermeneutic – that Jesus was “a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him” (Acts 2:22). Likewise, if Saul is read within his Jewish milieu, it is unlikely that it is possible to find anything that places Jesus in the position of later Christological readings. Jesus’ exalted status as the Second Adam also attests to him as being, like Adam (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 5:14-15), a created being, and certainly no hint of divinity resides within a Jewish reading of Saul.⁵⁵ Some have argued for the priority of John, with its higher Christology, and for an early adoption of quite an advanced Christological sense, even if it was not adopted by councils till very much later.⁵⁶ However, one very often finds the need for special pleading and an argument that runs counter to what may be considered the best contemporary critical historical readings, as found in, for instance, Bart Ehrman.⁵⁷ Indeed, even highly conservative Christian apologists have seen the need to cede this ground in terms of acknowledging that Jesus would not have thought of himself as divine and probably not even as the Messiah.⁵⁸

I would argue that to think a high Christology, to think in orthodox trinitarian forms about Jesus as affirmed in the Nicaean-Chalcedonian tradition, is to be implicated within the antisemitism of the authors and lineage that developed them. As I noted above, these councils and debates came within a context that explicitly sought to divide Christianity’s root and branch from its Jewish heritage as a triumphalist agenda of imperial Christianity.⁵⁹ While, of course, many of these figures were far from “white” in today’s terms (the North African, Anatolian, and Middle Eastern power centres of the

⁵⁴ See Hedges, *Understanding Religion*, Case Study 4A.

⁵⁵ See Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperOne, 2010). Within the early Jesus movement literature, Jesus was, at most, portrayed as an angelic or celestial figure, but within Jewish cosmology this still makes him a creature and not the creator. Even terms such as the *logos*, often read as indicating divinity via later Christological interpretations, convey only a celestial position in contemporary Jewish thought, such as in the writings of Philo of Alexandria.

⁵⁶ For a prominent argument for an early high Christology, see Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵⁷ Bart Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), see esp. 85–128.

⁵⁸ See Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 244–49.

⁵⁹ A good, accessible overview of the social and political context can be found in Linda Woodhead, *An Introduction to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

church attest to this), we see a direct line from these early Christians to where we are today, a line which is – as discussed – directly and unremittingly antisemitic.

Here I would like to place my arguments in relation to a succession of scholarship that has raised the question of Christology in the light of Christian antisemitism, most especially in a post-Holocaust context. We have noted Ruether's work above, but also well known is Jürgen Moltmann's attempt to empty Christology of Christian triumphalism.⁶⁰ While Moltmann took Jewish suffering seriously, and has been inspirational to many Christians in rethinking a God who suffers with us, he has been rightly challenged for making too easy an equation between Auschwitz and Golgotha⁶¹ and slipping Christian triumphalism in "cloaked as anti-triumphalism."⁶²

But they are not alone, and opening up the question of a post-Holocaust Christology has been key for many engaged in Jewish-Christian dialogue.⁶³ Alongside those who have noted how we must place this reflection in connection to dialogue with Jews and in relation to Jesus' Jewish context,⁶⁴ I would like to go further. This is not to belittle previous work, but to take it to where, I believe, it points at its best. In this regard, I find much sympathy with Marianne Moyaert's reading of Isaiah 53 alongside Emmanuel Levinas as a Jewish interlocutor.⁶⁵ I will not retrace her argument, but Moyaert suggests that, to avoid triumphalism, reading such texts, and Christological thinking, must take place within a Jewish-Christian encounter "not to Judaize Christianity, but [to end] a long Christian tradition of supersessionism."⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1974).

⁶¹ See Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist, 1998), 121, where he cites Elie Wiesel noting this of Christians talking about the Shoah: "Yesterday it went: 'Auschwitz? Never heard of it.' Today: 'Auschwitz. Oh yes, I already know about that.'"

⁶² Marianne Moyaert, "Who Is the Suffering Servant? A Comparative Theological Reading of Isaiah 53 after the Shoah," in *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection*, ed. Michelle Voss Roberts (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 226.

⁶³ See, for a survey, Marcus Braybrooke, *Time to Meet: Towards a Deeper Relationship between Jews and Christians* (London: SCM, 1990), 59–71. For some particular studies, see Matthew Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Life of Wisdom* (London: Continuum, 2010), 12–46; John Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (Ramsey: Trinity Press, 1982); Alice Eckardt and Roy Eckardt, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, rev. ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988); and Marie Louise Baird, "Jesus at Auschwitz?: A Critique of Post-Holocaust Christologies," in *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology*, ed. Terrence Merrigan and Jacques Haers (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 399–415.

⁶⁴ See Braybrooke, *Time to Meet*, 43–58, 61–67, 68–71.

⁶⁵ Moyaert, "Who Is the Suffering Servant?" 227–34.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

Alongside Levinas' claim that we must not place suffering in the hands of a deity but take it on ourselves, Moyaert quotes his statement that "All persons are the Messiah," and then she further notes, "The Messiah, he once dared to say, does not come. If we do not devote ourselves to this world, then history will end badly."⁶⁷ Here she stresses the ethical strand of thinking coming from Levinas' thought,⁶⁸ but Moyaert does not take us to what I see as the Christological implications of this.⁶⁹ How can we fully reflect the Jewish "no" to the Christian question "Has the Messiah come?" (to which Christians have typically answered "yes")? If, with Levinas, we say the Messiah does not come, then we read Jesus as of his times, a Jewish prophet, and embrace Messiahship as what we do if we live out his teachings.⁷⁰ Here I am perhaps also exceeding Levinas' claim and taking a particular reading of being "a messiah" as an ethical imperative of all people: that is, to do the work of healing and ethical duty toward the Other.⁷¹

Therefore, within this context, I would argue that taking Jesus' Jewishness seriously entails seeing him as a Jewish prophet. That is how he would have understood himself and how his disciples would have understood him. Even if, with some scholars (for example, N. T. Wright and J. G. Dunn⁷²), one wishes to argue that Jesus saw himself as the Messiah, it must still be acknowledged that within the Jewish context this in no way signalled divinity – as seen certainly in Mark and Saul. Rather, to radically take Jesus' Jewishness on board is to think with the historical figure, I would argue.

⁶⁷ Ibid., citing Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1990), 89–90.

⁶⁸ On some interreligious implications of reading Levinas for his ethical insights, see Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 17–27; and Paul Hedges, "The Ethics of Comparative Religious Reading: Approaching the Sacred Space of Another Tradition," in *Contested Spaces, Common Ground*, ed. Ulrich Winkler, Lidia Rodriguez, and Oddbjørn Leirvik (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 18–32.

⁶⁹ I should note that what is developed is what I see as the implications of Moyaert's thought, and so I do not suggest that she would endorse the argument, although I see it following both from my own and her own arguments in this matter.

⁷⁰ This may be seen as a stance that resonates with Carter Heyward's notion of "goddling," where God is understood as a verb and a horizontal relational idea within this world, rather than as a noun and a vertical relationship outside the world, and so outside of our ethical responsibility. See Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus from Those Who Are Right: Rethinking What It Means to Be Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 131; and for a reading of such an ethic in relation to Jesus as philosopher in our contemporary context, see Paul Hedges, "How to Think Theologically after Covid-19?: Some Reflections and Pointers on Jesus as Philosopher," *The South Asian Journal of Religion and Philosophy* 2:2 (2020).

⁷¹ In Jewish terms, one may term this *tikkun*. See Gilbert Rosenthal, "Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept," *The Journal of Religion* 85:2 (2005), 214–40.

⁷² Against such figures as J. P. Meier, E. P. Saunders, G. Vermes, P. Frederiksen, M. Borg, G. Theissen, B. Ehrman, and D. Crossan.

An obvious counter to my arguments is that it is possible to adopt a high Christology and to be anti-antisemitic. Certainly, as noted, many Christians have taken the problems of their tradition on board yet have not rejected a trinitarian formula or Jesus' divinity. Nor, again, do most Jews ask that Christians give up their beliefs about Jesus to become anti-antisemitic. However, my concern is with deeper structures that have hidden Jesus' Jewishness and have been complicit in implicit and explicit antisemitic prejudice. In these terms we may become personally antiracist but forget the structural and cultural prejudice that resides within our systems. A high Christology separates Jesus from his Jewishness, is filled with the content of a history of white Jesus ideology and imperial triumphalism, and is embedded in texts that make Christians all too readily stand in opposition to Jews. We must, I argue, think Jesus apart from Christianity. Does one stand with the persecuted prophet from Galilee on his own terms, or with those who denigrated his people, denied humanity to an entire group of humans, and embedded virulent genocidal hatred in this world? Indeed, as noted above, to take the Jewish notion of Messiah seriously, as one anointed, is it not all of us who must be the agents of God's work, as Levinas proclaims in telling us that we must devote ourselves to the world? Not to (vainly) proclaim ourselves as "Messiah," but to realize that we must act in the realization of a Messianic ideal as an ethical imperative, as "a messiah" (seeing an anointed one as a person whose ethical imperative is to act righteously).

Toward a Decolonized Antiracist Christology

As will be seen, this is not really an argument about whether Jesus had an olive, brown, or other skin complexion. Indeed, like pulling down statues of slavers, to discuss Jesus' skin tone is to participate in a relatively superficial level of antiracism. The structures and culture of prejudice will not be changed by toppling some bronzes nor by hanging some dark-skinned Jesuses on the walls. Therefore, I have here argued that to be truly antiracist in our theologies, we need to first reflect upon the racialization of Christianity's long complicity with such prejudicial systems and go back to the root: the marginalization of Jesus' own Jewishness and with it a legacy that has pitted Jews against Christians.

Of course, this is not to suggest that Christians should adopt contemporary Jewish modes of being (or attempt to resurrect what they imagine were the traditions of Jesus' time),⁷³ but they should reflect within their own tradition on the ways in which this antisemitism may be countered. Indeed, it is in part to take seriously Christian relations with those identified as being other than Christians and to do this within a worldview

⁷³ See, for instance, Marianne Moyaert, "Christianizing Judaism? On the Problem of Christian Seder Meals," in *Is There a Judeo-Christian Tradition?: A European Perspective*, ed. Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 137–64.

that is opposed to racial domination.⁷⁴ I have argued that this takes us to Christology, which itself needs to be rethought from its base if Christian theology is to be decolonized and become antiracist. It is a call that will be seen by many as heretical; it will challenge the ecclesial structures to their very foundations. If they are wrong about this, what else may they be wrong about? This does not mean that we can re-enter an original “Jewish Christianity” or early Jesus movement position, for we cannot know what Jesus or his earlier followers actually thought.

Yet, at the same time, we can be pretty sure about some things Jesus and his followers did *not* think. Moreover, to simply try to put past structures in place is no guarantee that they will answer our modern questions. Indeed, a radical overhaul of our thinking must accompany a wider change of attitude as we seek to set aside structural and systemic prejudices and associated stereotypes within our traditions. We are also left in something of a quandary, for while it may pastorally be stated that to follow the man Jesus of Nazareth is to entail knowing who he was, who he thought he was, and to follow in that path no matter what powers of this earth or ideological systems may weigh upon you, we cannot do this simply.

Nevertheless, if we take his legacy as one that opposes antisemitism and racism, then we need to seriously consider his context and our context for thinking Christology today. This, I have argued, means renouncing much that stands for traditional orthodox Christological construction and to take on ourselves not a Messianic role but a role as partners in bringing about an antiracist Messianic ideal as those anointed to act righteously before the Other.

⁷⁴ That the interfaith movement has moved from a concern with postcolonial power dynamics to a more general bonhomie within society could be seen as a related argument. See Colwell, “Race, Power, and Privilege.” Christian-Jewish relations also should be concerned with being anti-antisemitic and not simply show a face of respect to Jewish people but look at structural and cultural dynamics that underlie our worldviews and systems.

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