

Publikacja poświęcona Andzie Eker przywraca pamięci czytelników i uwadze badaczy jedną z ciekawszych postaci literatury polsko-żydowskiej. Możemy się spodziewać, że kolejne pozycje wydane w Studiach Polsko-Żydowskich jeszcze bardziej pogłębią naszą wiedzę na temat literackich aspektów tego pogrnicza.

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**Shaul Magid, *Hasidism Incarnate: Hasidism, Christianity, and the Construction of Modern Judaism*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2015, 271 pp.**

Shaul Magid's new book ventures into an under-researched and controversial topic. While questions concerning Christian-Hasidic relations have been raised in the past, they have mostly revolved around the possible influences of the Russian dissenting sects on the nascent Hasidic movement. *Hasidism Incarnate* examines affinities between Christianity and Hasidism from a different perspective. It argues that some Christian concepts, mediated by Kabbalah, indeed became integrated into Hasidic teachings, even though theology and the practices of the Christian environment did not directly influence Hasidism. The Hasidic masters further reformulated these concepts into "incarnational thinking"—a cluster of theological concepts that subvert the polarity between the Jewish theology of *logos*, whereby God becomes embodied in the book, and the Christian theology of incarnation. The ultimate expression of this theological development in Hasidism was the doctrine of a *tsadik* (the righteous one): a divine embodiment in the material world. The significance of the "incarnational thinking," however, goes beyond Hasidism. This creative and unorthodox element has served as a template for contemporary American Judaism, curious and open to various modes of spirituality, including borrowing from other cultures and religions that blur the God/human boundary.

The choice of the rather fuzzy term "incarnational thinking" suggests that a cohesive Hasidic theology is not at issue here. Rather, in six loosely connected essays the book explores the tropes of subversive thinking within Hasidism, which due to its affinities with Christian theology have been repressed by polemical or apologetic narratives. These tropes would

be later picked up by Jewish thinkers in America and employed in their academic and/or theological projects; no longer bound by the anxiety of Christian influence, they would put at their center the reassessment of the difference between Judaism and Christianity.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine various features of a *tsadik*. Chapter 1 scrutinizes the function of a *tsadik* as the vehicle for godliness, as it is described in some Hasidic and pre-Hasidic sources. It juxtaposes a *tsadik*'s ability to transcend human condition with the Christian concept of *theosis* (divinization). Chapter 2 narrows the scope to one particular Hasidic thinker, Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav. Here, Nahman's concept of speech, which transforms the *tsadik*'s body into divine word and the carrier of divine will, is compared to the idea of Jesus as *logos* incarnated.

Chapter 3 takes the already asserted "incarnational thinking" and applies it to the question of the foundation of Jewish ethics. It argues that incarnationalism enabled Hasidism to disentangle ethics from *halakhah*. In Hasidism, ethical behavior is conditioned on the recognition of the other as divinity incarnated. The love of the other, Magid argues, is a derivative of the love of God in the other. In Chapter 4, the book moves on from ethics to cosmology, focusing on Yaakov Koppel Lifshitz, a pre-Hasidic thinker whose books were read by early Hasidim. Here, the nexus of a *tsadik* with the *sefirah* of *Malkhut* has parallels to affinities to the Christian *kenosis* (self-emptying). A *tsadik* embodies the kenotic character of *Malkhut* (the last *sefirah*, characterized as entirely empty and a perfect receptacle for divinity) and is filled with the infinite godliness (*ein sof*). As a vehicle for *ein sof*, the infinite divine wholeness, the *tsadik* is capable of effecting a messianic emendation in the cosmic reality affected by the breaking of the vessels.

Chapters 5 and 6 expand the book's temporal frame and look at the links between the Hasidic "incarnational thinking" and modern Jewish thought. Chapter 5 compares the images of Jesus in the works of both Martin Buber and Shmuel Bornstein. For Buber, Jesus is a positive agent in Jewish history, a paradigm of religious devotion rooted in the direct relationship with God rather than in a religious doctrine. For Bornstein, conversely, Jesus plays a negative role in the redemptive history of the Jewish people by absorbing all its impurities. Despite their differences, Buber and Bornstein recognize in Jesus a figure "necessary for [the] spiritual and historical development of the Jews" (p. 135), even if for Bornstein the necessity of Jesus for the Jews is understood in purely negative terms.

Chapter 6 leaves the textual analysis of Hasidic writings altogether and instead examines the attitudes of Joachim Schoeps, Leo Baeck, Michael Wyschogrod, and Elliot Wolfson to “incarnational thinking” in Judaism. Magid uses these modern thinkers to illustrate a tendency in Jewish theology of drifting away from its “obsession with difference” (p. 139) between Christianity and Judaism toward further openness to ideas akin to Christian theology. He argues that the contemporary Jewish community, unthreatened by mass conversion and thus liberated from the constraints of apologetics, allows for renewed theological reflection and an exploration of previously repressed ideas. Hasidism, with its “incarnational thinking” and deep intimacy between man and God, is an attractive source for this theological renewal.

The essays compiled in *Hasidism Incarnate* offer a fresh and erudite comparative perspective on Hasidic thought. While there will certainly be readers who will recoil at the very fact of juxtaposing Hasidism with Christological concepts, the book avoids simplistic claims and gracefully navigates the minefield of Christian-Jewish relations. Magid’s preference for a phenomenological rather than historical perspective helps him to avert earlier controversial claims of direct Christian influences. Drawing on the works of Peter Schäfer, Daniel Boyarin, and Michael Fishbane on early Judaism and Christianity, *Hasidim Incarnate* argues that the blurring of the separation between the divine and the human in Hasidism has many precedents in Jewish thought. Non-mystical Judaism repressed incarnational motifs in response to the threat of Christian proselytizing efforts, and the long shadow of the Jewish “obsession of difference” is visible even today, despite the threat no longer being there. Engagement in “incarnational thinking” is, therefore, not a sign of Hasidism’s theological weakness, but of its strength to explore marginalized and contentious theological issues, without the risk of crossing the actual boundary between religions.

What is more problematic is the book’s overarching claim that Hasidic “incarnational thinking” is an alternative theological paradigm, which aspires to overcome the paradigm of modern Judaism determined by Western Jewish thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to Magid, the emphasis on the difference between Judaism and Christianity was an existential necessity for the authors who shaped modern Jewish thought. Their work emerged “under Christian gaze,” which forced them to construct Judaism in an apologetic manner, and, consequently, rejected the refreshing incarnational spirituality professed by Hasidic

masters as akin to Christian theology. In contrast to Western thought influenced by the Haskalah, Hasidism emerged “outside of the Christian gaze,” and was not restrained in its theological reflection by polemical or apologetic agenda. Owing to that intellectual freedom, Hasidism is for Magid a usable source for the spiritual renewal of Judaism in today’s pluralistic America, where the Jewish community is by and large safe from Christian intellectual or physical violence. The emphasis on unorthodox interpretations of Hasidic tenets helps him achieve an additional goal: it disassociates Hasidism from the contemporary *haredi* experience. In this way Magid constructs his own theology of renewal, which claims access to the roots of Hasidism and yet does not surrender to stringencies of the contemporary Hasidic communities. In short, the return to Hasidic creativity is to be a solution to the Hobson’s choice Jews are given today between Liberal and Orthodox Judaism, both of which are products of the same anxiety of Christian influence.

This is hardly a place to argue whether a disinterested scholarship is possible at all or whether a book on Jewish theology should be simultaneously a book *of* Jewish theology. The author himself stresses in the postscript that his reading of Hasidism is based on his personal experience (p. 176), part of which has been his participation in the Jewish Renewal (the book is dedicated to Zalman Schachter-Shalomi). Be that as it may, in the case of *Hasidism Incarnate* this question is less relevant: the essays defend themselves as self-standing studies, regardless of the book’s theological agenda. At times, however, the need to construct “incarnational thinking” as a paradigm for twenty-first-century Judaism takes its toll on the textual analysis and the study switches from a descriptive to a proscriptive mode, in which Hasidism is defined through the task it has to play in Magid’s theology.

All the aforementioned notwithstanding, *Hasidism Incarnate* is an important, erudite, and insightful book recommended for those interested in Hasidic textual studies and those engaged in theological disputes over the direction Judaism might take in the future.

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