

# Behind the Monastery Walls

## PRAYING FOR THE JEWS

The concept of “praying for the Jews” has historically been linked with proselytism, evoking the image of Christians fervently praying for the conversion of Jews. The Christian desire for Jewish conversion is as old as Christianity itself, which began as a movement within Judaism and only later shifted its missionary efforts outside of the Jewish community to target Gentiles. Despite its origins as a movement within Judaism, deeply ingrained anti-Jewish theologies took root as Christianity expanded over the following centuries, and the desire to convert Jews to Christianity became one of the many expressions of this anti-Judaism.

As Christianity increasingly defined itself in contrast to Judaism, a theology of supersessionism developed that claimed that Christianity had abrogated Judaism. As supersessionist theologies took root, much theological discourse portrayed Jews in vilified forms. Jews were seen as a sign and remnant of the fundamental sin of refusing to acknowledge Jesus as the messiah and, even worse, as a people accused of deicide, culpable for the death of God on the cross. This theological anti-Judaism spread insidiously through Western society and eventually influenced the development of racial antisemitic tropes.<sup>1</sup> While Christian anti-Judaism is by no means the sole

cause of antisemitism, which also predates Christianity and can be seen in ancient Greco-Roman culture, the sizable contribution of Christian theology to antisemitism is clear. However, in a world still struggling to reckon with the senseless horror of the Holocaust, the malevolence of Christian anti-Judaism has been brought to light. Christians have begun to acknowledge that Christianity is implicated in a long history of violence against Jews and to recognize the culpability of Christianity in the antisemitism that made the Holocaust possible.

In the last half-century, Christian attitudes toward Judaism have changed radically, and theological and liturgical revisions have been enacted to attempt to erase teachings of contempt for Judaism from Christian thought. Christian-Jewish dialogue initiatives have become increasingly common, and many Christians have made great efforts toward atonement and reconciliation, particularly in Western contexts, where the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism weighs heavily on the historical conscience.

In the Catholic Church, this change has been particularly profound, and in an ecclesiastical institution known for being extraordinarily slow to change its teaching and traditions, the Second Vatican Council initiated a groundbreaking reform in Catholic understandings of Judaism.<sup>2</sup> Fueled by the theological reforms in the second half of the twentieth century, Christian concepts of Jews and Judaism have shifted substantially, acknowledging the anti-Judaic elements of Christian thought through the centuries and seeking new ways to understand Judaism through Christian theological lenses. However, anti-Judaic theologies still linger within the Catholic Church and throughout Christian thought, and even the most progressive statements still frame Jews and Judaism firmly within a Christian vision of faith and salvation. In short, given this history, the notion of Christian practices of praying for Jews remains entangled with the potential for conversionary motives and remnants of anti-Judaism.

#### A JUDEOCENTRIC CATHOLICISM

Despite the persistence of Christian anti-Judaism, in the new atmosphere inaugurated by these midcentury theological shifts, the controversial practice of Christian prayer for Jews has taken new forms. This book identifies a new religious and cultural phenomenon that has arisen from post-Holocaust

reflection on the part of Christians and is characterized by developments of “praying for the Jews” that depart from earlier precedents. It designates this phenomenon as a new Judeocentric Catholicism,<sup>3</sup> and the following chapters trace its development within the specific context of Catholic monastic life in Israel.<sup>4</sup>

I propose that this Judeocentric Catholicism reflects new patterns in Christian perceptions of Jews and Judaism. These patterns have arisen from efforts to comprehend the shock of the Holocaust and have taken shape within the theological worldview developed in the past half-century of Catholic theological reforms and within the context of contemporary Israel. This distinctly post-Holocaust, post-Vatican II Catholic phenomenon often takes philosemitic forms, but they are notably different from earlier forms of philosemitism, many of which aimed at proselytization. In contrast, this new phenomenon is characterized by the study of Jewish texts and traditions, by the contemplation of the theological relationships between Christianity and Judaism, and by practices of praying for the ongoing thriving of the Jewish people.

This Judeocentric Catholicism can be observed in two main forms: the first can be found in Catholics whose spirituality is immersed in Jewish life and thought; the second in Jews who have converted to Catholicism and yet maintain a strong sense of Jewish identity. If wordplay may be forgiven here, these two approaches may be distinguished as that of the philo-semites and the fellow-semites. For the former, this Judeocentrism often manifests as a Christian philosemitism, characterized by a powerful attachment to Jews and Judaism. The latter, on the other hand, find themselves on the border between Judaism and Christianity in a very different way, through choosing to maintain a Christian faith and a Jewish identity. This includes those who were raised Jewish and later converted to Christianity as well as those raised in mixed Jewish-Christian families. Many express that they find themselves continuously dwelling along the border between Judaism and Christianity, often feeling suspended between two identities.

Through a close study of Catholic nuns, monks, and religious sisters and brothers who live in Israel today, the following chapters explore how this Judeocentric Catholic phenomenon is lived out, experimented with, and transformed in the Jewish milieu of Israel.<sup>5</sup> The Catholics whose narratives are shared here do not self-identify as a group, and they share no mutually agreed-upon set of principles, beliefs, or practices other than those of the Christian faith. A number belong to a congregation or monastery within

which the focus on Christian-Jewish relations is shared and made explicit. Others, however, find themselves alone in their community in this sense and have developed this focus entirely on their own. Yet despite this lack of cohesion, a pattern is evident across their narratives. They are all originally from Europe and North America and have made long-term or lifelong commitments to remain in Israel. Whether they lead solitary lives in monasteries or are busy with directing educational programs or other work outside of the monastery, each engages deeply and intentionally with Judaism. This engagement takes the form of studying, teaching, participating in Christian-Jewish dialogue, or practicing forms of prayer for the Jewish people motivated by a post-Holocaust desire for atonement and for reconciliation and for greater understanding between Christians and Jews.

The theological views held by those who evidence this Judeocentric Catholic phenomenon are diverse. Some maintain philosemitic views with a Christocentric focus, basing their adoration of Jews and Judaism on beliefs about the role and nature of Jesus. According to this line of thought, Jesus is the universal savior of all people, and yet “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22),<sup>6</sup> and Christians share in the covenantal relationship that God established with the Jewish people. Others, however, have radically moved beyond a Christocentric basis in their interpretations of Judaism and hold a pluralist view that sees Judaism as a path to God that is separate from Christian faith and yet equally valid. Yet despite their decentered and diverse traits, together they contribute to a small yet notable contemporary phenomenon in Christian understandings of Jews and Judaism.

This book listens to and analyzes the narratives of these nuns and monks and traces the societal, theological, and personal influences that give rise to this phenomenon. It explores encounters along the border between Christianity and Judaism, including forays across this border in both directions, through conversion and other forms of immersion into the two religious traditions. It follows the lives of individuals navigating and negotiating these borders, from Jewish Holocaust survivors who converted to Catholicism and entered monastic life, to those who have been Catholic all their lives and yet attend synagogue services every Shabbat. These chapters analyze the contexts and histories of these border negotiations, with attention to where the boundaries become permeable and where they are reinforced.

Many of the people whose narratives are heard in these pages are advanced in years, and there are others discussed here who passed away

before my research began and whose experiences can only be surmised through letters, interviews, or other documentation that remains. The interviews for this book were conducted in 2015 and 2016, and in the few years that have passed since then, a number of those whose voices are heard here have encountered struggles with health that required them to leave Israel after many decades of life there to live in the retirement communities of their congregations overseas. The living situations, careers, and other biographical details of those interviewed here reflect their positions when they met with me and shared their stories, and these narratives now serve as windows into the time, just a few short years ago, in which they were all vigorous and in good health, living in Israel.

The individual voices and narratives heard here reflect developments in Catholic understandings of Judaism that are not found within official Church documents but arise in personal experiences and interpersonal encounters. While this new Judeocentric Catholic phenomenon is far from widespread, it serves as a significant case study in hermeneutical shifts in Christian conceptualizations of Judaism. When viewed from within the context of a church still just beginning to grapple with the Holocaust and with the contribution of Christian theology to the history of antisemitism, this phenomenon becomes more than a few individuals praying alone in monasteries. It serves as an indication of developing Christian perceptions of Jews and Judaism in a time of swiftly changing theological and cultural contexts and as a view onto contemporary Catholic negotiations of identity and faith in relation to the Jewish people, Jewish history, and Jewish religious traditions.

This Judeocentric Catholic phenomenon is equivocal; its value and impact on Jewish-Christian relations and Catholic theologies are ambiguous and can be interpreted in many different ways. Although the impetus behind its development has been the eradication of anti-Judaism from Catholic thought and improved relations between Christians and Jews, it is also complicated by a few problematic issues. When it swings toward philosemitism, it tends to cast Jews in an idealized light, reinforcing essentializations about Jews. These stereotypes are positive, and yet they are stereotypes nonetheless and preclude the perception of Jews as people like any else. Claims of hybrid Jewish-Christian identity can also be problematic and often encounter resistance in Jewish communities, for Jewish conversion to Christianity is heavy with cultural and religious taboos, reflecting a traumatic history of forced conversions. And yet, despite these and other problematic

issues, this phenomenon has also contributed to greater education about Judaism and Jewish experience for Christians and to a fuller recognition and acknowledgment of the history of Christian anti-Judaism.

This book does not seek to provide a final evaluation of this phenomenon's cultural or theological value. Its purpose is not to persuade; it does not promote this phenomenon as positive, nor does it indemnify it. The purpose, rather, is to explore this Judeocentric phenomenon as it takes shape in the lives of Catholic nuns and monks in Israel and to investigate the complex and diverse cultural, religious, historical, political, and personal factors that influence it. This book is also an exploration through personal narratives, which invites the reader to listen to intimate reflections on faith, conversion, Holocaust trauma, Zionism, and religious identity. In this way, it is both an analytical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon and a meditation on faith and identity.

Together, the following chapters speak of intimate spiritual experiences and personal relationships and of the interplay of faith and uncertainty. They tell the stories of lives on the border: on the border between Christian identity and Jewish identity, on the border between Christian belief and Jewish practice and culture, on the border between Israeli life and life within a monastery, and on the border between old, ingrained Christian patterns of interpreting Jews and Judaism and new directions in Christian-Jewish relations.

#### STRUCTURE AND THEMES

This is a book about people and about relationships. For this reason, it cannot speak properly if it remains entirely within the standard academic format of analysis. To speak properly, it must also take a form suited to communicating the depth of feeling and the complexity of the informants' experiences and relationships, and capable of expressing the ambiguities of the heart of which the informants speak. Therefore, I have composed a patchwork of two distinct components: chapters of analytical discussion, and narrative "portraits" of individuals interspersed between the analytical chapters. The latter consists of descriptive passages about the participants and the contexts in which they live, featuring excerpts of their personal narratives and reflections gathered during interviews. Like poetry or other arts, which, if done well, communicate through their aesthetic form something

that cannot be communicated otherwise, the descriptive portraits are intended not to simply transcribe our meetings but to communicate the subtleties of interpersonal encounters that elude standard academic writing.

I have divided this volume into four parts. The first part, “The Jewish People Through a Christian Lens,” introduces the scope and method of the book and situates the specific phenomenon discussed here within its greater social context. This section investigates the image of the Jew in the Christian imagination, examining how a religiously formed Christian worldview draws on scriptural narratives to construct understandings of the Jewish people. It surveys the phenomenon of philosemitism as it has been observed and theorized in a range of forms and places this new Judeocentric Catholic phenomenon in contrast to other Christian responses to Israel, such as Palestinian Christian perspectives and Christian Zionist thought.

The narrative descriptions of individuals begin with the opening of the second part, “A Judeocentric Catholicism,” presented in a format of analytical chapters alternating with descriptive portraits of individuals. This section describes and analyzes current expressions of this phenomenon found in Israel today and traces its roots in a number of individuals and institutions that set the groundwork for it in the mid-twentieth century. Following this is a discussion of responses to the State of Israel expressed by the Catholics whose voices are heard throughout this study, many of whom feel a strong emotional attachment to Israel and yet also feel torn by what they see as injustices in the political conflict.

The third part, “Religious Identity After the Holocaust,” examines the influence of the Holocaust on self-understandings of religious identity, drawing together a number of related discourses revolving around Holocaust trauma, conversion, hybrid religious identities, and post-Holocaust theology. It shares the narratives of Jews who survived the Holocaust and who converted to Catholicism in the midst of the war or in the immediate aftermath. Each of them chose to enter monastic life, and eventually “made aliyah” by immigrating to Israel, motivated by a desire to be in the Jewish homeland.<sup>7</sup> This section considers the impact of the trauma of the Holocaust on these radical life decisions and discusses the persistence of the desire to belong to the Jewish community that many express even after their conversion to Christianity. This section closes with a critical look at the problematic issues involving attempts to theologize about the Holocaust using Christian concepts and beliefs.

The final part, “Praying for the Jews,” addresses the specifically religious issues of prayer and ritual practice, and theological debates about evangelization and Christian truth claims. It begins with a discussion of the role of interreligious dialogue in monastic life and then moves to an analysis of Christian participation in Jewish liturgies and ritual life, considering the controversial issues that can arise. The final chapter addresses the central theological issues at play in these Christian perceptions of Jews and Judaism, examining the soteriological and Christological views expressed by the informants. It engages in a critical consideration of the practice of praying for the Jewish people in an age when Jewish conversion to Christianity is no longer accepted as an appropriate goal of dialogue. At the core of Christian belief is the necessity of recognizing Jesus as the universal savior, and this chapter discusses how this belief becomes a point of theological irresolution, and even paradox, for Christians who are also convinced that Judaism is a theologically valid religion. At the heart of this inquiry is the question of whether this philosemitic Christian gaze on Jews continues to maintain traces of implicit hope for conversion and, if it does not, how this is reconciled with essential Christian truth claims.

#### LIVED RELIGION

The remainder of this introductory chapter explores the methodological underpinnings of this study. Here I make an argument for the importance of the study of lived religion and individual experiences, and following this, I consider researcher reflexivity and ethical issues in the representation of human subjects. Readers who desire to move directly to the central content of the book may wish to skip ahead to the second chapter, which explores the phenomenon of philosemitism in its historical contexts. Any readers who might prefer to entirely forgo the methodological, historical, theoretical, and sociological chapters and to move directly to the narrative descriptions of individuals may wish to turn to part 2 of this book.

While most scholarship on Christian-Jewish relations focuses on historical studies or on the interpretation of scriptural texts or church documents, this book explores a phenomenon that exists not in the form of texts and public statements but within the lives and spiritual experiences of individuals. At the heart of this book is the encounter; it is a meditation

on encounters between Christians and Jews and also encounters among memories, hopes, and religious worldviews. But why do the experiences and reflections of these people matter? When prayers are made in silence and solitude, alone in a room as dusk falls outside a small window, of what interest are they to others and of what relevance to scholarship on religion? Arguing against the idea that private experiences such as these are irrelevant to the academic study of religion, Robert Orsi criticizes “the idea that real-world significance is public and political whereas lived religion is preoccupied with the intimate (and therefore politically irrelevant) domains of family, relationships, imagination, and so on.”<sup>8</sup> This book, too, rejects this polarized mapping of the world, in which what is public is important and what is private is insignificant. Public and institutional forms of religion are only structures that house the vast interior array of personal, intimate, and often very private experiences. As Meredith McGuire asks, “What might we discover if, instead of looking at affiliation or organizational participation, we focused first on individuals, the experiences they consider most important, and the concrete practices that make up their personal religious experience and expression? What if we think of religion, at the individual level, as an ever-changing, multifaceted, often messy—even contradictory—amalgam of beliefs and practices that are not necessarily those religious institutions consider important?”<sup>9</sup> Religions take as many shapes as there are people who practice them, in multiple and diverse expressions of religiosity. This becomes particularly evident in the specific context explored in this volume, for the voices heard here express views that do not always seamlessly align with many Christian teachings.

These observations also point to why the study of antisemitism and other patterns in Christian perceptions of Jews continues to be so crucial even after the theological reforms of the twentieth century. The institutional Church has revised its teachings about Judaism, but this does not ensure that these new teachings have broadly become a part of the lived religion. For example, despite the emphasis that recent Christian teachings have placed on the Jewish roots of Christianity, many Christians still do not realize that Jesus was a Jew—not only that he was born as a Jew but also that he died as a Jew—and at no point became a Christian. Antisemitic sentiments still run through the lived religiosity of many, and at times they are so subtle that they are not recognized as such.

## METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON REFLEXIVITY

The issues addressed in this book are explored through personal histories and narratives using an ethnographic method that, while in demand in other areas in religious studies, has yet to be popularized in studies of Christian-Jewish relations. This method necessitates the consideration of not only *what* to portray but also *how* to portray it, and it raises a host of questions regarding the ethics of representation. In any discipline, the effort to understand the object of study is tangled in layers of perception, interpretation, and communication, and this is even more challenging when the objects of study are living people. The ethnographer “reads” the subject based on his or her own perception and identity, and the ethnographer’s representation can sometimes mislead or fail to be understood. The very presence of the ethnographer can also make the context “nonauthentic” through introducing an outside presence. The struggle for correct representation is not solely the researcher’s problem either; at times, the subjects may present—or misrepresent—themselves according to their desired view of themselves.

The notion that it is possible for ethnographic fieldwork to be fully objective began to crumble in the last decades of the twentieth century. This began with the postmodernist critique of objectivity, which argued that the anthropological gaze all too often displays much of the exploitation characteristic of the colonial era, and pointed to the potential for fieldwork to become imperialistic.<sup>10</sup> This discourse brought the position of the ethnographer into the forefront, carefully drawing attention to the ways in which the ethnographer’s position, identity, and hermeneutical lens influenced the collection and interpretation of the data. The self-conscious awareness implicated in this reflexive turn allowed the supposedly rigid imperialism of the anthropological gaze, convinced of its own objectivity, to break down.

The reflexive turn brings the researcher into the picture, or more precisely, it finally acknowledges that the researcher has always been in the picture. This brings greater transparency to fieldwork, but it does not solve the problem of how to represent the object of study as truthfully as possible, with the greatest integrity, given the impossibility of absolute objectivity. Behind every participant’s statement is the context in which it was made, which in this project involved face-to-face encounters between the participant and me as we discussed intimate spiritual experiences while a digital voice recorder blinked beside us. My own identity, biography, and

participation inevitably became part of the participants' narratives whether I intended it or not, for not only does my own context influence my interpretation of their narratives, but in addition, the first-person narrations were addressed to me personally in a conversational format.

The following chapters detail my interpretations of the informants and their narratives, but what did they see when they spoke, looking at me? A few said that they were surprised that I was so young (as they saw it), and I wondered if their comments reflected their expectations of a researcher's authority and power—had they expected someone with more of an air of authority, signaled by age? Some inquired about my own religious affiliation as soon as we sat down, before I had time to ask any questions of them, and the pressing way in which they asked it seemed to indicate an anxiety: Was I one of them, would I understand, could I be trusted to not misrepresent them? I generally answered with an honest although brief and opaque description of my own rather complex religious identity. When the interview was held at a monastery, I would often flesh out my biography just a bit by adding that I had spent some time in the past as a long-term guest at a Benedictine monastery. This admission allowed our conversation to go deeper; if they knew that I was familiar with monastic life, they would move into more complex, reflective, and probing topics.

In my role as a researcher, I remain an outsider to the personal narratives shared in this book. However, the boundary between the outside and inside is somewhat porous in this case, and I remain an outsider with the ability to “visit” the world of the insider. My scholarly training is theological, allowing me to be conversant in the language of faith even though I do not speak it as my own. As an outsider, I use theological language only as a tool of scholarly inquiry and not as a confession of faith.

This book quite intentionally does not take any theological position as its own, whether Christian or Jewish. It analyzes this topic from a scholarly distance, all the while recognizing that researcher neutrality is an impossibility. And given that impossibility, I recognize that the presentation and analysis of the phenomenon in this book occur through an interpretative lens with a specific worldview, one that may be characterized as inherently liberal and pluralist. This pluralist perspective is not a theological perspective because it makes no claims about the nature of God. Indeed, a pluralist perspective is at times at odds with, and perhaps incompatible with, some of the religious convictions and traditions discussed in these pages, which

stand upon a foundation of Christian truth claims that are not easily reconciled with pluralism.<sup>11</sup> This book does not support or argue against these religious convictions or any others; it aims simply to present them from a position of scholarly inquiry that, while categorically incapable of being fully objective or neutral, nevertheless maintains a scholarly distance and refrains from arguing for any religious truth claims.

#### THE ETHICS OF REPRESENTATION

In many cases, the process of interviewing also became a process of developing a relationship, and as this connection was forged, the participants often opened up more. By welcoming me into the possibility of understanding their experience, the participants invited me to become less of an outsider, or perhaps a guest insider.

In openly speaking with me and giving me permission to publish their private thoughts and experiences, the informants in this study placed a great deal of trust in me as a researcher and as a confidant. The lives of these nuns and monks are marked by solitude and interiority—even those with active apostolic religious lives who engage with the outside world through teaching or other vocational activities. All of them, from the cloistered nun in a full habit to the religious sister in an apartment in central Jerusalem, have made vows to a life of prayer and spiritual introspection. Their lives are deeply interior and private, and yet they welcomed me into their homes. Those who live in monasteries welcomed me inside the stone walls surrounding the cloister of their monasteries; hermits invited me to enter their solitary dwelling places, where few others enter; those who live in apartments hosted me in their sitting rooms and offered me food and drink.

The issue of trust arose again and again in this fieldwork, and when trust was lacking, it was the biggest obstacle that I faced. Without trust, the participants would rarely speak openly, and their answers would often reflect the “official” response of the Catholic Church rather than their own perspectives. They would often make this clear by prefacing their answer with a response such as “Well, the answer to that has already been decided by the Church. We are taught to believe . . .” Sometimes they would point me to their congregation’s website to seek the answers even if my question specifically asked about their personal experience. At other times, they

would ask that I not record the conversation and, in some cases, that I not share it in writing at all. When trust was established, all else flowed smoothly. This was accomplished in a number of different ways: in some cases, it was established after the participants asked me questions about my own religious views, family background, education, or the goals of research; in other cases, it unfolded naturally as the conversation progressed, signaled through nonverbal communication such as eye contact and body language.

Once trust had been established and the participants had opened up to me and shared intensely personal spiritual reflections, I needed to achieve two seemingly contradictory aims. On the one hand, I felt compelled to portray the informants as they would like to be portrayed, with respect to their own self-understanding, and to not betray the trust they had invested in me. On the other hand, as a scholar I must place critical analysis first, which can involve deconstructing and challenging the informants' own self-understanding.

In the course of a conversation with one of my informants, I brought up this issue and spoke to a nun by the name of Sr. Talia about the challenge of sharing her words through an academic study and subjecting them to analysis and publication while also respecting the intimate and hidden nature of her spiritual experiences. I wanted to let her know that I was trying to be conscientious about how to portray her in my analysis and to respect her own self-understanding in my representation of her. I was particularly concerned with this challenge in her case because Sr. Talia often speaks like a mystic; she expresses wordless spiritual experiences through evocative language that suggests meaning without explicitly defining meaning, and this way of communicating does not translate easily into a scholarly discussion. However, Sr. Talia was unperturbed at the prospect of having her words appear in an academic study. She explained that although her spiritual experiences are indeed private and hidden, "'Hidden' does not mean that it should not be published. I don't mind publishing; I really don't mind." Reflecting on the way she understands the privacy of her spiritual experiences, she continued, "I think it's important that people should know. . . . They will have words, but words will not transmit the secret. The secret will still be here. Like your secret, you cannot transmit your secret, the secret of your life. You just cannot. So it's not a problem; you can publish it." In other words, she does not see the exposure through publication to be threatening to her privacy,

for she believes that the innermost meaning of her spiritual experiences will remain protected and ultimately inaccessible to others.

As a researcher, I intruded into private spaces and private lives and asked the participants to speak about their spiritual experiences and to put words to thoughts that they rarely (if ever) shared. They shared openly, and some told me that the experience of speaking with me had been emotionally exhausting for them. The trust that they eventually placed in me was not just as an offer of information that allowed me to write this book but also a gift of sincerity, openness, and emotional generosity. In exchange, I consider it my responsibility to represent the informants and their testimonies as accurately as possible and, in addition, with empathetic respect.

The demands of scholarship require a hermeneutic of unbiased critical thinking, and yet criticism and analysis do not always mesh well with empathetic relationships. However, perhaps the notion of accuracy itself should be critically rethought. If accuracy indeed cannot be based on disinterested, machinelike objectivity, as the postmodern and reflexive turns of the twentieth century have proposed, of what then does it consist? I argue here that empathy is a necessary component of accuracy in the interpretation of all things human—and particularly in the interpretation of oral testimonies.<sup>12</sup> An intensely critical interpretative strategy can fall short of a deep and nuanced understanding of testimonies if it fails to understand the speaker in his or her humanity. It is all too easy to present participants as disembodied data. A hard-edged intellectual critique lacking in empathy is not necessarily good scholarship; one can end up instead with a representation stripped of all emotive nuances and devoid of compassion. Interpreting and representing human subjects with the greatest accuracy requires empathetically seeing participants in all their humanity.

The following chapters aim to listen carefully to the voice of human experience, often choosing to forgo critical conclusions in favor of allowing multiple perspectives to coexist—as they often do in first-person narratives—weighing conflicting thoughts and feelings within a single narrative, twisted and intertwined in the dance of memory and reflection. In this exercise in listening, these pages offer a meditation on faith and identity, uncovering and following the experiences of many who continually walk, in some form or another, along the border between Judaism and Christianity.