

WEEKLY PDF DIGEST • 28 APRIL 2023

## EDITOR'S LETTER

### This week in *Mosaic*

Jonathan Silver looks back at the week

## RESPONSES



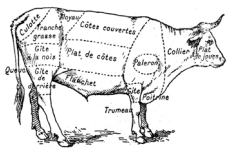
### Are Europe's Restrictions on Jewish and Muslim Ritual Due to Christianity's Influence or Absence?

As Christianity has receded in Europe, a movement has grown to invest culinary life with a moral meaning that runs counter to biblical faith.



### The Marcionite Offensive

European hypocrisy on animal rights and ritual slaughter comes straight from an ancient Christian heresy.



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Insects may be welcome on European plates, but not kosher meat.

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Is America becoming less religious or merely less Christian?

+ The best of the editors' picks of the week

**Dear friends,**

## **Kosher meat and the fate of French Jewry**

The earliest evidence of Jewish settlement in France is shrouded in myth and memory. There are stories of Jewish governors in the land of Israel who, when exiled by their Roman conquerors, were sent to Lyons and the town of Vienne. One legend tells of three ships full of Jewish captives sent to Bordeaux, Arles, and Lyon after the Roman conquest of Jerusalem. By the fifth century CE, however, evidence of the Jewish presence in France grows more reliable and abundant. Which means that Jews have married, raised children, buried their elders, studied Torah, composed poetry, and lived at home in France for at least 1,600 years. Jews have lived in France longer than Islam has existed as a religion. By the time that Napoleon seized control of the French Republic, Jews had lived there for well over a thousand years. Not all those years have been happy ones, of course. But the Jewish people have endured there, and along the way, they've provided for their own sustenance, procuring food according to Jewish tradition and Jewish law.

That's the very thing that recent legal moves there and in Europe at large now call into question, where the ritual slaughter necessary for meat consumed according to Jewish law and tradition could well be outlawed. Whatever the motivation of those who would ban it, the practical effect of outlawing kosher slaughter would be to say that the women and men who eat kosher meat are not welcome in Europe. Our April essay by Eric Mechoulan has focused on just this issue, and last week we heard a response from Anael Malet. This week, the Catholic writer Matthew Schmitz and the veteran French Jewish editor and intellectual Michel Gurfinkiel also weighed in, and were met by Mechoulan's charmingly French last word on the matter.

## **A pagan awakening?**

On this week's podcast, I spoke with the writer Liel Leibovitz about a recent *Commentary* essay in which he proposes that, underneath the spiritual crisis afflicting contemporary America, one can detect the presence of pagan forms of spirituality and belief. Listen and let me know what you think—you can reach me by replying to this email..

## **A note on the *Mosaic* website**

Over the last few months, we've been setting up a new paywall and registration system for the *Mosaic* website. This essential update has been a long time coming and it will bring all sorts of new capabilities to our website. Most importantly, this change will improve your user experience as a *Mosaic* reader. The new system will ask you to login less frequently; it will remem-

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ber your password more easily; and it will make changing your subscription preferences simpler. Right now, there's nothing you need to do. But expect some more communication about this from us next week.

With every good wish,

Jonathan Silver

Editor, *Mosaic*

Warren R. Stern Senior Fellow of Jewish Civilization, Tikvah

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*L'As du Fallafel restaurant in the Marais district, hosting one of Paris's main Jewish communities, on July 24, 2020. Frédéric Soltan/Corbis via Getty Images.*

MATTHEW SCHMITZ

APRIL 24 2023

**About the author**

Matthew Schmitz is a founder and editor of *Compact*. He can be found on Twitter @matthewschmitz..

## Are Europe's Restrictions on Jewish and Muslim Ritual Due to Christianity's Influence or Absence?

As Christianity has receded in Europe, a movement has grown to invest culinary life with a moral meaning that runs counter to biblical faith.

Jews are leaving Europe at an increasing rate. Between 1970 and 2020, the Jewish population of the European Union declined by 16 percent, with emigration playing a significant role. From 2015 to 2019, the number of immigrants to Israel from Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries was 50 percent higher than it had been fifteen years before, according to a study from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. In France, Germany, Austria, and Greece, it was 2.5 times higher. In Italy and Spain, five times higher.

Given this grim trend, one would think that European leaders would do everything possible to guarantee the rights and well-being of the continent's Jewish population. But in important respects, the opposite has been the case. In recent years, *shechita*, the method of slaughter prescribed by Jewish law, has come under threat—not just from popular majorities, but from the rulings of judges who see themselves as upholding European values and minority rights.

What stands behind these moves? As Eric Mechoulan suggests, they reflect in part a longstanding hostility to Jewish practice, informed by the historic

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legacy of Christianity. Yet the most immediate cause may be something very different: the continent's loss of its Christian identity. For as Christianity has receded, a movement has grown to invest culinary life with a moral meaning that runs counter to Christianity as well as Judaism.

Kosher slaughter has been challenged in part because of anxieties surrounding Muslim integration, which have led to calls to ban halal as well as kosher slaughter. But the issue of kosher slaughter deserves consideration on its own terms, in part because modern opposition to it is older than, and is likely to outlast, these recent controversies.

In 2019, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that meat slaughtered in accordance with Jewish law could not be labeled organic, because kosher slaughter failed to ensure that suffering had been “kept to a minimum during the entire life of the animal, including at the time of slaughter.” The court endorsed the practice of “stunning,” a euphemism that describes everything from piercing the head of a cow with a metal bolt, to gassing a pig, to electrocuting a chicken. Kosher slaughter, by contrast, involves the rapid cutting of the animal's neck with a sharp blade wielded by a specialist trained in Jewish law.

In issuing its opinion, the court cited a regulation holding that “animal welfare is an EU value.” Though the court's judgment was relatively limited, its underlying logic was far-reaching. If kosher slaughter fails to guarantee animal welfare, and animal welfare is an EU value, then the practice of the Jewish faith is in this respect incompatible with being European.

In 2020, the court followed this logic a step further by upholding Belgian laws that ban kosher slaughter. It justified its decision in part by noting that animal welfare was “a value to which contemporary democratic societies have attached increasing importance for a number of years.” The court claimed that the Belgian laws appropriately balanced this value with protection of religious liberty. The judges confidently assumed that Jewish practices were at odds with animal welfare because they fell short of what the opinion described as the most “up-to-date” methods.

Kosher slaughter arises from, and reflects, a tradition with a deeply humane attitude toward animals. Attempts to depict it as cruel thus entail misrepresentation not just of a particular act but of an entire faith. Jewish law prescribes that animals, as well as men, must be given rest on the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:10). It forbids taking a newly born animal from its mother for the first seven days (Leviticus 22:27) and prescribes that no animal can be killed on the same day as its mother (Leviticus 22:28). It states that one may not muzzle an ox while it treads grain (Deuteronomy 25:4) and enjoins relieving overloaded animals, even if they belong to one's enemy (Exodus 23:5). Rabbinic authorities have even read a verse of Deuteronomy (“And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full”) as an injunction to feed one's animals before feeding oneself.

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The absurdity of the European judges' attitude is heightened by the fact that the European Union condones bullfights and hunting, in part because these practices are regarded as traditional. The suggestion seems to be that these practices (which I for one support) are properly European, whereas kosher slaughter—which has been practiced on the continent for millennia—is not.

Yet the judges hit on something important when they noted that animal welfare is a growing concern in Europe. Opposition to kosher slaughter has not been so intense since the 1930s and 1940s, when the German government outlawed the practice, extended that ban to its conquered territories, and depicted kosher slaughter in highly critical terms, most notably in the notorious film *Der Ewige Jude*. Then as now, responsible officials couched their opposition to kosher slaughter in terms of animal welfare and respect for nature, even putting out images of the country's leader feeding fawns from the palm of his hand.

Contemporary opposition to kosher slaughter differs in significant ways from the form that swept Europe in the 20th century. In the former, “animal welfare” was invoked to justify a direct and deliberate campaign against Jews. Today, “animal welfare” is the watchword of a softer and more diffuse program of cultural change. It is cited to justify a re-spiritualization of cuisine, a “progressive” analog of kashrut. This represents a challenge not only to Judaism, but to Christianity.

We should not be surprised to find attempts to regulate culinary life increasing where Christianity is under attack or undergoing decline. For Christianity is exceptional—and in the eyes of some, perverse—in its insistence that what makes a man clean or unclean is not what he puts into his mouth, but what comes out of it. Christianity challenged both Judaism and ancient paganism by separating culture and religion in a process that the French scholar Remi Brague has called the “Pauline revolution.” Christians insisted that it was not the clothes a man wore, the food that he ate, or the state of his flesh, that marked him as part of the people of God, but his incorporation into the body of Christ. This insistence stood in contrast to the instinct—shared by many cultures—to regard the way one eats as a sign of whether or not one belongs to the community.

This Christian view has often been expressed in polemical terms directed against Jews. For instance, the Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus, a Christian text written near the end of the 2nd century, condemns kosher observance and circumcision as “utterly ridiculous and unworthy of notice.” The disagreements between Jews and Christians on these topics should not be denied—or exaggerated. Christians hold that God does not define a proper way to prepare food (although some have argued that the laws given to Noah should apply). The Christian position, therefore, is that kosher slaughter is unnecessary, not that it is wrong and should be prohibited. Europe, in the name of animal welfare, is moving in a very different



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direction. In the name of “European values,” the EU is articulating a set of culinary rules that it claims to be universally binding, rules that prohibit Jewish practice.

Such an insistence runs counter to the Christian tradition, which at its best preaches culinary tolerance. As the Epistle of Mathetes observes in a less strident passage, “Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe.” Far from believing that there is only one correct way to eat, Christians follow “the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct.” Christians cannot endorse the religious rationale for kosher observance. But they have equally strong reasons to reject the present attack on it.

Submission to the divine nomos is humanizing. This truth is embodied in Jewish life in a particularly vivid way. For the man who keeps kosher is reminded with every bite of the Creator who gave him life. We Christians do not adopt the full scope of Jewish law, but along with Jews we affirm that obedience to God makes us human. This shared affirmation is utterly opposed to post-Christian outlooks that celebrate nature, the organic, and tradition without any reference to God above. These viewpoints venerate nature in a way that denigrates man. They seek to reduce animal suffering by restricting the rights of men, and finally to reduce human suffering by endorsing euthanasia. They confirm the words of Hosea, who once observed that “those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves.”

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Marcion of Sinope. Alamy.

MICHEL GURFINKIEL

APRIL 26 2023

**About the author**

Michel Gurfinkiel is the founder and president of the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute and a contributing editor at the *Sun*. He served as editor-in-chief of *Valeurs Actuelles* from 1985 to 2006.

## The Marcionite Offensive

European hypocrisy on animal rights and ritual slaughter comes straight from an ancient Christian heresy.

Eric Mechoulan’s essay on Europe’s intolerance for Jewish ritual slaughter combines thorough research and documentation—no pertinent angle has been forgotten—with lucid exposition and a deep understanding of the cultural, social, and political implications. Such an examination has been sorely missing until now; Jewish leaders, not just in Europe but elsewhere as well, including Israel and America, should read it and meditate on it without delay. Non-Jewish leaders, opinion-makers, and government officials would also benefit from it.

The main lesson to be drawn from Mechoulan’s report is that the European debate on *kashrut* has very little to do with hygiene, animal welfare, or the global economics and ecology of food—as is usually assumed—and a lot to do with anti-Semitism. The author is right to describe graphically and to the last detail the various methods used in Europe allegedly to “alleviate” animal suffering. When people talk about “stunning,” they usually have in mind something akin to anesthesia. I remember how shocked a panel of journalists and government advisors was in France, some twenty years ago, when they were exposed to the real thing for the first time in a video. Mechanical and electric “stunning” are not just more technically barbarous than *shechita*: they are redundantly barbarous, since they add a form of pre-slaughter or post-slaughter torture to slaughter itself. Likewise, it is indeed useful to mention, as Mechoulan does, the many breaches of animal welfare that are routinely accepted in Europe for economic or “cultural” reasons, from industrial fishing and the slaughter of cetaceans, as practiced by the kosher-intolerant Norwegians, to hunting and bullfighting.



Some of the European countries that have outlawed *shechita* are just perpetuating or reinstating 19th- or early 20th-century bans that were enacted in order to keep Jews out or to turn them into second-class citizens. Evidently, another, much larger and much more demographically dynamic non-Christian religion, Islam, with slaughter requirements of its own, is now being targeted along with Judaism. However, the old bans were not removed in the interval between the public rejection of anti-Semitism after 1945 and the dramatic growth of Muslim communities at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st; in some cases, they were actually strengthened. Even more significantly, the various groups that campaign against ritual slaughter cannot entirely ignore the fact that Islam is less stringent and more amenable to compromise in these matters than Judaism—so much so that whereas a complete ban on “non-stunned” meat would be catastrophic for Jews, it would hardly affect the rise of Islam.

Switzerland started banning ritual slaughter in 1867, and turned the ban into a federal, nation-wide, law in 1893. Legalization was envisioned in 1978 but rejected in a popular referendum, no less, in 2003. There was an attempt at the same time to ban the import of kosher meat as well.

Sweden, which outlawed the ritual slaughter of cattle in 1937, doubled down on poultry 52 years later, in 1989. Norway issued its own ban in 1929 and never considered recalling it.

Pre-war Poland, where 10 percent of the population was Jewish, banned *shechita* in 1937—the most extreme attack on Jewish religious rights at the time outside Nazi Germany and the Communist USSR. In post-Communist Poland, kosher and halal slaughter were banned in 2012, technically following a decision of the Constitutional Court but in fact as the result of a campaign supported both by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the leader of the conservative PiS party, and animal-rights activists. The ban was suspended a few years later at the urging of the meat industry and some other conservatives.

Nazi Germany banned *shechita* in 1933. Similar bans were enforced in the territories conquered by the Third Reich after 1938 and imitated by such allies as Italy and Hungary. While contemporary Germany places great emphasis on the protection of Jewish and minority religious rights, including kashrut, Austria, a country absorbed by the Reich from 1938 to 1945, considered banning *shechita* nationwide in 1998 and eventually allowed for local bans. Slovenia, which is historically close to Austria, and which was controlled by Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1945, banned all forms of ritual slaughter in 2012.

In countries where no such legal tradition or precedent existed, various forms of prohibition or restriction have been introduced over the past twenty years, either legally or administratively—as is the case in Iceland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Greece,

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and Cyprus—and various campaigns against ritual slaughter have gained momentum elsewhere, notably in France. Here again anti-Semitism seems to be the key. But it might be important, at this point, to make clear what anti-Semitism really is in the post-modern era.

Mechoulan brilliantly outlines the theological differences between Judaism and Christianity regarding the very idea of “sacrifice”—epitomizing the competing views about sacrificial “blood” that may have nurtured an age-old Christian revulsion towards *shechita* along with a demonization of the *shechita*-happy Jews. Even in a secularized (or de-Christianized) Europe, despite the efforts of the churches to distance themselves from the anti-Jewish tropes of the past, this religious heritage may still, in his opinion, carry weight and influence the public conversation.

I largely agree with Mechoulan’s intuition and his insistence on a “meta-political” approach granting as much importance to culture writ large as to politics or politicking. But I beg to differ on one point only, or rather to suggest a further dimension. My own feeling is that what has always been at stake in the Jewish-Christian debate is not classical Christian theology, which after all always recognized the Jews as a central tenet of God’s grand design and granted them a legitimate niche in Christian society. The problem is the unholy ghost in Christianity’s machine: Marcionism, the 1st-century contention that the God of Hebrew Scripture really is the Devil, and that Christ saved Man from him. While Marcionism was formally rejected as heretical by all churches, if only because it implied a dualist, gnostic, vision of two competing Gods, it never ceased to come back and haunt Christianity. And for good reason. Christians, at some point, always had to wonder why they drifted away from the Jewish fold. Marcionism provided them with a simple, irresistible, answer: the Jews, their books, and their ways, are absolutely evil. Ergo, the less Jewish, or the more anti-Jewish, you are, the holier you are.

It was perhaps inevitable that Marcionism should come back in full force in the 20th century, as classical Christianity was receding and no longer able to contain it. One instance of this *retour du refoulé* was Nazism, with its openly Marcionite philosophy and its attempt to substitute a de-Judaized “German Christian Church” for normative Catholicism and Protestantism. A second instance, interwoven with the first one in many ways, is the Green, ecological, and animal-rights-obsessed cult of Mother Earth, or “the Planet,” according to which a pristine world was sullied by a conspiracy of Old Testament-reading capitalists. Both movements have focused their holy hatred on *shechita*: not out of concern for animals, as we have seen, but rather because of the biblical meaning of this supremely “ritual” slaughter.

Another important lesson from Mechoulan is the frailty (or perhaps the betrayal), in front of all that, of some European governments and of their judiciaries. Ever since Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms Speech in 1941, religious freedom has been seen as one of the founding principles of

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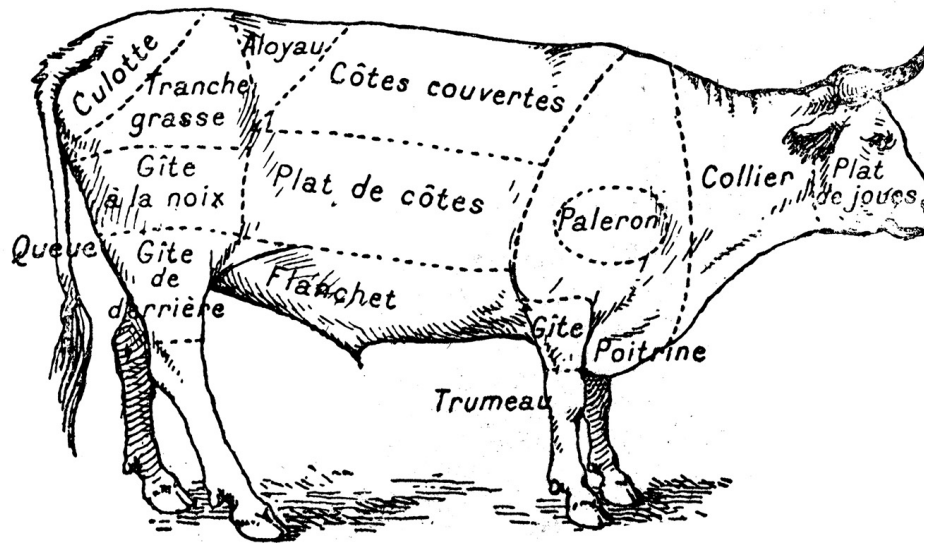
Western and world democracy. As such, it has been incorporated into the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights, as well as in many national constitutional documents. Moreover, Western democratic nations, especially in Europe, have passed specific laws to protect Judaism as a long-persecuted minority religion.

This has not prevented several countries in Europe from maintaining a legal prohibition on *shechita*, a practice that Jews deem to be essential to their religious identity, nor several other ones to pass new laws to the same effect. Likewise, it has not discouraged national or supranational courts of justice, including the European Court of Human Rights, from granting legitimacy to anti-Jewish legislation.

Admittedly, one should not paint everything black and white. Most European governments have not indulged, so far, in anti-*shechita* legislation. Some constitutional courts—Finland's for instance—have struck it down. Still, the extent to which principles have been ignored is disquieting.

Jews know out of accumulated experience that anti-Semitism never ends but rather transmogrifies from one pattern to another one. To quote the Passover Haggadah: "For not just one alone has risen against us to destroy us, but in every generation they rise against us to destroy us." However, the problem is not so much whether new anti-Semites are arising (either of the milder or the harsher variety), or why they keep arising, but rather where they are currently arising from. Just like the French army in 1939 was ready for a 1914 style war, but not for the Blitzkrieg of 1940, Jews are usually well equipped to fight yesterday's anti-Semitism but caught off guard by today's. All the more so when it stems from quarters that were heretofore meant to be Jewish-friendly—like good, democratic, principled, European nations—or when the Marcionites dress in the clothing of compassionate idealists.

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ilbusca/iStock.

ERIC MECHOULAN

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**About the author**

Eric Mechoulan is a professor of history and geography in Paris. He doesn't eat meat.

## Who's Afraid of Ritual Slaughter?

Insects may be welcome on European plates, but not kosher meat.

**T**his not an easy task to respond to the remarks made by Anael Malet, Michel Gurfinkiel, and Matthew Schmitz insofar as their comments are in line with the ideas I developed in my original essay. At the same time, they all adopt different angles of approach that invite reflection.

First of all, a clarification: I was careful to write about the place anti-Semitism holds in the European offensive against ritual slaughter. It is not a form of anti-Judaism as that concept has been known in the distant (Christian) or recent (socialist, Marxist, or Nazi) past. That at the extremes of the political spectrum Jew-hatred and animal rights are intimately linked is self-evident, but it doesn't explain why the consumer masses and Europe's judges are also driving the offensive. I therefore fully agree with Anael Malet's categorization of the four main families of anti-ritual slaughter activists in Europe: "nationalists, animal-rights activists, anti-religion secularists, and consumer-rights defenders." (As for her mention of Voltaire, in my opinion it is to his great credit that one can interpret his attack on the Jews as a backhanded attack on Christians. Yet he is not innocent of the charge. Of the many people in charge of his finances, Voltaire felt entitled to defraud only one, the Jew Hirschel. And he made a murderer of his only Jewish character in *Candide*. There is nothing anti-Christian about this.)

In general, I would be more cautious than Anael Malet in ascribing the anti-ritual slaughter campaign to a "lack of a genuine understanding of the meaning of religion in [European] society." Europe has good reasons for not wanting to leave too much power to religion. A Middle Ages punc-

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tuated by crusades and massacres, eight wars of religion in France, and 30 years of war between Catholic and Protestant princes in Europe are enough. The memory of the religiously motivated pogroms which spared almost no community should convince the Jews that they have nothing to lose—in theory—in a secular Europe. Today’s Europe was built against religion. It does not want it as the mortar for its social structure because it has cost too much. Europe knows very well what it is losing and says “good riddance.” The problem is that it has not found anything to replace religion. For generations now, individualism, materialism, hedonism and, it must be admitted, generalized deculturation have precipitated a distending of the social bond between neighbors and families, and within families themselves. Europe is in the grip of a moral wandering which is reflected in the contradictions of its jurisprudence; its judges are citizens like any others.

This is why in my essay I shared the thoughts of the 20th-century rabbi Y.Y. Weinberg, who saw the face of this new culture, imbued with paganism, in the burgeoning European defense of animal welfare at all costs. The preeminent nature-worshippers in Europe thankfully no longer wear the mask of Nazism, but they do still wear a mask, that of progressive ecology, and behind it remains a visceral anti-humanism. That idea, in turn, takes its full measure in anti-speciesism, a current of thought with philosophical pretensions born in the 1970s in the Anglo-Saxon world, under which the species to which an animal belongs is not a relevant criterion for deciding how it should be treated. In other words, anti-speciesism claims that there is no hierarchy among species.

It thus seems to me that the attack on the Jews via the attack on ritual slaughter is not targeted against their physical existence, their beliefs, or their particular way of life but against their idea of putting the human above everything else in the world. The philosopher Clément Rosset would probably say that the current idea of nature masks the absurdity and contingency of the world behind a network of philosophical principles whose main role is to justify our dissatisfaction with reality. The Jews, however, are content to see nature as a mere framework for the fulfillment of an ethical mission. The animal simply happens to exist in that framework.

Attached to family and community, positing the existence of a transcendent source of indisputable values, the Jews—who had everything to gain in Europe in political, economic and social terms, and who gained a great deal between the first days of the Enlightenment and the Shoah—have in the eyes of other Europeans become primitive beings, attached to practices that are now ridiculous and unjustifiable. Ritual slaughter and circumcision are the most unacceptable in a sanitized society because they are bloody. In this sense, the growing refusal of these two practices, which are understood by the Jews to be forms of humanization in the face of “nature,” is not the Christian refusal explained by Matthew Schmitz but something new. From Christians whose faith is built on a human sacrifice, this refusal could be religiously interpreted, but coming from secular Westerners, Jews can hardly understand it.

Here, the difference between the Jews and the Christians is perhaps due to the fact that, as Matthew Schmitz puts it, “Christians hold that God does not define a proper way to prepare food.” Beyond food, it is the materiality of the world that Christians have always sought to flee: their absolute ideal of holiness (even if the Church has often betrayed it) is that of withdrawal into the walls of the convent, between sexual abstinence and vows of poverty. This ideal was forged in opposition to the Jewish perseverance in reality and the Jewish laws mandating sanctification of all acts, even the most minute. Feeding oneself being one of these main acts, the attention that Jews pay to it is therefore self-evident for them.

Before becoming de-Christianized, Westerners could not understand this Jewish approach. For Christians (Matthew 15:11), “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth.” This is a misunderstanding of Judaism that Jews themselves could again hardly understand, since ritual slaughter has actually nothing to do with the pure and the impure. After having distanced themselves from Christianity, Westerners are now massively re-interested in what “goeth into the mouth,” as proven by the craze for organic food and the careful monitoring of food labels and production chains. Jewish law is about escaping the order of nature while belonging to it. For Jews, this escape makes us human, contrary to animals that grab what they can in order to feed themselves. But when Westerners pay so much attention to what they eat, it is to get closer to nature, to be in communion with it. So, the Jews see the “cult of Mother Earth, or the Planet” (Michel Gurfinkiel’s words) as a retrograde worship, and non-Jewish Europeans tend to see Judaism in exactly the same way. We don’t understand each other. Tomorrow we will be savages to each other. It is therefore to be expected that Europe should refuse to allow what the Jews consider to be a humanization of their relationship to food. Europe simply cannot perceive it as such, since the protection of nature is gradually taking ideological precedence not only over the right to exercise one’s religion but also over the well-being of humans.

**About fifteen years ago,** on a work trip in Denmark, I was trapped for six hours in a humongous traffic jam on the highway between Copenhagen and the island of Funen. A truck carrying pigs had overturned and the animals had wandered onto an islet supporting a bridge pier. Not only did a crane have to be brought in to clear the road and get the animals back into their truck, but also a veterinarian to catch and kill the injured pigs in the middle of the countryside, as Danish law prohibits the transport of suffering animals. It took him a long time. For this reason, a quarter of the country was blocked and tens of thousands of humans, women and children, old and sick, lacking water and washroom facilities, stayed for hours under the scorching sun. (I arrived only at the fifth hour of the jam; the first ones were there half a day). The Jews don’t want this civilization—one might say for “religious” reasons. The Europeans want it. And they appoint their judges accordingly.



Anael Malet is therefore right to say that religious freedom will “take a backseat to more important concerns,” which could be, in the words of Matthew Schmitz, “animal welfare and respect for nature.” One may object that it is better to go to court and defend *shechita* than to flee from anti-Semitic hordes. The near future will tell us whether there is really a choice to be made. Perhaps European Jews will get both. Meanwhile, the “margin of appreciation” of the European Court of Human Rights is a double-edged sword. Yesterday, it allowed France to avoid legalizing the Islamic veil, which, right or wrong—and right in my eyes—would have created appalling social tensions and the violence that accompanies them. Tomorrow, it could prohibit the practices specific to certain communities such as *shechita*. The issue here is that of a justice who took into account yesterday the cultural heritage of peoples and tomorrow perhaps “the spirit of the times.”

In this respect, Anael Malet is right again in worrying about the confinement of religious representatives within the limited framework of their communities. Nobody outside is listening to them, not in the way they used to. Their voices are often no longer required in ethics committees; instead, major decisions in bioethics are taken entirely by secular specialists with little spiritual care or insight. And Michel Gurfinkiel accurately argues that European Islam will adapt, both because it is less fussy than Judaism in terms of ritual practice and because European decision-makers, as in Brussels, will take care not to confront Islam head-on for reasons of electoral mass.

Should Michel Gurfinkiel’s rejection of ritual slaughter in the Christian West be interpreted as a remnant of Marcionism, which sees animal sacrifice as one of the rituals of the cult of evil attributed to the Jews? I think he has too high an idea of this Marcionism, which was eventually absorbed by Manichaeism and has since evaporated. In any case, there is no need for the ghost of Marcion of Sinope to demonize the Jews. The problem, in my opinion, is that Europeans denounce the evil in others in order not to recognize it in themselves. Their method of slaughtering animals is in no way more humane than that of the Jews, quite the contrary.

As a matter of fact, disgust of blood does its work. Meat consumption is declining in Europe and supermarkets are offering meat cuts in forms that make it possible to forget the animals from which they came—but insects are welcome on our plates now, without stunning. The triumph of the hamburger is not only the defeat of gastronomy, it is also part of a refusal to accept the reality of the world. The Jews assume that reality through a ritual that does not attempt to justify the death of the animal but at the same time absolves the human of murder. “The day will come,” wrote the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss in 1990 (a man by the way always anxious to erase any Jewish references in his analyses), “when the idea that, in order to feed themselves, the men of the past raised and slaughtered living beings and complacently displayed their flesh in shreds in showcases will undoubtedly inspire the same repulsion as it did to the travelers of the 16th

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or 17th century when they saw the cannibalistic meals of the savages of the Americas, Oceania, or Africa.” He is probably right. But if the humans of the future are to become more pagan and more willing to break with their humanistic roots instead of finding them and adopting the messianic vegetarian ideal of the Jews, we all have more to lose than to gain. Meanwhile, the vocabulary they use is more sanitized, more neutral, more politically correct. Stunning sounds better than slaughter and the evocation of anesthesia makes one forget the blood that spurts out. As Camus remarked, “To name things badly is to add to the misfortune of the world.”

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Halloween revelers at the Salem Witches' Magic Circle in Salem, Massachusetts on October 31, 2022. JOSEPH PREZIOSO/AFP via Getty Images.

LIEL LEIBOVITZ AND  
TIKVAH PODCAST AT  
MOSAIC

APRIL 27 2023

**About the authors**

Liel Leibovitz, a journalist, media critic, and video-game scholar, is a senior writer for the online magazine *Tablet*.

A weekly podcast, produced in partnership with the Tikvah Fund, offering up the best thinking on Jewish thought and culture.

## Podcast: Liel Leibovitz on the Return of Paganism

### Is America becoming less religious or merely less Christian?

#### Podcast: Liel Leibovitz

It's sometimes argued that, as material, political, and economic conditions improve in a society, that society tends to grow less religious. Polls have seemed to demonstrate for years the validity of this argument in America. Gallup, for instance, recently found that fewer than half of all Americans belong to a house of worship or religious congregation, down from about 70 percent at the turn of this century.

But perhaps such polls show do not show that Americans are becoming less religious at all. Perhaps they suggest instead that Americans are simply less devoted to traditional forms of biblical faith. That's the background for the argument advanced in the cover story of the May 2023 issue of *Commentary*, called "The Return of Paganism." Written by Liel Leibovitz, the editor at large of *Tablet*, the essay argues that the diminution of traditional forms of Christian worship has not made Americans less religious but has instead opened up space for inescapable religious impulses to find expression in beliefs that are awfully similar to ancient forms of paganism. To talk about these ideas, their manifestations in American culture and politics, and their implications, Leibovitz joins *Mosaic's* editor Jonathan Silver.

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# A Three-Millennium Perspective on Israel's 75th Anniversary

APRIL 24, 2023

From Meir Soloveichik  
at *Commentary*

Urging parliament to recognize the newly independent state of Israel in 1949, Winston Churchill argued that the restoration of Jewish sovereignty “be viewed in the perspective, not of a generation or a century, but in the perspective of a thousand, two thousand, or even three thousand years.” **Meir Soloveichik** attempts to do just that:

It should be obvious, of course, that Israel's birth was astounding. . . . But as we mark 75 years of a modern Jewish state, a study of history reveals another fascinating fact: this might be the most stable 75 years of government that the Jewish people have had in Jerusalem in all of Jewish history.

Can this be? Consider: several thousand years ago, David first conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital and was soon after temporarily overthrown by his son Absalom. David was forced to flee the city, returning only after he had conquered and defeated his son's forces. Solomon succeeded his father and ruled in peace and prosperity, whereupon the Israelite monarchy summarily split between kingdoms north and south, which is how the Holy Land remained until its conquest by Assyria and Babylon.

During the Second Temple period, Jewish independence was achieved by the Maccabees, creating a Hasmonean house that, almost immediately after it assumed a regal role, fell to infighting and civil war. This allowed for Rome's entry into Jerusalem. In a certain sense, a third Jewish government was established in Jerusalem in the Jewish revolt against Rome of 66 CE, which fell in the year 70 because of the internecine battles among rival rebel factions.

This means that a 75-year span in which a stable Jewish government that governs the Holy Land from the Negev to the Galilee has never happened before in Jerusalem.

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# A Mysterious Jerusalem Inscription Might be Connected to the Kingdom of Sheba

APRIL 25, 2023

From Nathan Steinmeyer  
at *Bible History Daily*

According to the books of Kings and Chronicles, King Solomon was visited by the queen of Sheba—an episode that inspired much folklore and at least three Hollywood films. Most scholars today believe her kingdom, described by the Bible as rich in spices and precious stones, was located in southern Arabia, but others place it in modern-day Ethiopia. **Nathan Steinmeyer** explains a new theory suggesting that a 3,000-year-old potsherd could provide evidence of contact between Sheba and ancient Israel:

Discovered in 2012 during excavations at the Ophel [area of Jerusalem] by the late Eilat Mazar, the small inscription, which includes just seven letters, has puzzled scholars for years. While most have assumed the inscription is written in Canaanite, Daniel Vainstub of Ben-Gurion University now believes it is written in an ancient South Arabian script known as Sabaic, the language of the ancient kingdom of Saba (biblical Sheba) in the area of modern Yemen.

Dated to the 10th century BCE—the time of the biblical King Solomon—the inscription could provide evidence of trade connections between ancient south Arabia and Jerusalem during this early period. According to Vainstub, . . . the second word, which Vainstub reads as *ladanum*, is a type of resin possibly to be identified with *onycha*, one of the ingredients used to create incense burned at the tabernacle (Exodus 30:34).

Not everyone is convinced by Vainstub's reading or interpretation, however. "Which is more likely, that we have in this Jerusalem inscription the Canaanite script, which is well attested in the Levantine world, or that we have a 10th-century early Arabian script?" cautioned Christopher Rollston, Professor of Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures at George Washington University.

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# The Conservative Rabbi Who Kept God—by Another Name—in Israel’s Founding Document

APRIL 25, 2023  
From Yizhar Hess  
at *Jerusalem Post*

When the London-educated lawyer Mordechai Beham was tasked in 1948 with drafting a declaration of independence for the nascent Jewish state, he decided to consult with Harry Zvi Davidowitz, an American rabbi who lived nearby. It was most likely Davidowitz who thought of putting the biblical epithet *Tsur Yisra’el* (Rock of Israel) into the text, a formula that mollified both secularist and religious signatories. **Yizhar Hess** provides some biographical details:

Davidowitz was ordained to the rabbinate in 1913 at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). Rabbi Solomon Schechter, the influential chancellor, ordained him. During World War I, Davidowitz served as a military chaplain and at the war’s conclusion, held the rank of lieutenant in the United States Army (later he would also receive two decorations: the Purple Heart and the Victory Medal) and became a congregational rabbi.

Then, in the summer of 1934, he arrived in Israel for the first time and that was it. He and his wife Ida fell in love with the golden sands of Tel Aviv and built a life. He would only return to the U.S. in 1946 for a Rabbinical Assembly conference in New York. There, he delivered a speech at the conference’s opening session that left a strong impression on his colleagues. He spoke about Tel Aviv and Zionism with great love, talent, and depth.

Davidowitz led a modest life. A Renaissance man who knew how to recite the Bible by heart but also most of Shakespeare’s plays, . . . he was the first to translate into Hebrew Shakespeare’s plays. His translation of *Hamlet* (which came out in three editions) was used by high-school students in Israel until the 1970s, as were his translations of *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*.

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# On Its 75th Birthday, Israel's Survival Remains a Miracle

APRIL 26, 2023

From Paul Johnson  
at *Commentary*

In 1998, the historian and essayist **Paul Johnson**—who died in January at the age of ninety-four—considered what the Jewish state had achieved in the first 40 years of its existence. Much has changed about Israel since then (although not the identity of its prime minister), but this Yom Ha-Atsma'ut, Johnson's insights remain as true as ever.

In the last half-century, over 100 completely new independent states have come into existence. Israel is the only one whose creation can fairly be called a miracle.

I observed the drama of 1948-49 from the security of an ancient Oxford college, where I was an undergraduate. Academic opinion was then, on balance, favorable to the new Zion: many dons had been brought up in the philo-Semitic tradition of *Daniel Deronda* (1876), George Eliot's novel about a young man who discovers his identity as a Jew and dedicates himself to the Zionist cause, and they welcomed Israel as an intellectual and moral artifact. But opinion was also virtually unanimous that the state would be crushed. That was assuredly the view of most governments and military staffs: the notion of the Jew as a soldier had not yet captured the Western imagination.

After reflecting on the extraordinary circumstances of Israel's creation and survival, Johnson turns to the challenges before it. Note that he was writing years before the term "start-up nation" had been coined:

The real task, and one that Netanyahu is well equipped to handle, is to create a society where—under conditions of peace—the clever children of Israel will want to stay, and where they can be confident they will flourish. Israel is an elite nation; in my opinion, that is what it should be, and unashamedly so, encouraging and training its people to be in the vanguard of the world's activity in agriculture and industry, in technology, in the arts, in education and administration, in the conquest and the preservation of nature. Israel must have its place among the nations (to borrow the title of a book by its prime minister). But it is not a nation like other nations. Willy-nilly, it is and will continue to be sui generis, its people shaped by the terrible events of our century, and marked by destiny.

# Franz Kafka Was Ambivalent about Judaism—but Much Less So Than about Many Other Things

APRIL 24, 2023

From Robert Alter  
at *Jewish Review of  
Books*

The diaries of the Prague-born novelist and short-story writer Franz Kafka have recently been published in English in their complete and unexpurgated form. In his review, **Robert Alter** emphasizes the literary value of this unpublished work, and examines what it conveys about its enigmatic author. There are, for instance, Kafka's neurotic tendencies:

Even a hypochondriac can fall ill, and long before the onset of the tuberculosis that would end his life at the age of forty, he was constantly listening to his body, finely tuned in to pick up any sign of breakdown. He was assailed by everyday complaints: headaches, chills, digestive ailments, severe insomnia. Since Kafka was an original, even his kvetching shows a certain originality of perception: “How far from me, for example, my arm muscles are.”

And there is much to be learned about this secular German-language writer's deep sense of connection to Judaism:

Kafka was a master of ambivalence. The three principal topics of ambivalence in the diaries are Judaism and Jewish culture, the institution of marriage, and sex. It may surprise some that of the three, the subject on which he was least ambivalent was Judaism. Raised in a thoroughly secular German-speaking home, he intermittently saw Jewish religion and culture as offering an authenticity of which he had been deprived by his upbringing. He reports being deeply moved at a Kol Nidre service, though, unlike [the German Jewish philosopher] Franz Rosenzweig's parallel experience, it was not part of a personal transformation. He read [the 19th-century scholar Heinrich] Graetz's history of the Jews and a history of Yiddish literature and repeatedly flirted with Zionism, at one point even briefly contemplating the possibility of immigrating to Palestine.

Kafka's ambivalence about his “ponderous Judaism” is the consequence of an insoluble dilemma of identities. He could scarcely think of himself as Czech, and though German was his primary language, he would never have imagined himself in any sense as German. The mixed messages about Judaism he got from his parents left him in a state of confusion. Jewish peoplehood, embodied in the Jews from Eastern Europe, exerted a strong pull.

In [one diary passage], he writes, “The people remain, of course, and I cling to them.” Perhaps we should think of this as someone clinging to a life raft—he clings but he can't get on the boat. The flip side of his

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attraction to Jewish peoplehood comes out in a succinct entry later in the diary that has often been quoted, for good reason: “What do I have in common with Jews? I have scarcely anything in common with myself and should stand completely silent in a corner, content that I can breathe.”

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