

Franz Posset, *Collected Works*, vol. 4: *Respect for the Jews*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene (OR) 2019, pp. XVI + 290, 47 fig.

In 2018 the publishing house WIPF and STOCK issued Franz Posset's three volumes of *Collected Works*: vol. 1: *The Two-Fold Knowledge: Readings on the Knowledge of Self and the Knowledge of God: Selected and Translated from the Works of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*; vol. 2: *Pater Bernhardus: Martin Luther and Bernard of Clairvaux*; vol. 3: *Luther's Catholic Christology According to His Johannine Lectures of 1527*. Volume 4 was published in 2019 under the title *Respect for the Jews* with a foreword by Yaacov Deutsch (p. xiii–xiv).

Posset is a German-American, independent church historian and lay theologian in the Catholic Church. He is an internationally recognized ecumenist, specializing in the history and theology of the Renaissance and early Lutheran Reformation. He was awarded several times with prestigious prizes, highly appreciated among academics: the Natalie Zemon Davis Prize in 2006, the National Croatian Award Davidias in 2014, the Franz-Delitzsch-Förderpreis in 2015 and the Harry C. Koenig Prize for Catholic Biography awarded by the American Catholic Historical Association in 2016.

Posset's output also includes works on Christian Hebraism and Jewish-Christian relations in the period of the Renaissance and Reformation. The most important of these is a nearly 1000-page monograph on Johann Reuchlin (*Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522): A Theological Biography*, Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).

The issue of respect of Christians for the Jews in the Renaissance and Reformation era addressed by Posset does not receive much attention in world literature, which focuses largely on the Jewish-Christian conflict and the polemics between representatives of the two religions. Even many Christian Hebraists of the early modern era, although they drew extensively on Jewish linguistic achievements and their biblical commentaries, barely showed a supportive attitude towards Judaism, which was particularly evident in Lutheran circles. The aversion of those circles to Jews was further deepened by the phenomenon of the Judaization of Christianity, which

accompanied the Reformation movements practically from their beginnings, even during Luther's lifetime. The reason for the limited interest in the issue of respect for the Jews also lies in the scarce medieval and renaissance Christian literature showing the Jews and their religion in a positive light. Not for nothing is it said that the *Adversus Judaeos* literature existed in this period, represented by hundreds, if not thousands, of works (Yaacov Deutsch, *Foreword*, p. xiii). Posset, as an insightful scholar sensitive to the problem of respect and Jewish-Christian dialogue, fills this gap with his work by providing, analysing, and annotating the few sources on the respect of Christians for the Jews with his apt commentaries and conclusions. A similar approach is also to be found in Posset's flagship work on Johann Reuchlin, the Christian Hebraist, who maintained friendly relations with the Jews, benefited from their achievements and defended them, especially during the so-called battle over Jewish books (1510–1520).

Volume 4 is a collection of eight essays (eight chapters). They are preceded by an extensive *Introduction* (pp. 1–16). Some of the essays are based on lectures given by the Author at various international scientific conferences.

In the *Introduction* the Author briefly presents the contents of the collection and treats quite extensively the problem of Luther's anti-Judaism/antisemitism and that of the authors from whom he drew: Anthonius Margaritha (ca. 1490–1542) and Johann Pfefferkorn (1469–1521). Assessing Luther's attitude towards the Jews, Posset concludes that it was an anti-Judaism that "contains elements of antisemitism" (p. 7). For Luther, in his arguments concerning the hardness of heart and resistance of the Jews to evangelisation, referred to their nature imbued from childhood with a "venomous hatred against the Gentiles" which "penetrates blood and flesh, bone and marrow, and has become completely their nature and life" (p. 6; cf. pp. 86–90). Posset explains that he wants to highlight the hitherto poorly exposed contrast between the hostile attitude towards Jews represented by Luther, Margaritha and Pfefferkorn, and the respect for the Jews shown by Reuchlin, Georg Witzel (1501–1573), Mattheus Adrianus (ca. 1470–1521), Robert Wakefield (d. 1537) and Nicolaus Winmann (ca. 1500–ca. 1550). Thus "such disrespect has to form for us the dark backdrop against which authors like Reuchlin brightly stand out" (p. 15). The present book is thus not only a companion volume to Posset's work on Reuchlin (2015), but also to his book on Luther (*The Real Luther*, 2011) (p. 15).

The first essay, titled *A Fifteenth-Century Bible in Hebrew with a Picture of the Crucifixion* (chapter 1, p. 17–35), was presented at the 50th International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 2015. This text

is devoted to a codex, kept in Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence (MS Conv. Sopp. 268), that contains the Hebrew Bible decorated with a miniature image of the Crucifixion. Posset claims that “the creation and the financing and also the preservation of such a luxurious codex in Florence would not have been possible without a certain degree of respect for the Jews and their holy book” (p. 2).

Chapters 2 (p. 36–59) and 3 (p. 60–82) comprise lectures delivered at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław (Poland) in 2017. *Who Is “the Strongest and Most Skilled Protector of This Oppressed Language”? Or, The Jews, Their Sacred Language, and the Holy Name of God in the Eyes of Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522)* (Chapter 2) is an outcome to Posset’s lecture given during the Third International Conference on Christian Hebraism in Eastern and Central Europe, organised by the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław and the University of Wrocław. “*Search the Scriptures/scriptures*” (John 5:39) according to Johann Reuchlin (Chapter 3) is in turn a lecture to students and professors of the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław.

The respect of Reuchlin for the Jews sprang from (1) his thorough study of Church law, which, in addition to provisions unfavourable to Jews, contained canons favourable to them, (2) his own experience of relations with Jews who taught him the language, and (3) his conviction that the Jews, through their writings, had access to the pure source of divine revelation. He saw in the Jews “our book carriers, copyists, and librarians, who preserve those books from which we can present the witness for our faith” (p. 46). He valued the Hebrew language very highly because “it is the language in which God communicated without a translator face to face” (p. 43–45). This language rose to the rank of *sacramentum* in Reuchlin’s writings (p. 47). Quoting Georg Witzel’s words, Posset portrays Reuchlin as “the strongest and also the most knowledgeable protector of this oppressed language” (p. 48).

On page 49 Posset ponders on why Reuchlin in his letter to Rudolf Agricola (1444–1485) (fig. 2.5) of 1484/1485 omitted the consonant *lamed* in the word *E[l]ohim*? In my opinion Reuchlin used here a ligature characteristic of manuscripts.¹ For one can see that the letter *aleph* is unnaturally elongated above the top line on the left side, just as is the case with the letter *lamed*. In the same text the letter *aleph* is written in two more places but without the elongation above the upper line. Using this type of

¹ See Ilona Steimann, *Jewish Book – Christian Book. Hebrew Manuscripts in Transition between Jews and Christians in the Context of German Humanism* (Bibliologia 58), Turnhout: Brepols 2020, p. 86 (figure 13).

ligature, Reuchlin did not fail to write the vowel *holem*, which normally occurs in the word *Elohim* after *lamed*.

Reuchlin was fascinated with the names for God. He sought the answer to the question: which of God's names gives man salvation: *IHVH*, *Elohim*, or *Iehoshuah* (see Ps 40:5; 54:3; Acts 4:12). He found the solution in the study of the Kabbalah and embraced the idea that in the middle of the word *IHVH* (*Tetragrammaton*), which he read as *Ihuh* or *IHVH* (in Renaissance Latin, V and U were used interchangeably). Also, the Hebrew ו (vav) can be read as a vowel "u" ו (shureq), the letter *shin* should be inserted, which he associated with the word *shemen* ('oil') that in turn pointed to *Mashiah* – 'the anointed one'. This produced the word *IHSVH* (*Ihsuh*) (*Pentagrammaton*), which Reuchlin read as *Iehoshuah* (Hebrew for 'Jesus'). He attached theological significance to this construction: "This letter, *shin*, therefore, designates the mediator. The incarnation of God in the man Jesus makes him the mediator between God and humanity" (p. 52). Furthermore, applying the principles of cabalistic gematria, the equivalent of *shin* (=300) is the Hebrew expression ברחמים ('in mercy') (2 + 200 + 8 + 40 + 10 + 40 = 300), which enriched his theology as he read the name Jesus as *IH-in-mercy-UH* (p. 55–56). As can be seen, the Hebraist paid little heed to the fact that the name Jesus in Hebrew is spelled slightly differently (with *ayin*), because the consonant ו (vav) read as "u" ו (shureq) together with the consonant ה (*he*) produced a similar effect in pronunciation, yet Reuchlin was looking for an answer to the question "with which name, or with which sound, are we to 'call' out to the saving God, not in which spelling we write it" (cf. Acts 4:12; Rom 10:13; p. 55). Thus, the unpronounceable name *IHVH* became pronounceable in Jesus.

Reuchlin authored a so-called Catholic Cabala, in which he reinterpreted the Jewish sources in terms of the Catholic doctrine of salvation. "Reuchlin in doing research in this way came to appreciate most highly the sacred language of the Jews, who are his fellow citizens and 'brothers'" (p. 59).

Chapter 3 shows the importance of the text of John 5:39 in the formation of Reuchlin's views on the value of Jewish writings for Christians, which played an important role in Reuchlin's defence of Jewish books against their destruction during the so-called battle over Jewish books. Reuchlin, inspired by the views of Paul of Burgos (ca. 1350–1435), interpreted the Greek word γραφάς found in this text as "scriptures" (with small "s") and construed it as "both Sacred Scripture (Hebrew Bible) and the Jewish written tradition including the Talmud. He understood Christ's word to mean all Jewish scriptures" (p. 61).

Chapter 4 (p. 83–197) – *God's Language, Catholic Praise of the Sacred Language of the Jews during the Early Reformation, with Georg Witzel's*

Speech in Praise of the Hebrew Language (Latin Original with English Translation) is an expanded version of a lecture given in 2018 at the American Catholic Historical Association meeting at Emmitsburg, Maryland. The chapter is devoted to little known or completely unknown eulogies of the Hebrew language as the means by which God communicates with humanity. The eulogies were prepared by Matthaeus Adrianus, Robert Wakefield, Nicolaus Winmann and Georg Witzel, followers of Reuchlin, inspired by his work in the field of promoting the study of the Hebrew language. An addition to this chapter is the first English translation of Witzel's speech in praise of the Hebrew language (*Oratio in laudem linguae Hebraicae*) made by Posset and provided by him with commentaries (p. 108–197). The English text is printed in parallel with reproductions of the Latin original of 1538. The publication of this hitherto unknown source provides, as it were, first-hand information on how the Renaissance enthusiasts of the study of Hebrew supported their interests and how they encouraged others to take up learning this very language. Posset comes to a conclusion that may be surprising to many: “The necessity of Hebrew studies for Bible interpretation was advocated by the biblical humanists of the Renaissance times. Luther and Melancthon joined them. But only Catholic scholars gave exuberant praise of the sacred language during the first half of the sixteenth century” (p. 107).

The chapter (p. 198–210), titled “*The Hebrews Drink from the Source, the Greeks from the Rills, and the Latin People from the Puddle*”. *Some Observations on a Lutheran Table Talk*, is an analysis of a renowned adage used by Luther in 1532. It proves his high esteem for the Hebrew language that is indispensable for “explaining the phenomenon of Hebraisms in the Greek New Testament. To Luther the classics [...] are of less importance than Hebrew because the Greek New Testament can only be properly expounded from the matrix of the Hebrew Bible” (p. 210). The original source of the proverb in consideration “remains an unexplained mystery” (p. 201). The lecture that became the base for this chapter was delivered by Posset at the conference on Lutheranism and the Classics in 2014 in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Chapter 6 (p. 211–235) is dedicated to *Hebrew Translation of Christian Prayers on the Eve of the Reformation*. Christians translated their prayers into Hebrew and published them with several motivations in mind. Firstly, the prayers were used as teaching tools for training in Hebrew. For this reason, they were published as supplements to printed Hebrew grammars. In this context, mention should be made of the first publication of this type in the year 1500 in Venice at Aldus Manutius. It was a 32-page booklet constituting an introduction to the Hebrew language that included the Our

Father prayer in Hebrew. Manutius was followed by a German, Nicolaus Marschalk (ca. 1470–1525), who reprinted this grammar together with the prayer (Erfurt 1502), and a Frenchman, Franciscus Tissardus (ca. 1460–1508), who in his much more extensive grammar book (Paris 1508) also included the prayer, reprinting it from a Venetian edition. Furthermore, Johann Boeschensain (1472–ca. 1540) published a collection of as many as nine prayers (Augsburg 1514), which probably were intended for use by more experienced students. The second motivation was that of private devotion: Mattheus Adrianus printed in 1512 at Tübingen his own translation of a collection of Marian prayers “in honour and gratitude to the Virgin Mary for rescuing him from great danger” (p. 225), adding the Our Father, Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed. Another motivation for translating and editing Christian prayers into Hebrew is related to the Christian missionary activity of Johann Pfefferkorn of Jewish descent (cf. p. 267–270). His translation was published in 1508 in Cologne.

There is a mistake in this chapter on page 219. Posset states that Reuchlin’s grammar (*Rudimenta Hebraica*) appeared in 1504, when in fact it came out in 1506. It is a Hebrew grammar by Conrad Pellican (*De modo legendi et intelligendi hebraeum*) that was published in 1504. However, this must be a mere typing mistake, since Posset had already worked out the topics related to Pellican’s and Reuchlin’s grammars very thoroughly and obviously knows the dates of their publication (*Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522): A Theological Biography*, Berlin–Boston 2015, p. 251–285).

This chapter adds an interesting and practically unexplored aspect to the study of Christian Hebraism. Till then, when speaking about the beginnings of the production of Hebrew grammars for use by Christians, Pellican’s textbook of 1504 and Reuchlin’s work of 1506 were mentioned as being the first. These were extensive and comprehensive studies. Posset, presenting a thirty-two page introduction to the Hebrew language published by Manutius, showed that this production had a “prehistory” dating back to 1500.

In Search of an Explanation for the Suffering of the Jews. Johann Reuchlin’s Open Letter of 1505 is the topic of Chapter 7. This work previously published in “Studies in Christian Jewish Relations” 5 (2010) was awarded the Franz Delitzsch-Förderpreis in Germany in 2015. The chapter is devoted to the interpretation of Reuchlin’s German booklet, *Doctor Iohanns Reuchlins tütsch missiue, warumb die Juden so lang im ellend sind*, which was published in 1505. In this booklet Reuchlin answers the question of a Christian nobleman on how and about what one may talk with Jews, without giving cause for scandal. According to various authors, this booklet

is ambiguous in its meaning; hence it is interpreted both as philosemitic and anti-Judaic. Even Johann Pfefferkorn drew anti-Judaic arguments from this work, justifying, for example, the need to destroy Jewish books. In his booklet Reuchlin encouraged a discussion with the Jews about their slavery lasting many centuries. Analysing the biblical texts on sin and punishment (Deut 25:2; Exod 20:5; 32:34; 34:7; Ezek 18:20; Neh 9:16–20), the author concludes that such a long punishment must be the result of a very serious sin publicly committed by the community as a whole, by all Jewish generations, parents and children (a collective sin). Reuchlin argues that this sin is the continued blindness of the Jews who failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God and who committed blasphemy when they “labelled Jesus both a sinner and sorcerer [...] who was hanged” (p. 246). However, the conclusions Reuchlin arrived at are not the conventional Christian view that the Jews were suffering for the sins of their forefathers who had murdered Jesus – as Erika Rummel, quoted by Posset, claims. Nor is Reuchlin’s work an attempt to convert Jews to Christianity or to condemn them. “Reuchlin has a sincere desire to understand better the fate of the Jews” (p. 248). The purpose of the proposed discussions with the Jews is dialogue, not mission (p. 249) and the improvement of the relations between Jews and Christians.

The eighth chapter (p. 252–270) – *In Search of the Historical Pfefferkorn: The Missionary to the Jews, 1507–1508* – is an essay published earlier as part of a collective work edited by Adams and Heß in 2017. This chapter is based on a paper delivered at the international workshop in Uppsala in 2015 on Johann Pfefferkorn’s campaign against the Jews: Antisemitism and ethnography in the sixteenth century. The chapter deals with a Christian convert’s – and Pfefferkorn was one – explicit “dis-respect” for his former co-religionists. Posset rightly claims that “in order to understand Reuchlin one must understand Pfefferkorn and vice versa” (p. 253). The Author enters into polemics with the widespread view among Pfefferkorn’s opponents and even contemporary researchers that he was a “banausic butcher” (*banausus lanius*) (Reuchlin in 1513) and an “uneducated Jew” (Henning Graf Reventlow in 2011), venturing a question: “can Pfefferkorn simultaneously be viewed both as nothing more than a ‘butcher’ and an invincible ‘nemesis’ of the most learned man of his time, Johann Reuchlin?” (p. 254). Posset attempted an answer to this question, drawing attention to Pfefferkorn’s earliest works (1507–1508), and concluded that such examination “repudiates the picture of Pfefferkorn as an uneducated *banausus*” (p. 270).

Instead of a summary (numbered as chapter 9), Posset concludes volume 4 of his *Collected Works* with a statement of Luther made in June

1540: “We love this people”. Knowing Luther’s hostile attitude towards postbiblical Judaism (Luther’s writings are often regarded as one of the sources of modern anti-Semitism; cf. p. 4–7) Posset calls these words “thought-provoking” and shows that Luther was aware that Christians are “the branches that are grafted into the true trunk” of Israel (see Rom 11:17) and that “Christ is the flower head who had to come forth from this beautiful plant”. Instead of a summary, Posset associates and juxtaposes several dates: he was finishing his book in October / November 2018, when at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh on October 27, 2018 the worst anti-Semitic massacre in American history took place. November 9/10, 1938 is the so-called *Reichskristallnacht* and additionally November 10, 1483 or 1484 is the anniversary of Luther’s birth. Posset does not complete this juxtaposition with an unequivocal conclusion; he ends his work with a moment of silence, as it were, which really becomes “thought-provoking” for the reader.

The book concludes with an extensive bibliography (p. 273–281), the index of personal names (p. 283–287) and of biblical references (p. 289–290).

The book contains minor shortcomings which are worth improving in a subsequent edition: the content of chapters 6–8 described by the author in *Introduction* (p. 3) does not quite correspond to the actual layout of the canon. It is also worth considering whether it would not be beneficial to extract from the somewhat lengthy *Introduction* (p. 4–15) the material on the anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism of Luther, Margaritha and Pfefferkorn and edit it as the first chapter. Furthermore, in the middle of the *Introduction* (p. 10) the reader encounters a suddenly isolated single point entitled *The Church of Jews and Gentiles!* – which does not seem to be a necessary editorial intervention. A similar approach can be found in Chapter 3 (extracting only one point and within it one sub-point). Furthermore, the quality of the illustrations in Chapter 1 could be better. It is also a pity that the publisher failed to reproduce them in colour (coloured illustrations are found only in the e-book edition). The first line of page 23 is probably a reference to fig. 1.15, instead of 1.13. There are also misprints in Hebrew. In longer quotations the order of the Hebrew words is reversed (p. 50, 51 [note 46], 105 [note 100], 268, 270). On page 246 the initial *yod* is omitted in the word יהושה. On page 222 there is a minor misspelling: instead of “Jewish” there is “Jeish”. These, however, are insignificant omissions and details which in no way diminish the value of the work.

Posset’s book, like his other publications, is a piece of good scholarly work based on a meticulous analysis of the sources. He has shown that a friendly and congenial attitude towards Jews and their writings at the turn of the sixteenth century was characteristic not only of Reuchlin, but

also of other Christian thinkers of that period, which allows for a more comprehensive and thus more objective assessment of Jewish-Christian relations at that time.

In addition, Posset brought to light hitherto unknown persons relevant to Jewish-Christian relations and published or discussed unknown or little-known sources that expand our knowledge on the subject. The Author was the first to have translated into English the work of the German theologian Georg Witzel, *Oratio in laudem linguae Hebraicae*.

Very helpful are the numerous pictures illustrating the issue undertaken by the Author. Some of them have never been published before in English/American publications. The illustration on the cover of the book and on page ii with the sculpture "Synagogue and Church in Our Time" by Joshua Koffman (Philadelphia), which uniquely depicts Synagogue and Church as Study Partners, is impressive in its symbolism.

The conscientious preparation of the formal elements of the scholarly methodology also deserves to be emphasised. Posset very meticulously provides the life dates of the persons under consideration, and in the Index of Personal Names he adds supplementary information next to each name. This is, by the way, a constant practice of the Author, which certainly requires a lot of work, but significantly increases the scholarly value of his books and makes them easier to use at random. Unfortunately, these are not practices commonly used in contemporary scholarly literature.

It is difficult to talk about ordinary reading when it comes to books at this level! However, an exciting perusal of this exceedingly interesting work gives the reader an understanding of why independent researcher, Franz Posset, has been awarded multiple prestigious prizes in several countries around the world.

In conclusion, it is worth making one more important observation. Posset's historical research has long been characterized by great sensitivity to Jewish-Christian relations, often very difficult, marked by suffering and prejudice. Posset is aware of these difficulties up to the horrors of the Second World War; but as a Christian-Catholic and a German he does not resort to cheap apologetics. He goes further and deeper, showing that the history of Jewish-Christian relations in the early modern period also contains many beautiful pages which, when rediscovered or reread, help rebuild what was destroyed by senseless hatred, prejudice and distrust on both sides. In this way, Posset contributes not only to the study of distant history, but also to the construction of the present and the future.