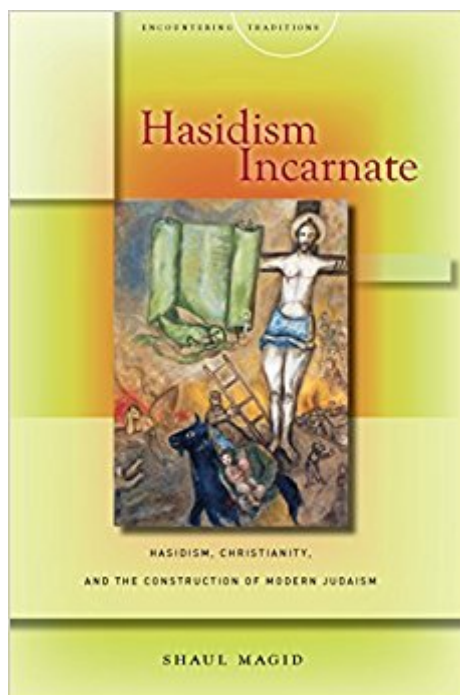




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# Hasidism Incarnate: Hasidism, Christianity, And The Construction Of Modern Judaism (Encountering Traditions)



## Synopsis

Hasidism Incarnate contends that much of modern Judaism in the West developed in reaction to Christianity and in defense of Judaism as a unique tradition. Ironically enough, this occurred even as modern Judaism increasingly dovetailed with Christianity with regard to its ethos, aesthetics, and attitude toward ritual and faith. Shaul Magid argues that the Hasidic movement in Eastern Europe constitutes an alternative "modernity," one that opens a new window on Jewish theological history. Unlike Judaism in German lands, Hasidism did not develop under a "Christian gaze" and had no need to be apologetic of its positions. Unburdened by an apologetic agenda (at least toward Christianity), it offered a particular reading of medieval Jewish Kabbalah filtered through a focus on the charismatic leader that resulted in a religious worldview that has much in common with Christianity. It is not that Hasidic masters knew about Christianity; rather, the basic tenets of Christianity remained present, albeit often in veiled form, in much kabbalistic teaching that Hasidism took up in its portrayal of the charismatic figure of the zaddik, whom it often described in supernatural terms.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An extremely erudite and bold look at our evolving understanding of Jewish philosophy and mysticism in its cultural and multi-faith contexts. The insights into Jewish ethics are revolutionary, and they reflect some unprecedented entry into affinity of Orthodox Judaism, Hasidic Orthodoxy, and Orthodox Christianity, that help deepen the understanding of all of them. Increasingly, as we move beyond polemical and understandable biases in how each religion was looked at in its divisive separateness over the ages, we are beginning to have a deeper understanding of more profound commonalities of religious and ethical experience in the lived psyche of religious people that cuts beyond the obvious theological differences and expressions of each religious tradition.

Dr. Marc Gopin  
James H. Laue Professor, Director of the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution  
The School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University

Two stars and not one because Magid unearths and explicates some rare rabbinic texts of the Hasidim which document the extent to which early rabbis of this sect believed themselves to be God in the flesh (such as Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav and Menachem Mendel of Rymanow). A low rating in general because the author's project represents contempt for the truth, which he doesn't bother to conceal but actually boasts of in a roundabout manner. Get this: Magid is not concerned with such traditional scholarly obligations as divining the original meaning of these Hasidic documents! Or even how they have been taught and believed by Hasidim over the centuries. Rather, the data are grist for creating a "transgressive" myth that might serve Judaic-Christian relations in the future through the weaving of figments of the author's imagination. He does admit in convoluted fashion the demonization of Jesus by Hasidim. Yet in general he denies that Hasidic Judaism harbors an ineradicable contempt for goyim (gentiles). As such, his book, *Hasidism Incarnate*, is a whitewash of Orthodox Judaism's racism and bigotry. Hasidic Judaism is ferociously prejudiced toward non-Jews. Magid, in fabricating a more benevolent, make-believe Judaism for an ecumenical future fails to label his book as mostly a combination of fiction and wishful thinking.

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