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Food

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> While the Jewish law prohibits lard as heretical, the same is not so in Christian lands. Let us eat fresh pork, let us eat! The more we enjoy the piglet, the better Catholics we become. (Fabre-Vassas 1997, 247)

This verse, from an 18th-cent. Burgundian song, captures the extent to which distinctive food practices became crucial markers not only of the difference between Jews and Christians but also of Jewish or Christian identity itself. Jews and Christians alike made a point both of eating differently from members of the other community and of not eating certain foods with such individuals. Distinctive food practices are attested by the early 2nd cent., remain normative into the 21st cent., and still play important roles in some contexts.

The Hebrew Bible permits consumption of only certain kinds of animal species (Lev 11; Deut 14:3–20). Pigs, for example, are forbidden because land animals must not only have split hoofs but also chew their cud. This particular taboo became a defining marker of Jewish identity following the conquests of Alexander the Great, who settled a large number of pork-loving Greeks in the Land of Israel. Jesus and his disciples, all Jews, adhered to biblical dietary laws regarding forbidden animal species. Paul, however, insisted that non-Jewish followers of Christ need not adhere to this obligation, although he did require them to respect community members who abstain from meat (Rom 14:2–4, 13–23). Paul's disciples went further, declaring that no food should be rejected (Tit 1:15; 1 Tim 4:1–4) and that Jews, because of their ingrained inadequacies, failed to recognize that Moses conveyed spiritual lessons through the dietary laws rather than literal rules (e.g., *Barnabas* 10.9). Christian interpreters commonly understood a parenthetical explanation of Jesus' teaching, "Thus he declared all foods clean" (Mk 7:19), as an abrogation of biblical dietary laws, but in its original context this teaching pertains to matters of ritual purity rather than permitted or forbidden foodstuffs. In many Christian communities, it became customary to eat pork on Easter to reinforce the contrast between Christian and Jewish norms.

Acts of the Apostles preserves a broader statement about the food-related obligations incumbent on the earliest non-Jewish followers of Christ: "abstention from what has been offered to idols, from blood, [and] from that which was strangled" (15:29). The first of these restrictions reflects a widespread sentiment among Jewish writers of the era –including Paul

(1 Cor 8:1–11:1) – that willful consumption of food offered to idols violates the prohibition against idolatry. The latter restrictions reflect the Hebrew Bible's strong condemnation of blood consumption, including meat from which blood was not adequately drained; this taboo ranked in significance alongside those against murder, idolatry, and illicit sexual activity (e.g., Ez 33:25–26). Eastern traditions preserved this restriction; as a result, Christians in the Middle East slaughtered animals in a manner that causes the blood to drain out, akin to the methods of slaughter used by Jews (and Muslims). Western Christians, in contrast, ultimately abandoned this prohibition under the influence of Augustine, who understood the New Testament's food-related obligations as merely temporary in nature (*Answer to Faustus* 32.13).

Paul and, likewise, Acts emphasizes the importance of shared meals among those who revere Jesus as the messiah, notwithstanding resistance among contemporaneous Jews to sharing meals with gentiles (Gal 2:11–14; Acts 11:3). Later Christian authorities, however, condemn the sharing of meals with Jews. They express concern that accommodating Jewish dietary norms would implicitly condone the Jews' rejection of Christian truth claims regarding not only Jesus but also proper understanding of the Old Testament. In the words of the first ecclesiastical council whose records survive, which took place in present-day Spain in the very early 4th cent., "If any of the clergy or the faithful eats with Jews, he shall be kept from communion in order that he be corrected as he should" (Elvira, c. 50; trans Laeuchli 1972, 132). Similar prohibitions appear repeatedly in medieval Western and Eastern sources alike. Roman Catholic authorities continued to reiterate this prohibition into modern times; for example, an 18th-cent. papal "Edict concerning the Jews" declares that "The Jews may not play, nor eat, nor drink, nor have any other familiarity or conversation with Christians, nor Christians with Jews" (Kertzer 2001, 29). Christian authorities also condemned the consumption of specific Jewish foods, first and foremost the unleavened bread that Jews prepare for Passover but also meat and wine prepared in accordance with Jewish norms.

Jewish authorities also forbade consumption of various foods prepared by non-Jews (e.g., *mAZ* 2:3–7). Some of these rules reflect concern that, because non-Jews do not adhere to Jewish dietary laws, the food of non-Jews might contain forbidden ingredients such as non-kosher seafood or the milk of non-kosher animals. Others reflect concern that non-Jews engage in food-related idolatrous practices, such as the offering of wine libations, than render these foods forbidden to Jews. A third set of rules focuses on foods that are baked, cooked, or otherwise transformed from their raw state. The implicit logic of these regulations is that Jews should limit their exposure to non-Jewish culture. Although some earlier Jewish sources forbid sharing meals with non-Jews (eg., *Jub.* 22.16), the rabbinic tradition focused its attention on ingredients and preparers rather than dining partners.

Note that none of these Jewish rules specifically targets Christians. The food restrictions attested in classical rabbinic literature reflect not only a binary division of the world into Jews and non-Jews but also a pointed lack of interest in distinguishing among non-Jews. This changed only somewhat during the Middle Ages, when rabbinic authorities in Christian Europe and, especially, the Islamic Middle East began to consider the specific implications of Christian and Islamic beliefs and practices. Already within the New Testament period and consistently thereafter, in contrast, Christian authorities singled out the Jews as a contrastive

foil and used rhetoric about Judaism to define the antithesis of proper Christianity. Ephrem the Syrian, for example, defined the Eucharist through contradistinction with the Passover matzah of the Jews in his Nineteenth Hymn on Unleavened Bread:

> Glory be to Christ through whose body the unleavened bread of the [Jewish] People became obsolete, together with the People itself. …
>
> For the blood of Christ mixes in and dwells in the unleavened bread of the People and in our [Eucharist] offering.
>
> The one who received it in our [Eucharist] offering received the drug of life. The one who ate it with the People received a deadly drug.
>
> For that blood for which they cried out that it might be upon them is mixed in their festivals and in their Sabbaths. (Shepardson 2008, 32–33)

Christian food restrictions concretize anti-Jewish rhetoric of this nature into normative practice.

There is, however, abundant evidence that many Christians ignored these restrictions in their daily lives. This is most apparent in medieval Europe, where Christian consumers routinely purchased cuts of meat from animals slaughtered by Jews that Jews themselves regarded as forbidden. This includes meat from the hindquarters of cattle, near the thigh muscle forbidden in Gen 32:33, as well as meat from animals with internal blemishes that render them forbidden under rabbinic law. Many civil authorities – such as the late-11th-cent. Bishop Rüdiger of Speyer – explicitly permitted commerce of this nature notwithstanding canonical laws that forbade it. These communal leaders recognized that if butchers were unable to sell the high quality nonkosher byproducts of kosher animal slaughter, the cost per pound of kosher meat would be prohibitive for Jewish consumers, who might move elsewhere in pursuit of affordable meat. For that very reason, those who sought to reduce the presence of Jews within medieval Christian society, whether through conversion or migration, often lobbied to forbid commerce of this nature. Evidence also indicates that Christians, including monks, commonly disregarded prohibitions against drinking wine made and sold by Jews. Christians and Jews often exchanged gifts of food, including in the context of holidays and life-cycle celebrations.

Stories abound of efforts by individual Jews to observe traditional dietary restrictions within Christian homes and communities. As Hasia Diner observed in her global study of Jewish peddlers, "Men steeped in a system that divided the world's food into the edible and the inedible found that most of their customers' fare fell squarely in the latter. The peddlers usually refused anything other than fruit, vegetables, bread, or eggs" (Diner 2015, 93). Many Jews who settled outside of established Jewish communities abandoned various aspects of Jewish dietary law, but the pork taboo was often the last to go. The pointed rejection of biblical and rabbinic dietary laws by Reform rabbis in 19th-cent. America symbolized their break from traditional Judaism.

The long history of restrictions against one another's food had no significant impact on the rapprochement between representatives of Christianity and Judaism in the late 20th cent. Christians had long since forgotten this aspect of their history and, for unrelated reasons, the Code of Canon Law adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in the early part of the century omitted all references to Jewish food. Orthodox rabbinic authorities had long since developed methods to allow non-Jews to prepare kosher food for Jewish consumption, and the vast majority of 20th-cent. rabbis had no objection to sharing such food with non-Jews. For these reasons, provision of kosher food at interfaith gatherings, to the extent that Jewish participants requested it, posed only technical challenges.

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