
The 'Judeo-Christian' Tradition: A Genealogy of Europe's Exclusions

Anya Topolski*†¹

¹KU Leuven (KUL) – Belgique

Résumé

While the European Union Parliament did not endorse the reference to Europe's 'Judeo-Christian' roots in its constitution, the question nonetheless provoked an on-going debate on Europe's symbolic foundation and its future identity. On the one side of the debate are those who cite the 'Judeo-Christian' commandment to care for the stranger as central to European civilization, while on the other side are those who argue for the exclusion of Islam from Europe in the name of the 'Judeo-Christian' tradition. The term 'Judeo-Christian' is often taken to be a sign of reconciliation directed towards European Jewry, however it is now most commonly used in relation to debates on Europe's identity, the rise of Islam in Europe, and immigration (LexisNexis). Motivated by current political events such as the increasing support of right-wing parties, and the rise of unfavorable views of Muslims in Europe (Pew 2008; EUMC 2006), my aim is to understand and challenge the notion of a 'Judeo-Christian' tradition as a carrier of modalities of exclusion with regard to Islam in Europe today. By analyzing the shifts in the discourse of 'Judeo-Christianity', developing a genealogical account of its meaning in relation to the idea of Europe, I seek to understand what, if any, relationship is there between Europe's excluded others (Anidjar 2003; 2007, Balibar 1991; 2004, Bunzl 2007)?

To begin to understand the exclusionary modality currently at play in Europe, it is necessary to consider how and why the notion of 'Judeo-Christianity' came to symbolically represent European identity. The goal is to understand whether this term veils a new exclusionary violence in the aim of a trans-national European identity formation. This engagement allows for a consideration of the parallels (without denying that there are *significant* differences) between the different discursive mechanisms of exclusion with regard to Europe's 'others'. The focus of this paper is the empty signifier 'Judeo-Christian', applied to tradition, heritage, faith etc., which has both a convoluted chronicle and content. Coined in Europe in the 1830's by F.C. Baur, the founder of the German Protestant Tübingen School, the term's popularity faltered in the late 19th century and was replaced by the descriptors Aryan and Semitic (peoples, races, cultures etc.). At the onset of the First World War most traces of the term JX had disappeared, both in intellectual and popular discourse, which is why many scholars argue it was born in the US. This American re-birth also led to its re-definition. What Baur meant by JX is precisely contrary to its American usage. In a nutshell while the former term is bathing in supersessionism, the latter seeks to overcome this violently antisemitic theological construction. However a closer investigation of the term shows that even the latter 'well' intended usage is problematic. In the first part of my paper, I will briefly consider the different origins of the term JX in order to demonstrate, in the second

*Intervenant

†Auteur correspondant: anya.topolski@hiw.kuleuven.be

part of my paper, how its current usage in Europe, as a means to exclude Islam, remains true to its European exclusionary genealogy.

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