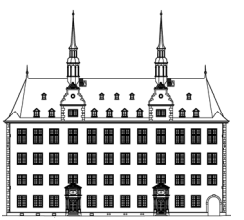

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Individual Life Paths between Secularism and (New) Religiosity in the 19th Century

Edited by
Cristiana Facchini and Alessandro Grazi

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Bologna and Münster in May 2025

Cristiana Facchini and Alessandro Grazi

Cristiana Facchini, Alessandro Grazi

Introduction

1. Religious Transformations in Nineteenth-Century Europe

Framed within the long nineteenth century, this volume focuses on individuals who, over the course of their lives, distanced themselves from their original religious communities, whether by aligning with other groups or by seeking to reform and transform their communities from within[1]. We interpret such processes as moments of transition and border crossing, and we aim to uncover and interpret forms of religious behavior against the broader backdrop of processes of »secularization«[2]. Rather than treating secularization as a linear or clear-cut process of religious decline, we explore how the emergence of a more secularized society created space for innovation and creativity. Following Charles Taylor's and other scholars' insights, we assume that religion retained a strong formative and generative power even in modern contexts, remaining compatible with some of the tenets of modernity. In this sense, secularization may be understood not simply as a process that highlights the decline of religious observance and practice, but possibly as a path of transformation through which religious motifs and meanings continue to exert influence, even beyond the bounds of traditional religious institutions[3].

The period under investigation is the *long nineteenth century*, a time in which expressions of religiosity and religious belonging arguably underwent profound and sustained transformations. These changes constitute a fundamental process in the formation of modern European societies. Not only did a form of »diffusive Christianity«[4] began to take shape, but new modes of institutionalized and non-institutional religions also emerged. This pluralization of religion and religious experience in Europe has been described as a »constant expansion of the universe

1 The gender-related formulations used in the chapters correspond to the preference of the respective authors.

2 The debate on secularization is vast. See especially Phil Zuckerman/John Shook (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Secularism, Oxford 2017; Karel Dobbelaere, Secularization. An Analysis at Three Levels, Brussels 2002.

3 Charles Taylor, A Secular Age, Cambridge/London 2007.

4 John Wolffe, God and Greater Britain. Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843–1945, London 1994, pp. 92f.

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of religion«[5]. At the same time, the social function of religion – particularly its public visibility – and the institutional authority of Christian churches began to diminish or, depending on distinctive cases, to be openly questioned. These changes were driven by complex processes such as industrialization, the ascendancy of the natural sciences, the rise of nation-states, and mass migration. As a result, the nineteenth century witnessed a significant cultural shift: for the first time, the secular and the religious were publicly and explicitly negotiated[6].

The modern world, with its reconfigurations of authority and cultural identity, opened new avenues for individuals to pursue distinct personal and spiritual projects. Taking these developments as a point of departure, this volume seeks to explore the interwoven processes of »secularization« and religious revitalization on the micro-historical level. By examining individual trajectories, we seek to integrate micro-historical and macro-historical perspectives, analyzing how broader societal changes or policy shifts shaped personal choices and life paths. The case studies presented in this volume therefore ask to what extent such moments of transition and boundary crossing are best understood as expressions of secularization, transformations of religious contexts, or the emergence of new forms of religiosity.

Such an inquiry however necessitates a theoretical grounding – an understanding of what we mean by *secularization*, especially when approached as a plural and multifaceted process. Indeed, one of the most influential narratives in the study of religion in the long nineteenth century has been shaped by the concept of secularization – understood in its legal, philosophical, and sociological dimensions[7]. Secularization has been one of the most intensely debated issues in the humanities for at least five decades, particularly since Peter Berger's pioneering work *The Sacred Canopy*[8]. Scholars have long argued both for and against the validity of secularization as a concept, and even among those who accept its use, there is considerable disagreement over its nature, whether it represents a long-term, gradual decline or a sudden collapse in the relevance of religion[9].

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5 Kurt Nowak, Geschichte des Christentums in Deutschland. Religion, Politik und Gesellschaft vom Ende der Aufklärung bis zur Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts, Munich 1995, p. 11. In the German original: »ständige Erweiterung des Universums der Religion«.

6 Rebekka Habermas, Kulturkämpfer, Wundergläubige und Atheisten. Das lange 19. Jahrhundert und die Erfindung des Säkularen, in: Birgit Aschmann (ed.), Durchbruch der Moderne? Neue Perspektiven auf das 19. Jahrhundert, Frankfurt am Main 2019, pp. 147–170, at p. 148.

7 Daniele Menozzi, La chiesa cattolica e la secolarizzazione, Turin 1993; Taylor, Secular Age; for criticism, see Talal Asad, Formations of the Secular. Christianity, Islam, Modernity, Stanford, CA 2003.

8 Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy, New York, NY 1967.

9 David Nash, Believing in Secularization. Stories of Decline, Potential, and Resurgence, in: Journal of Religious History 41/4 (2017), pp. 505–531.

It is worth mentioning that a significant part of this interpretive paradigm developed in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in the aftermath of World War II, amid the reorganization of liberal democracies in the west and in parallel with the ideological pressures of the Cold War. This evolution was also driven by the reception and adaptation of European sociological thought – especially the works of Max Weber and Émile Durkheim – within the United States. It is not surprising, then, that the conceptualization of secularization became a key reference point in American sociology, particularly as American society was undergoing profound structural changes. This sociological lens inherited the preoccupations of its European predecessors, who had been chiefly concerned with the consequences of »modernity«. Though neither Durkheim nor Weber conceptualized secularization as such, they were deeply interested in the transformations of society through the overlapping influences of modern science, technology, new forms of statehood and legal rationality, individual rights, and the impact of industrialization and capitalism. In one word, it was the relationship of traditional modes of thought with »modern rationality« (Weber) that attracted attention, and called for analysis and understanding. Moreover, modernity itself was never a fully neutral or uncontested concept. It brought with it a series of deep ambivalences, many of which were inadequately addressed by modernization theorists, the foundational thinkers of twentieth-century sociology. Issues such as racism and the dual nature of the modern state – as both an agent of emancipation and a perpetrator of systemic violence – exemplify this theoretical blind spot[10].

As noted by some critics, the debate surrounding secularization has often been shaped less by empirical findings than by the narrative logic embedded in the theory itself. In this way, secularization has come to function as an ideology – or even as a secular form of belief – used alternately by its detractors and defenders[11]. Moreover, a growing consensus has emerged that the original formulation of the secularization thesis – namely, that modernity inevitably leads to the progressive decline of religious belief and practice – amounts to a myth more than a historical reality[12]. Critics have also pointed to the limited scope of traditional secularization theories, which are often based exclusively on western, and particularly Christian, societies. They leave out not only non-western contexts but also the complex internal diversity

10 Post-colonial and post-modern critics have highlighted these questions. See Asad, Formations; Edward Said, Orientalism, New York, NY 1978. The collapse of the liberal state called for a re-description of religion, which is worth remembering, in particular in the work of Eric Voegelin. For a definition of Ersatz religions, see Eric Voegelin, Science, Politics, and Gnosticism, Washington, DC 1997. On Voegelin and religion see: Ted V. McAllister, Revolt against Modernity. Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin and the Search for a Postliberal Order, Lawrence, KS 1995.

11 Nash, Believing, pp. 505–531.

12 José Casanova, Public Religions in the Modern World, Chicago, IL/London 1994, p. 11.

of religious expression within the west itself[13]. Hence, some scholars suggested to discard it, as the concept is too polemical and of scarce heuristic value[14].

This realization does not require that all secularization theories be rejected wholesale. It remains evident that, in many modern societies, institutional religion plays a more subdued and less commanding role than it once did. Religion is frequently contested, subverted, or displaced, but not necessarily eradicated. Instead of a narrative of disappearance, scholars increasingly recognize processes of religious transformation, pluralization, and reconfiguration.

In line with recent research, we treat »secularization« as a multifaceted and context-dependent phenomenon, an evolving set of processes that unfold through diverse mechanisms. Particularly influential here is Charles Taylor's tripartite conceptualization of the secular: 1) the emptying of public spaces of overt religious references; 2) the decline of belief and practice; and 3) the transformation of the conditions in which belief is held and experienced. It is this third dimension – the changing conditions of belief – that forms one of the core foci of our volume. We are interested not in secularization as the triumph of atheism or the erasure of religion, but in the emergence of non-institutional, personalized, and creative forms of belief that remained deeply religious in nature, even as they broke with tradition.

Some scholars now define secularization not as a singular process but as a constellation of related trajectories. It is not a uniform development, but a complex and often contradictory interplay of forces that require close empirical and conceptual scrutiny. From this perspective, the individual becomes a key site for analysis. Biographical case studies allow us to trace how broader structural changes – scientific, political, institutional – interact with personal belief systems and choices. Indeed, for many of the individuals studied here, atheism was less a destination than a challenge to be resisted or reconciled with. The religious transformations these individuals experienced rarely resulted in complete abandonment of belief. Rather, they often led to the creation or adoption of new, hybrid spiritual frameworks shaped by personal, philosophical, and socio-political influences. This micro-historical approach reflects the insight that personal trajectories often intersect with broader historical currents, whether local, national, or transnational. As Oscar Handlin noted, the purpose of studying biography is »not simply to tell a life story […] but to deploy the individual in the study of the world outside that individual and to

13 A recent body of literature has focused on the impact of secularization in non-western countries, such as India (an early player in this debate) of the middle east. Interesting and overlooked the question of how religious minorities in the west coped with the rise and spread of modernity. For some reading on Jews, see for instance: Ari Joskowicz/Ethan Katz (eds.), Secularism in Question. Jews and Judaism in Modern Times, Philadelphia, PA 2015.

14 Ian Hunter, Secularization. The Birth of a Modern Combat Concept, in: Modern Intellectual History 12/1 (2014), pp. 1–32.

explore how the private informs the public and vice versa«[15]. The figures examined in this volume did not merely experience religious transformation; when possible, they actively contributed to reshaping religious life in their societies.

Of some heuristic value might be the notion of »invisible religion« elaborated by Thomas Luckmann, according to which the modern search for meaning and salvation had withdrawn to the private sphere[16]. While his model may have overstated the retreat of religious institutions, his emphasis on the private and the individual remains highly relevant. Our volume does not deny the continued relevance of institutions, but it foregrounds the decisive role played by individual agency in shaping, resisting, or reinterpreting religious meaning in modern contexts.

Through the lives of individuals who crossed religious boundaries, transformed traditions from within, or forged new spiritual paths, we aim to trace how the changing conditions of belief in the long nineteenth century manifested themselves in concrete lives. In doing so, we move beyond simplistic binaries of belief and unbelief, religion and secularism, and instead offer a more nuanced picture of religious transformation in modernity.

The concept of secularization is shaped by disciplinary boundaries and interpretative frames. Some definitions are narrowly legalistic, referring to the transfer of Church property and power to secular institutions. Other ones are more philosophical, describing a historical shift from a worldview grounded in belief in God to one founded on human reason. A third perspective – largely sociological – focuses on the transformation of social structures in response to modern pressures. Depending on the angle of analysis, the meaning and implications of secularization shift accordingly. Often, these perspectives are used in combination, even if they originate from distinct intellectual traditions.

From a historical point of view, it is essential to keep in mind the overt processes of secularizing policies – such as the expropriation of ecclesiastical properties and the framing of church/state relations – whilst delving into the layers of nineteenth-century culture and society to uncover patterns of transformation and continuity. In this light, the distinction between premodern and modern Christian societies becomes more visible, their display of public roles and visibility being clearly modified, if compared to the past. Even when religion was not openly attacked as a vestige of the past to be eradicated, it was increasingly perceived as something to be reformed, privatized, or marginalized. In one word, it was at the centre of intellectual debate.

15 Oscar Handlin, Truth in History, Cambridge, MA 1979, p. 276.

16 Thomas Luckmann, The Invisible Religion. The Problem of Religion in Modern Society, New York, NY 1967.

The intellectual and cultural history of the nineteenth century presents indeed a complex set of discourses on religion[17]. The critique of religion was a well-established feature of Enlightenment thought, but outright calls for the abolition of religion were rare prior to the French and Bolshevik revolutions[18]. During the French Revolution, attitudes toward religion were deeply ambivalent: while attempts to dismantle the Catholic Church's power were widespread and radical, religion itself was often viewed as a useful tool for social cohesion. The effort to eradicate the Catholic Church ultimately led not to a linear path of secularization but to prolonged conflict and often violent outbursts. It is within these dynamics of conflict that scholars might search for a better understanding of how religion worked in the long nineteenth century[19].

Several nineteenth-century philosophies often considered anti-religious – such as Positivism – gave rise to movements that took on quasi-religious forms. Auguste Comte's »religion of humanity«, for instance, was lately described as an *Ersatzreligion*, a surrogate religion that illustrates the complexity of the era's spiritual landscape[20]. These intricate intellectual trajectories and political developments call for a more nuanced analytical approach – one that examines how religious groups responded to the pressures and transformations brought about by modernization. By incorporating concepts such as resistance/resilience, adaptation, and indifference, we can better understand the diverse and sometimes unexpected ways in which religious actors navigated the challenges of modernity.

The Catholic Church offers a salient example of resistance to the paths of modernization. In the wake of the 1848 revolutions, it responded with institutional rigidity and ideological retrenchment, most famously expressed in the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), a document that strongly rejected liberal values. Even while under pressure – as seen in Germany's *Kulturkampf* or the loss of the Papal States following the *Breccia di Porta Pia* in Italy – the Church adapted in enduring ways. It consolidated its internal structures, reasserted its authority, and invested in the

17 We refrain here to refer to the debate over the notion of »religion«, because intellectuals, politicians, and cultural activists operating in the nineteenth century held many different views about it, from a very narrow notion of religion as Christianity to a broader notion that incorporated different traditions.

18 Christopher A. Bayly, The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914, Oxford 2004.

19 Jürgen Osterhammel, The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century, Princeton, NJ 2014, chapter 18.

20 For this definition see Eric Voegelin, fn. 9. Also, for the concept of »political religion« see Emilio Gentile, Le religioni della politica. Fra democrazie e totalitarismi, Roma/Bari 2001. For a critical view on the notion of »political religion« see: Hans Maier, Political Religion. The Potentials and Limitations of a Concept, in: Hans Maier/Michael Schäfer (eds.), Totalitarianism and Political Religions, vol. II, London/New York, NY 2007, pp. 225–245.

development of new devotional geographies. At the same time, it strategically focused its influence on specific areas such as education and the economy[21]. On the one hand, the Catholic Church constructed a mythic vision of a sacred Christian society rooted in the medieval past; on the other, it selectively embraced modern technologies and political tools to counter a modernity it partly despised. This conservative ideology – often described as *integrist* – was not universally accepted. It left space for individual believers to be drawn toward the transformations brought about by science, philosophy, and politics. This volume explores several of these individual cases, offering insight into the tensions between resistance and change within Catholic contexts.

In contrast, the concept of adaptation more aptly describes the attitudes of groups or individuals who welcomed the opportunities of a changing world. Many such examples come from religious minorities – Jews and Protestants in Catholic countries, or Catholics and Jews in Protestant ones – who, after centuries of marginalization, found new avenues for social and political participation. Religious diversity in certain regions also facilitated greater integration into modern society, including access to professions and political roles previously closed to them[22]. The rise of *denominationalism* among Jews and the emergence of liberal and progressive movements among Christians reflected broader reformist agendas. These movements sought to integrate and improve their communities' standing in modern society. Such reformist impulses crossed confessional and geographic boundaries, reaching well beyond the Christian or western world. As this volume illustrates, these trends brought recognition to a new generation of religious leaders, reformers, and founders of new spiritual movements. In Asia, for example, religious figures engaged critically with the west, which they viewed as overly materialistic and lacking spiritual direction.

Yet, indifference to the changes brought by modernity also played a role, though this theme is not explored in this volume. It is important to note that religious enclaves resisting modernization were more widespread than often assumed. Choosing to live at the margins of mainstream society, guided by alternative norms and values, remained a viable path, one that merits further study. Groups such as the Old Believers in the Russian Empire, Mennonites in various countries, or Chassidic Jews exemplify such cultural enclaves. Leaving these groups was possible, though often at significant personal cost. What these communities reveal is a deep-seated skepticism toward the claims and promises of modern society.

21 Of some use Giovanni Miccoli, Fra mito della cristianità e secolarizzazione. Studi sul rapporto chiesa-società nell'età contemporanea, Genova 1992.

22 Roberto Dagnino/Alessandro Grazi (eds.), Believers in the Nation. European Religious Minorities in the Age of Nationalism (1815–1914), Leuven 2017.

The individual trajectories explored in this volume predominantly reflect the adaptation model, which highlights the creative reworking of the profound changes that characterized the long nineteenth century. These intellectual paths illustrate both the opportunities and the challenges of their historical moment, often signaling moments of rupture and transformation. While many of the figures discussed are European intellectuals, we have deliberately adopted a more global and entangled perspective, including Asian thinkers who actively promoted their own visions of modernity. This broader lens is particularly evident in the authors featured in the first section of the book. Notably, many of the voices in this volume belong to Jews, one of the religious minorities granted political emancipation during the nineteenth century. Their experiences, along with those of Catholics and Protestants who distanced themselves from traditional religious structures, reveal a diverse range of responses to the shifting religious and political landscape. This volume showcases viewpoints that move well beyond the confines of identity politics, highlighting instead a spectrum of political engagement and religious creativity that was often indebted to utopian and progressive world-views.

2. Structure of the Book

To illuminate the various patterns of religious transformation in the nineteenth century, the volume is organized into four thematic directions. Each centers on emblematic figures whose individual paths reflect wider cultural, political, and intellectual trends.

The first thematic session concerns key figures, whose religious transformation acted as a *trait d' union* between the individual and the global in two different ways: 1) in an actual geo-cultural dimension, through the impact in western religious culture caused by the Indian guru Swami Vivekananda; 2) in theoretical intellectual terms, through Luigi Luzzatti's attempt at formulating a global theory of religious freedom.

In fact, in the book's first section, Ruth Harris offers a vast and deep reflection on how the concept of religious transformation in the individual could help us understand key intellectual, cultural, and political re-alignments. She argues that the western turn to »eastern spirituality« – with its gurus, meditation, and yearning for »self-realization« – would not have been possible without Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), who gained international fame at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Vivekananda is shown not only as a key figure in rearticulating Hinduism for western audiences but also as someone whose vision attracted committed female followers. Vivekananda's global enterprise was underpinned by an unusual collaboration between »traditional« women in India and avant-garde female activists and intellectuals in the west. Harris claims that, without their help,

he would never have been able to press for cultural relativism, open new spiritual horizons, let alone fund institutions at home and abroad. The essay challenges the established notion that the nineteenth-century »feminization of religion« was a purely western Christian phenomenon. While many scholars have focused on the dominance of women in Christian missions and philanthropy, this chapter explores how *Hindu universalism* – especially as promoted by Swami Vivekananda – provided an alternative religious framework that deeply engaged women in both India and the west. Women such as Sara Bull, Josephine MacLeod, and Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) were central to his mission. Their spiritual journeys involved significant religious transformation, moving from disillusionment with Christianity toward a reconfigured sense of faith through Vedanta and yoga. These women played complex roles: they were not merely disciples, but intermediaries between east and west, funders, organizers, and advocates. They engaged deeply with Indian thought, often interpreting it through Christian or Unitarian lenses, and brought their own spiritual traditions into conversation with Vivekananda's teachings. The essay emphasizes that religious transformation was not unidirectional or easily categorized. This cross-cultural spiritual engagement reveals that the feminization of religion in the nineteenth century was far more complex than previously understood: it was transnational, often contradictory, and mediated through intensely personal, spiritual relationships that blurred boundaries of gender, race, and religious authority.

Similarly, a global perspective on religion in the nineteenth century is provided by Cristiana Facchini's contribution on Luigi Luzzatti (1841–1927). A Jewish-born Italian economist, politician, and prime minister, Luzzatti was a leading liberal thinker who advanced a global theory of religious tolerance. Luzzatti, though not a theologian or historian of religion, played a key role in shaping modern Italy's legal and constitutional framework, particularly regarding the relationship between church and state. Framing the essay are two symbolic moments of global religious dialogue: the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, and a 1908 meeting in Rome between Luzzatti and Japanese scholar Anesaki Masaharu. These events highlight the transnational and intercultural dimensions of the period's religious discourse, setting the stage for Luzzatti's own pluralistic approach. Though born into Judaism, Luzzatti distanced himself from formal religious practice early in life, embracing instead a liberal, theistic worldview that drew upon diverse spiritual traditions. His political career and academic engagement were shaped by Enlightenment values, constitutional liberalism, and a profound interest in religious diversity, including Asian religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. In his *God in Freedom*, published in English in 1930, Luzzatti advanced a comparative theory of religious liberty that challenged Eurocentric models. He highlighted historical examples of religious tolerance not only in Christian Europe and America (e. g., Roger Williams and the U.S. Constitution), but also in India (Emperor Ashoka),

Persia (Bahá'í faith), and Mughal India (Emperor Akbar). For Luzzatti, religious freedom arose not from indifference or hostility towards religion, but from sincere religious belief itself, a conviction that God desires to be worshipped in many ways. He argued that true religious liberty involves not simply toleration, but a principled, constitutional separation of church and state rooted in mutual respect.

Luzzatti's eclectic and inclusive approach drew upon both modern constitutional theory and ancient religious traditions, asserting that Asia had pioneered the ideals of religious liberty long before Europe. Facchini situates Luzzatti within broader nineteenth-century trends: the global circulation of religious ideas, the institutionalization of religious studies, the politicization of the »Jewish question«, and the modern state's role in regulating religion. She also reflects on Luzzatti's personal religiosity, which she describes as a form of ethical theism, a non-dogmatic faith grounded in moral responsibility and openness to spiritual pluralism. Ultimately, Luzzatti emerges as a deeply modern thinker, one who used the tools of constitutional law, religious scholarship, and political liberalism to craft a vision of religious freedom that was at once historical, global, and urgently relevant in his time.

The second direction takes us to France, the country that had witnessed the French revolution and intense debates and policies aimed to counter and contain the power of the Catholic Church and where the policies of secularization were most radical. Here, we will observe the intertwinements between intellectuals associated with Judaism and the socialist utopian philosophy of Saint-Simonism, which exerted a relevant role in addressing French culture. In doing so, however, we will focus on two intellectuals, Joseph Salvador and Olinde Benjamin Rodrigues, who both argued for a future universal »religion of humanity«.

In this section, Alessandro Grazi explores and unravels some of the mechanisms with which Saint-Simonism favored the transition of originally religious elements into a secular frame, particularly for its Jewish members. Saint-Simonism, rooted in Enlightenment ideals and shaped after the death of its founder Henri de Saint-Simon, proposed a »New Christianity« or »Religion of Humanity«, as it was called by his disciples, grounded in moral unity, fraternity, social harmony, and the emancipation of all, including women and workers. Although secular in structure, it retained a strong religious vocabulary and ritual form, which drew many Jewish intellectuals into its orbit. The essay argues that Saint-Simonism enabled a secular re-appropriation of religious (particularly Jewish) motifs, offering a universalistic, spiritual, and ethically grounded worldview that appealed to liberal Jews in post-Revolutionary France. Grazi tests his observations about the relationship Judaism/Saint-Simonism through the exemplary case of Olinde Benjamin Rodrigues (1795–1891), a French Jewish mathematician and a prominent member of Paris' first Saint-Simonian circle. Individuals like Rodrigues often recently emancipated and deeply shaped by the values of Enlightenment, saw Saint-Simonism as a way to recast their Jewish identity in secular, ethical, and political terms. The movement

allowed them to retain a sense of moral mission, universal justice, and even messianic expectation – central features of Jewish tradition – without remaining within the confines of institutional Judaism. Rodrigues's personal trajectory is analyzed as a case study of this dynamic. Though he distanced himself from traditional Judaism and rejected both Christianity and atheism, he embraced Saint-Simonism as his new spiritual identity. In doing so, he interpreted Saint-Simon's »religion of humanity« as a continuation – and secularization – of Judaism's ethical and prophetic heritage. Rodrigues's transformation, Grazi argues, reflects one possible mode of secularization, in which religious motifs persist and evolve within a new, non-institutional spiritual framework.

The second contribution of this section focuses on Joseph Salvador (1796–1873), the French Jewish polygraph who authored several books on ancient Judaism and the historical Jesus[23]. In nineteenth-century France, intellectuals like Joseph Salvador responded to the waning of Enlightenment ideals by proposing a new, syncretic religiosity that blended Judaism and Christianity into a universal moral vision grounded in historical progress and divine revelation. Rather than merely reconciling traditions, Salvador reinterpreted them as stages of a unified spiritual evolution. According to Alberto Scigliano, in Salvador's view Moses' figure would justify a novel significance of Jewish values within the political, prophetic and utopian debate of the early nineteenth century. Salvador's ideas had a robust influence on Saint-Simonian thinkers, who believed that the notion of a universal religion based on Mosaism is the fulfillment of Judaism's political mission. Joseph Salvador's vision of *Mosaism* was a utopian, universalist reinterpretation of Judaism, grounded in biblical tradition and shaped by Romantic sensibilities. He rejected rabbinic and nationalist frameworks, instead presenting Moses and the Decalogue as the ethical and legal foundation for a future universal religion. This syncretic religion would transcend traditional faiths and promote societal progress, positioning the Jewish people not as a political nation but as a messianic moral force advancing humanity. Salvador interpreted Mosaic law as a divine precursor to modern democratic ideals, particularly the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. His messianic vision was not apocalyptic but historical and transformative, a reimagining of Judaism's mission as the foundation of a universal ethical future. In doing so, Salvador also critiqued institutional Christianity and Islam for their failures to realize this civilizational promise. Ultimately, his thought reflects a bold effort to recast Jewish identity as the spiritual and moral blueprint for a reconciled, progressive global order.

23 For a recent reading of Salvador see Guy G. Stroumsa, The Idea of Semitic Monotheism. The Rise and Fall of a Scholarly Myth, Oxford 2021, pp. 131–146.

The third direction explored in this volume sheds light on the role of scholarship not merely as a means to rediscover, understand, and reconstruct religious traditions, but as an active agent of religious transformation. This dynamic is particularly evident in the lives and works of the two protagonists of this section: the German Jewish intellectual Moritz Steinschneider and the Italian former Catholic priest Baldassarre Labanca. Despite their distinct backgrounds, both saw the scholarly study of Judaism and Christianity as an essential point of departure for any meaningful religious change. This section also offers an opportunity to assess the broader impact of religious scholarship – particularly on Christianity and Judaism – not only as a field of intellectual inquiry but as a formative tool in shaping new types of citizens or as a means to disclose truest forms of »religiosity«. It reflects a persistent fascination with »science« as a method, through which innovative approaches to reading and interpreting religious texts gave rise to new understandings of historical processes.

In her article, Irene Zwiep focuses on the life of the great German Jewish historian Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907), a champion of the nascent *Wissenschaft des Judentums*[24]. This is a particularly fascinating scholarly and intellectual trajectory because of the complex personality of Steinschneider who, according to Zwiep, was a staunch atheist who viewed religion – including Judaism – as a psychological construct driven by human frailty and yet he advocated for a form of deep ethical and moral piety. While Steinschneider rejected all revealed religion – including Judaism – as irrational and outdated, he promoted a form of secular Jewish piety rooted in ethics, cultural memory, and intellectual autonomy. Though criticized by later figures like Gershom Scholem who accused him of »liquidating Judaism« through critical historicism, Steinschneider's goal was not to destroy but to globalize and sustain Judaism by integrating it into the broader landscape of world civilization. His scholarship emphasized intercultural translation, bibliographical precision, and the cosmopolitan transmission of knowledge, particularly through the role of Jews as cultural mediators between Greek, Arabic, and European thought. The article argues that Steinschneider's notion of *Pietät* (piety) had little to do with religion in a traditional sense. Instead, it was an ethical commitment to Jewish *minhag* (custom), which he saw as a secular, cultural expression of the Good, deeply tied to family,

24 For recent perspectives on the Wissenschaft des Judentums see Mirjam Thulin/Markus Krah (eds.), Pardes – Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien – Cultures of Wissenschaft des Judentums at 200 (2018), issue 24; Kerstin von der Krone/Mirjam Thulin, Wissenschaft in Context. A Research Essay on Wissenschaft des Judentums, in: Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook 58 (2013), pp. 249–280. The production of knowledge about religion is an interesting lens through which to analyse the development of Wissenschaft des Judentums, and more broadly, the intertwined discourse on religion and Christianity, with which it was often entangled. On this, see Kocku von Stuckrad, The Scientification of Religion. An Historical Study of Discursive Changes, 1800–2000, Berlin 2014.

community, and shared human values. Steinschneider's worldview was inspired by German Classicism, particularly Schiller's ideal of universal humanism, rather than Enlightenment rationalism alone. In conclusion, the author uses the concept of »invisible religion« (Luckmann) to describe Steinschneider's legacy: a secular Jew who created a moral, cultural identity that functioned like religion without invoking the divine.

It is very fruitful to read Steinschneider along with another scholar of religion, from a different national context. The chapter authored by Roberto Alciati explores the thought and work of Baldassarre Labanca (1829–1913), a former Catholic priest who became a pioneering professor of the History of Religions in post-unification Italy. Far from renouncing belief, Labanca undertook a profound redefinition of Catholicism, proposing a vision grounded not in dogma but in rationality, secularization, and a return to the essential teachings of Jesus, following into the paths of similar approaches in Germany and France[25]. His was not a break from Christianity, but a reclamation of its core humanistic values – what he saw as a modern yet deeply rooted form of religiosity. Labanca stands out for his dual engagement with religion: as both a personal conviction and a subject of rigorous academic inquiry. His transition from the Theological Seminary life in Bourbon-controlled southern Italy to a university chair in the newly unified nation reflects not only his personal evolution but also the broader cultural and intellectual transformations of his time. He was the first to hold a professorship in the History of Religions in Italy, a milestone both for Italian academia and for Labanca's own project of religious reinterpretation. Rather than framing his life as a straightforward biography, this analysis adopts Pierre Bourdieu's concept of »trajectory«: a dynamic mapping of the evolving positions an individual occupies within shifting institutional and cultural fields. In this view, Labanca's decisions, beliefs, and scholarly output were not isolated acts but deeply embedded in the social and intellectual configurations of his time. His career was shaped as much by the evolving academic field as by his own ambitions or convictions. This approach emphasizes that what often appears to be a sequence of independent life choices is, in fact, a reflection of broader structural forces – networks of influence, opportunity, and constraint. Labanca's story, particularly the lesser-known episodes examined here, offers rich insight into how one might reconcile faith with critical inquiry, and how religious identity can be transformed – not abandoned – through scholarly reflection. In tracing Labanca's path, this study reveals a figure whose religious thought was never static, but constantly reimagined in dialogue with history, philosophy, and public life.

25 For a new insight into this topic see Cristiana Facchini/Annelies Lannoy (eds.), The Many Lives of Jesus. Scholarship, Religion, and the Nineteenth Century Imagination, Turnhout 2024.

The fourth direction explores individual transformations in which religion amalgamates with patriotism and nationalism and is strongly impacted by them. The geo-political contexts are rather different in this case as well, taking into consideration both Italy and Poland, indicating at least a shared refence to Catholicism and the complex relationship with the national movements and formation of the nation-state of the respective countries.

In his contribution, Fulvio Conti explores the central role of anticlericalism in post-Unification Italy, as emphasized by leading Catholic historians such as Pietro Scoppola and Guido Verucci. Far from being a marginal force, anticlericalism is framed as a fundamental component of Italian political and cultural history, deeply intertwined with the broader process of secularization. Analyzing several Italian ex Catholic priests, patriots, and intellectuals, Conti illustrates how during the Risorgimento conceptions of secularism intertwined with the patriotic movement and with the struggles for national independence. Furthermore, after Italy's unification (1861) anti-clericalism became a kind of legitimizing tool for the new state, while the Catholic religion was perceived by the presented intellectuals as an element of division. The Italian anticlerical tradition is shown to be complex and multifaceted. Alongside radical or satirical forms of anticlericalism, there existed more moderate or religiously motivated critiques. These included liberal Catholics such as Rosmini, Gioberti, and Manzoni, who called for a reformation of the Church based on its original spiritual mission, opposing temporal power while remaining within a framework of Christian belief.

Conti argues that anticlericalism was not just opposition to the Church but a political and cultural force tied to secularism, liberalism, and national unification. In this chapter, the author follows the many Catholics who left the priesthood for personal, political, or ideological reasons, including figures like Ugo Bassi, Giovanni Pantaleo, and Alessandro Gavazzi, who aligned with Garibaldi and Mazzini. Others, like Atto Vannucci, Gaetano Trezza, and Ausonio Franchi, contributed to secular thought and public life as philosophers and educators. Some, like Franchi, later returned to the Church, a move that sparked criticism. Conti shows how anticlericalism was diverse, ranging from rationalist atheism to liberal Catholic reformism, and played a central role in building Italy's secular state and shaping its modern national identity.

Marta Baranowska examines the views of the Polish politician Roman Dmowski (1864–1939) against the backdrop of a very different political setting, where Poles were still a repressed nation, belonging to two territorial empires. This chapter analyzes Dmowski's ideology of nationalism, particularly his concept of national ethics, and the evolving role of religion and the Catholic Church within that framework. A leading figure in Poland's nationalist movement, Dmowski viewed the nation as the highest moral good, an absolute value around which political and ethical life should be organized. At the turn of the twentieth century, Dmowski sought

to separate religion from the political sphere, proposing a »national ethics« that would guide civic behavior based on loyalty and duty to the nation, rather than Christian or Church-defined morality. In this system, morality was defined by what benefited the nation, and actions – including violence – could be justified if they served national interests. He introduced concepts such as national egoism, prioritizing the nation's good over universal ethics or religious values. Though Dmowski recognized the enduring cultural importance of Catholicism, especially for Polish identity under foreign rule, he sought to limit the Church's political influence. He believed that true national loyalty should surpass religious obedience and that nationalism should replace the Church as the moral guide in public life. Over time, however, his stance shifted: by the 1920s, amid changes in Polish politics and a religious revival, he began to advocate for cooperation between the Church and the nationalist state, promoting the idea of a »Catholic State of the Polish Nation«. Baranowska argues that Dmowski's so-called national ethics was not truly an ethical system, but a moralistic, totalitarian ideology designed to legitimize the authority of nationalist elites. His view of morality was rooted in collective instincts rather than individual freedom or conscience, effectively negating personal moral agency. Moreover, Dmowski's framing of nationalism as the only valid worldview left no room for pluralism, casting anything non-national as alien or hostile. Ultimately, the article demonstrates how Dmowski instrumentalized both religion and ethics to strengthen the nationalist project, redefining Catholicism to suit political needs and constructing a vision of national identity in which obedience to the nation replaced allegiance to universal or religious principles. His ideas reflect a broader European trend in which nationalism began to function as a »political religion«, rivaling or replacing traditional faiths in shaping public morality and identity.

The last and conclusive chapter of this volume brings us to the second half of the twentieth century, after two devastating world wars, genocide, and the rise and fall of political totalitarian regimes, and aims to cast a present and future glance at phenomena of religious transformation. In this chapter, Giuseppe Veltri addresses and challenges the assertion of the German sociologist of religion Jacob Taubes (1923–1987), according to whom technology has mastered the world. Veltri discusses Jacob Taubes's essay *Four Ages of Reason* (1957), which critiques the philosophical tradition dating back to Aristotle. The essay is rooted in his 1947 dissertation, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, and tackles the philosophical claim of universal reason while addressing the fragmentation of society into antagonistic groups. Taubes critiques the idea that philosophy's universal reason can reconcile social division and violence, calling the claim »chimerical« (false or illusory). The essay also delves into the relationship between reason, truth, and violence. Taubes is less concerned with reconciling controversial ideas or reaching consensus (as is often the focus in Jewish intellectual tradition) but more with understanding how reason as a tool for truth can be entangled with violence as a force for enforcing

a version of truth. Furthermore, Taubes addresses the paradox of technological progress promising rationality while simultaneously retreating from social rationality, questioning whether this progress has led society into barbarism, echoing the concerns of the Frankfurt School about the rise of barbarism despite the promise of reason's progress. Veltri discusses Taubes's accurate prediction that technology, especially in the form of sciences and artificial intelligence, would become the dominant force shaping culture and life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

This volume has sought to illuminate the varied and often paradoxical trajectories of religious transformation in the nineteenth century, a period marked by profound political upheaval, cultural realignment, and intellectual innovation. By organizing the book around four thematic directions, we have followed individuals whose paths refracted and reshaped larger historical forces, figures whose religious lives were not simply reflective of their time, but actively engaged in remaking the religious landscape of modernity. The contributions gathered here dismantle binary oppositions such as belief versus secularism or tradition versus modernity. Instead, they underscore the extent to which religious change operated as a multidirectional process, often negotiated at the crossroads of personal experience, scholarly inquiry, political commitment, and cross-cultural exchange. From Swami Vivekananda's spiritual cosmopolitanism to Roman Dmowski's nationalist moralism, from the reimagined Mosaism of Joseph Salvador to the scholarly radicalism of Moritz Steinschneider, these case studies demonstrate the astonishing variety of forms that religious transformation could take – individual and collective, reformist and radical, secular and spiritual. Crucially, the volume highlights the global and entangled dimensions of religious thought in this period. The circulation of ideas across continents, the reworking of traditions in dialogue with others, and the hybridization of spiritual vocabularies challenge the Eurocentric narrative of secularization as a unilinear, western process. Whether in the universalist visions of the Saint-Simonians, the ethical theism of Luzzatti, or the cross-cultural feminization of religion in Harris's portrait of Vivekananda's circles, what emerges is a transnational and pluralistic map of modern religiosity. Finally, many of the individuals considered here operated at the margins – of institutions, disciplines, or confessions – but in doing so, they expanded the possibilities of religious thought and experience. Their lives testify to the malleability of faith, the political uses of religion, and the enduring human search for meaning in times of transformation. By following their trajectories, this volume has not only explored the religious past but also raised questions that remain relevant today: about the place of belief in public life, the ethics of pluralism, and the creative tensions between identity and universalism. In bringing these diverse voices together, we offer not a unified theory, but a constellation of pathways – each revealing how religion was imagined, contested, and lived in an age that was highly creative and challenged by the modern.

I. Religious Transformation as a Global Enterprise

Ruth Harris

Vivekananda's Hindu Universalism and Women, East and West

It is now considered a truism of European and American history that the nineteenth-century saw the feminization of religion[1]. The notion has been repeatedly applied to the armies of female activists and missionaries – both Catholic and Protestant – who worked at home and in the colonies; and to the way they dominated the churches, philanthropy, and Christian mission around the globe, their ubiquity shifting devotion and even theology[2]. But this settled view is dramatically transformed if we examine what has been called »Hindu Universalism«. This movement of the *fin de siècle* bequeathed to western culture yoga and meditation, as well as the search for »self-realization«. Today, more than 200 Vedanta societies headed by Ramakrishna monks serve those interested in Hindu philosophy, teaching, and worship.

What few realize is that these ideas and practices were publicised in America and western Europe by a young Indian monk named Vivekananda, who made his international début at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893[3]. Much has been written about his interventions at this international event, as well as his importance in presenting a very particular vision of Hinduism for western

1 See Leon J. Podles, The Church Impotent. The Feminization of Religion, London 1999; Ralph Gibson, A Social History of French Catholicism 1789–1914, London 1989; Ruth Harris, Lourdes. Body and Spirit in the Secular Age, London 1999; Martin Spence, Heaven on Earth. Re-imagining Time and Eternity in Nineteenth-Century British Evangelicalism, Cambridge, MA 2015; Abigail Green, Humanitarianism in Nineteenth-Century Context. Religious, Gendered, National, in: Historical Journal 57/4 (2014), pp. 1157–1175.

2 Catholic Marian devotion soared as did that of the sacred heart and the cult of the Infant Jesus. In American Protestantism, too, religious strictures were often domesticated and rendered familial by women. See Drew Faust, The Republic of Suffering. Death and the American Civil War, New York 2008. For their impact in India see Barbara N. Ramusack, Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies. British Women Activists in India, 1865–1945, in: Women's Studies International Forum 13/4 (1990), pp. 309–321; Antoinette M. Burton, The White Woman's Burden. British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865–1915, in: Women's Studies International Forum 13/4 (1990), pp. 295–308. There were legions of American women missionaries; see Barbara Reeves-Ellington et al. (eds.), Competing Kingdoms. Women, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812–1960, Durham, NC 2010.

3 See Ruth Harris, Guru to the World. Vivekananda's Life and Legacy, Cambridge, MA 2022, pp. 113–137.

https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666571480 | CC BY-SA 4.0

consumption[4]. These works tend to focus, however, on the male protagonists, and have also generated important subsidiary debates over the social and political repercussions of Vivekananda's thought in India. These histories underscore how important his ideas were to a developing anti-colonialism and cultural nationalism[5].

These emphases, however, have side lined the transnational collaboration of key female activists. From its beginnings, Hindu Universalism, as much as Christianity, was important for women, but in ways that were unusual and sometimes even radical. Unlike missionaries who taught Protestant hymns and Christian civilizational superiority to »native« children and their mothers, these women read the Bhagavad Gita and conducted *puja* (worship) ceremonies at home. Through their religious transformation, they rejected conversion and often imperialism. They sought to meditate, to learn new techniques of yoga, and to undergo the rigours and spiritual pleasures inherent in the guru-disciple relationship – so different to those forged with Protestant and Catholic clergy.

One among them, Margaret Noble, even worshipped Kali, the goddess of creation and destruction, and wrote about her destructive power. Her book became important to Indian nationalists who saw it as inspiring a dynamic vision of Hinduism vital to fighting against British hegemony. However, the most important woman among them was an Indian, Sarada Devi, the consort and widow of Vivekananda's guru, the great mystic Ramakrishna. All the women discussed here worshipped Sarada as either saint or goddess, and regularly likened her to the Virgin Mary. For the western women, as well as many Indians, she was living proof of the divine in everyday affairs.

There is no doubt that Vivekananda saw the potential of these women's endeavours for his mission in both India and the west, even if he regularly bewailed his inability to recruit similarly high-minded western men to his cause. He realized, however, that to succeed, he had to put together the world of western activism and alternative spirituality with Hindu wifehood, motherhood, and female sainthood. These aspirations were crucial to the emergence of worldwide Vedanta and the

4 He was an advocate of Advaita Vedanta, a non-dualist school that emphasized the unity of all beings and was an ancient tradition that he transformed with his emphasis on service; for more see Swami Medhananda, Swami Vivekananda's Vedāntic Cosmopolitanism, New York, NY 2022, pp. 43–90, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197624463.001.0001> (2025-03-26); Harris, Guru to the World, pp. 277–307; Wilhelm Halbfass, India and Europe. An Essay in Philosophical Understanding, New Delhi 1990, pp. 230–242; and Gwilym Beckerlegge, The Ramakrishna Mission. The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement, Oxford 2000.

5 Shamita Basu, Religious Revivalism as Nationalist Discourse. Swami Vivekananda and New Hinduism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal, New York, NY 2002; Prathama Banerjee, Elementary Aspects of the Political. Histories from the Global South, Durham, NC 2020.

practice of yoga, to a vision of India as the world's spiritual teacher, but they were also often profoundly contradictory.

1. Vivekananda

To understand the global amalgam they created together – as much as its tensions and paradoxes – we must learn more about Vivekananda, now a controversial figure within India. He is as unknown in the west as he is a household name in India, as important to many as Gandhi. In recent years, Narendra Modi regularly pays homage to him and even moulds his image to fit Vivekananda's own[6], while in many parts of the Indian diaspora he is now eulogized in often ultra-nationalist terms for telling the »civilizational story of India« to an uninformed and arrogant west[7].

There is no doubt that selected passages from his corpus on self-reliance and India as the »Mother of Spirituality« do indeed run in this nationalist direction. Certainly, Vivekananda has been claimed by right-wing extremists, but just as many others regard his religious and social thought as central to why they turned to left-wing social activism, socialism or even communism. What is even more surprising in this instance, perhaps, is that they made this choice despite Vivekananda's unorthodox support for caste[8].

Vivekananda's corpus is therefore so various and at times so provocative that it is impossible to reduce his teachings to a single vision, or to draw a direct line from his time to our own[9]. If he is now controversial in India, his evanescent fame and influence in the west is at first glance difficult to explain. But they become more comprehensible when we understand how deftly he sorted through and analysed what are now alien systems of belief central to his own time. Religion, science, the occult, and orientalism all merged and overlapped in the minds of his western hearers; as an Indian monk, he was uniquely qualified to pronounce on these subjects from a knowledgeable but entirely novel perspective. They found his ideas often counterintuitive and challenging, and yet at the same time oddly liberating and reassuring. As will be seen, he spoke to them in ways that seemed foreign (even

6 See The Tale of the Two Narendras. Narendra Modi and Swami Vivekananda, in: The Statesman (July 4, 2016); PM Narendra Modi Invokes Swami Vivekananda, Lord Krishna in International Yoga Day Message, in: Business Insider (June 21, 2020); PM Modi Compliments the Hindu Group for Compilation on Swami Vivekananda, in: The Hindu (March 20, 2020).

7 Remarks by Hindol Sengupta/Amish Tripathi, The Universal Appeal of Swami Vivekananda, at Nehru Centre, London, January 12, 2021.

8 Banerjee, Elementary Aspects of the Political, p. 40.

9 See, for example, Jyotirmaya Sharma, A Restatement of Religion. Swami Vivekananda and the Making of Hindu Nationalism, New Haven, CT 2013, p. XIV.

exotic) but which none the less resonated with a vision of »alternative spirituality« that they had encountered in the New Thought[10]. In India, moreover, he was a hero – especially among Hindus, but not only among them – for asserting the value of Indian religion in western climes and revising it to undergird important aspects of anti-imperialism[11]. Above all, he asserted that western standards of thought, feeling, and spirituality were not necessarily to be emulated or praised, that Asia – and especially India – had lessons for a »materialist« west.

Born to a free-thinking father and a devout Hindu mother, he was English-educated and subjected to the stern Calvinist lessons of the Scottish Missionary College in the Raj's capital, Calcutta[12]. He joined one strand of the Brahmo Samaj, a reformist group which sought to rid Hinduism of what was criticised as outmoded superstitions and ritualism. This brave new vision of Indian religion rejected idol worship, notions of divine descent, and many Hindu worship rituals. Its followers sought to push aside what they saw as superstitious accretions, but not to throw Hinduism overboard. Brahmoism therefore was crucial in responding in an »enlightened« way to the missionary critique of idolatry and Hindu decadence[13].

Brahmoism, moreover, often left its adherents with a sense of loss and inner spiritual desiccation, as well as leaving fellow Hindus with the belief that they had, in fact, abandoned the religion of their forebears. With time and the passing generations – and the growing realization that the British had no intention of sharing dominion with their Indian subjects – many of these young men, Vivekananda included, »rediscovered« their »Hinduism« through a remarkable guru and mystic named Ramakrishna (see figure 1)[14]. Unfortunately, there is no space to explain

10 See Catherine Albanese, A Republic of Mind and Spirit. A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion, New Haven, CT 2007, pp. 330–393, especially pp. 353–359 and 366–372. On yoga, see Elizabeth De Michelis, A History of Modern Yoga. Patanjali and Western Esotericism, London 2004, pp. 67–180; Mark Singleton, Yoga Body. The Origins of Modern Posture Practice, Oxford 2010; Joseph S. Alter, Yoga in Modern India. The Body between Science and Philosophy, Princeton, NJ 2004; James Mallinson/Mark Singleton, Roots of Yoga, London 2017; Stefanie Syman, The Story of Yoga in America. The Subtle Body, New York, NY 2010, pp. 37–79.

11 See Harris, Guru to the World, pp. 1–37.

12 See Gauri Viswanathan, Masks of Conquest. Literary Study and British Rule in India, New York, NY ^{2}2014, pp. 47–54.

13 For more on Brahmoism, see Brian Hatcher, Hinduism before Reform, Cambridge, MA 2020; and id., Bourgeois Hinduism, or Faith of the Modern Vedantists. Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal, Oxford 2008; for the relationship of these thinkers to biology, see Cheever Mackenzie Brown, Hindu Perspectives on Evolution. Darwin, Dharma, and Design, London 2012.

14 I am especially indebted to the work of Sumit Sarkar, Writing Social History, New Delhi 1997, especially pp. 282–357, which began to discuss these inner tensions in Vivekananda. See also Partha Chatterjee, The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus. Comprising Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, The Nation and its Fragments, and a Possible India, New Delhi 1999, pp. 37–75, especially pp. 68–75; and the more revisionist Amiya Sen, Sri Ramakrishna, the Kathamrita and the Calcutta

Figure 1: Indian mystic, saint and spiritual leader Sri Ramakrishna.

the connection between the two men. Ramakrishna was a semi-illiterate Brahmin, who became an international religious figure through the joint efforts of the Oxford Sanskritist Max Müller and Vivekananda[15]. Suffice it to say that Vivekananda was quickly enchanted by the combination of love, spiritual power, and intelligence that Ramakrishna offered and began a long spiritual apprenticeship.

Through Ramakrishna, Vivekananda encountered a new religion of ecstasy and mystical creativity but under the direction of an unorthodox and charismatic teacher. Ramakrishna fostered a message of religious universalism, mixing it with an unabashed and intense love for the goddess Kali. As a temple priest at Dakshineswar outside of Calcutta, he had clothed and tended the goddess' image in her sanctuary, feeding her the offerings of her worshippers, and exemplifying the »idolatry« that both the Brahmo Samaj and the Christian missionaries had so condemned. Kali was the goddess of creation and destruction, the sword-wielding demon slayer, the feminine power that even subdued her husband, Shiva.

Despite his early Brahmoism and rationalism, Vivekananda became Ramakrishna's chief disciple as well as lifelong devotee of Kali, though mostly in private. He

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Middle Classes. An Old Problematic Revisited, in: Postcolonial Studies 9/2 (2006), pp. 165–177. See also Narasingha P. Sil, Vivekananda's Ramakrishna. An Untold Story of Mythmaking and Propaganda, in: Numen 40 (1993), pp. 38–62. I owe important perspectives on Bengali cultural history to the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference, Princeton, NJ [2]2009. For an astute exploration see Basu, Religious Revivalism as Nationalist Discourse.

15 Thomas Green, »The Spirit of the Vedanta«. Occultism and Piety in Max Müller and Swami Vivekananda's Interpretation of Ramakrishna, in: Numen 64/2–3 (2017), pp. 229–257; and id., Religion for a Secular Age. Max Müller, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta, London 2016.

Figure 2: View toward the Administration Building at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (1893), on the right Daniel Chester French's statue *The Republic*.

organized his guru-brothers in a makeshift monastery after Ramakrishna's death in 1886, and for five years thereafter, he travelled the length and breadth of India, learning about its religious diversity as well as its poverty and misery, while also marvelling at the subcontinent's capacity for spiritual abundance and rejuvenation.

He is famous for his emergence at thirty – without money, credentials, or an invitation – at the World's Parliament of Religion in Chicago in 1893. This gathering of »world's religions« was organized by progressive Protestants to coincide with the Columbia Exhibition, an extravaganza of science, technology, and culture that a third of all Americans came to visit (see figure 2)[16]. Designed to showcase America as the Great Power of the twentieth century, the Parliament ran alongside the Exhibition to open a benevolent dialogue with »inferior« faiths[17].

But Vivekananda and other delegates from south Asia and Japan upset these plans by using the forum to criticize both Christian missions and imperial rapac-

16 Justin Nordstrom, Utopians at the Parliament. The World's Parliament of Religions and the Columbia Exposition of 1893, in: Journal of Religious History 33 (2009), pp. 348–365; and Richard Hughes Seager, The World's Parliament of Religions. The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893, Bloomington, IN 1995.

17 See John. R. Haller JR., Distant Voices. Sketches of a Swedenborgian Worldview, London 2017, pp. 161–190.

Figure 3: Swami Vivekananda at the World's Parliament, Chicago (1893). On the left Vivekananda wrote in his own handwriting: »One infinite pure and holy – beyond thought beyond qualities I bow down to thee«.

ity[18]. Vivekananda addressed his audience as »Sisters and Brothers« rather than as masters, and later scolded them in his impeccable English. Distinctive in his invented scarlet robe and orange turban (see figure 3), he declared that Hinduism had »taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance«, and implied that it was superior to Christianity because, as he said, »We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions to be true«[19]. His self-presentation signaled a rejection of western hegemony. What was surprising, perhaps, is that the audience applauded wildly.

The constant repetition of this story is part of the legend-making that has since surrounded Vivekananda. But perhaps the larger and more important question is why westerners listened? There is no doubt that his condemnation of »western materialism« excited them, as did his critique of Christian notions of sin and duty. Rather than India needing the west to save it from damnation, he argued that the west needed India, especially to overcome what he regarded as an inherent tendency towards coercion. Certainly, this view of India as mild and the west as brutal was essentialist and cliched, but in Vivekananda's hands it sustained an attempt to de-stabilize western notions of »rationality« and vanquish presumptions

18 See Judith Snodgrass, Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West. Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Columbian Exposition, Chapel Hill, NC 2003.

19 Swami Vivekananda, The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 1, Calcutta [12]1965, p. 3.

of civilizational supremacy. He was, therefore, intent on a universalism grounded unapologetically in differing cultural forms, not merely on »cultural relativism«.

Vivekananda's remarks about India thus sought to build on the western reverence for ancient Hindu texts sanctified within the orientalist canon, while insisting on the spiritual vitality of contemporary India. He countered Hegelian stereotypes of eastern passivity and espoused a modified version of Advaita Vedanta, the most intellectually prestigious tradition within Indian religion. Swami Medhananda has described how at the beginning of his ascetic quest Vivekananda was inspired by Adi Shankar, the great eighth-century Vedic scholar and teacher who argued for the liberation of the self in Atman-Brahman, in the non-dualist union of the soul and the Absolute. But this vision of transcendental connection was predicated on the belief that one needed to withdraw from *maya*, the phenomenological world with its distractions, illusions, and false values. In these early times, he seemed to accept the need to achieve this goal and to endorse the quietist aspects of Advaita; but rather quickly he resisted tradition, and criticized the mismatch between Shakara's theoretical vision of the »unity of all beings« and the way Advaitists preserved mundane prerogatives in the here-and now, especially Brahmins. His formulation of »practical Vedanta«, however, discarded world-denial to promote engagement with the here-and-now through detached service to other human beings. It acknowledged the infinite contradictions of maya but argued that unity could be achieved through this highest form of God-Worship[20].

In the west, he struggled to convey this sense of Advaita through the interlinked search for the »realization of the self« and »consciousness of God«, which he regarded as two sides of the same coin. And through »practical Vedanta« challenged their view that Hinduism was in any way nihilistic. He thus challenged the Christian view of God as distinct from humanity, while also exploring the paradox of the »self« and »non-self« that was so difficult for westerners to understand. Vedanta, Vivekananda proclaimed, could embrace, comprehend, and even enhance other faiths with its special insights. This »universal« vision was tied to national regeneration, to a vision of »spiritual« India that entitled it to be the world's spiritual teacher.

His American sojourn began properly in New England in August 1893, when he was welcomed into the unusual world of highly-educated Yankee ladies, which included novelists, female lecturers, and reformers, women with old Puritan pedigrees, often substantial wealth, and links to Harvard academics and New England theologians. Even though they had fantasies about the »dark« Orient, for most Vivekananda was their first encounter with a real south Asian, let alone a Bengali

20 This is a very bare, even inadequate description of Vivekananda's revision of Advaita, and the bibliography is large. For the most recent and systematic examination, including an analysis of the work of others, see Medhananda, Swami Vivekananda's Vedāntic Cosmopolitanism, pp. 43–90.

intellectual. They were entranced by his beauty, intelligence, and wit, and overwhelmed him with both curiosity and hospitality. He was both celibate but manly, a combination that promoted an unthreatening intimacy. Although sexual boundaries were strictly observed, at times distressing emotional entanglements resulted in hurt on both sides.

For his part, Vivekananda understood that he was a curio, but realized America offered opportunities. He learned quickly about many different Protestant denominations and plunged into a world of alternative spiritual speculation and practice through what was called »New Thought«. This movement ranged from Theosophy and vegetarianism to mesmerism and homeopathy, as well as absorbing more orthodox scientific ideas. As will be seen, his western female followers »took in« the Vedantic message through the lens of these indigenous spiritual traditions, now burgeoning in the *fin de siècle*.

Many of Vivekananda's ideas concerning selfhood, consciousness, reality, and truth seemed tailor-made to address the worries of these genteel idealists, who had come to doubt both conventional Christianity *and* what they saw as a dangerous and reductive positivism[21]. They turned instead to the »sciences of mind«, and the healing cultures they produced, as well as being interested in the newer theories of psychology and anthropology. They listened rapt to his insights on perception, experience, and states of meditation. They were especially attentive when Vivekananda argued that modern science was compatible with the ancient wisdom of India. While Biblical criticism and evolutionary theory had undermined Christianity, he insisted instead that Indic religion was confirmed by the encounter. Moreover, he asserted that processes of creation and destruction – outlined in evolution – were already present in the laws of Karma. Science was spiritualized and religion scientized in a way that left their spiritual longings intact.

Above all, and in deliberate contrast to Christian missionaries, Vivekananda sought no converts and distanced himself from formalized church building (while creating Vedanta Societies). Instead, his goal was only to make »the Methodist a better Methodist; the Presbyterian a better Presbyterian; the Unitarian a better Unitarian«[22]. He did not try to compete with the established Christian churches. He sought instead to exemplify the »tolerance« that, for him, was the essence of Hinduism, describing India's welcome of Jews after the destruction of the 2nd Temple in Jerusalem, and the embrace of fleeing Zoroastrians. He therefore presented »Spiritual« India as the eternal refuge, a portrayal which set aside growing intercommunal rivalry between Hinduism and Islam as well as Untouchability in his

21 See Harris, Guru to the World, pp. 138–166.

22 Vivekananda, The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 5, p. 419.

homeland[23]. His discourse on »tolerance«, a word he did not really like, was central to his appeal and revealed another important aspect of an essentialised Hinduism that was internationalized.

From the beginning, women played a central role in explaining American society and religion to him while also transmitting his ideas to their fellow Americans. Their interactions were both life-enhancing and disruptive. He remarked in 1897 »If I have to come back again as a woman I must & will come as an American woman«[24]. He could not help but compare their privilege and freedom to the constraints that ruled Indian women, whose condition had been at the centre of both reformist and orthodox debate over »westernisation« or »indigenism« that Tanika Sarkar has so eloquently outlined[25]. After all, it was only two to three generations since the great debate over whether widows should be burnt on the funeral pyre of their husbands, a controversy that had put their plight at the centre of imperial controversy and reinforced a vision of contemporary Indian »barbarism«[26].

He believed these New England women to be remarkable but worried that women's »emancipation« might come through coercive processes of westernization. Although violently opposed to child marriage, he feared widow remarriage, and regarded it as a spiritual death. He also prized the mother-son bond above all other familial connections and saw fraternity – under the goddess of Mother India and of Kali – as central to his vision of Hindu unity and equality. Brides, he continued to believe, should take a subordinate role to the son's mother, until they became mothers in turn[27].

He also venerated Sarada Devi, the wife of Ramakrishna. Vivekananda always presented himself as Ramakrishna's disciple and, while he believed that Sarada was a saint, he never claimed such distinction for himself. For Vivekananda, she was central to how he envisaged the maternal in his theology, but she was, above all, a living spiritual guide. She instructed his guru-brothers to care for him when he went on pilgrimage, and he only went to the World's Parliament after she consented. When he returned to India for the first time in 1897, he washed himself in the

23 Peter Van der Veer, The Modern Spirit of Asia. The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India, Princeton, NJ 2013, p. 85.

24 For the full run of letters, see Swami Chetanananda, With Swamiji in India. J.J. Goodwin's Letters from India about Vivekananda, in: Swami Shuddhidananda (ed.), Vivekananda as the Turning Point. The Rise of a New Spiritual Wave, Kolkata 2013, pp. 480–490.

25 Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism, Bloomington, IN 2001, pp. 23–52.

26 See Lata Mani, Contentious Traditions. The Debate on Sati in Colonial India, Berkeley, CA 1998; and Tanika Sarkar, Rebels, Wives, Saints. Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times, London 2009, pp. 13–69.

27 Vivekananda, The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 6, pp. 145–149.

Ganges before meeting her so as not to contaminate her with foreign corruption[28]. Ordinarily, he condemned such rituals as »don't touchism«, but with her he readily cast aside his cloak of »enlightenment«.

2. Sarada Devi

Sarada Devi remains somewhat elusive, her life recorded in hagiography. She read – especially the Ramayana – but she did not write. We have instead personal reminiscences, which recount people's varied reactions to her, but not her own thoughts and feelings. However, even the hagiography cannot obscure her totally; indeed, the testimonies of the western women express Sarada's profound impact on them.

Sarada Devi was born as Saradamani Mukhopadhyay into an impoverished west Bengali Brahmin family in Jayrambati. Her village, like the larger region, struggled against growing impoverishment and environmental depredation, as well as the endemic malaria that this generated. She was married to Ramakrishna when she was six years old and he twenty-three[29]. This kind of union was not uncommon in nineteenth-century India where young girls lived with their own families until they reached puberty before joining their husbands in a new household.

Ramakrishna was a priest at the Dakshineswar Temple outside of Calcutta but had been sent home to recover his health after an extended period of visions and austerities. Alarmed at his state, his parents thought that marriage would ground him, but their hopes that he might become an ordinary householder were not realized. He returned to his spiritual trials and refused to have children, arguing that such earthly preoccupations should not concern him or his wife. He told Sarada instead that she was a goddess, so as not to be burdened by biological maternity. After his return alone to the Dakshineswar Temple, she re-joined him in 1872 upon learning that he had had another bout of madness. They only lived together for ten years of their twenty-six years marriage.

Sarada journeyed alone to find Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, a voyage now legendary in the annals of the Ramakrishna Mission. She is said to have braved hunger, exhaustion, and even brigands, who, when she addressed them with kindness, decided to escort her to the Temple and her husband[30]. She worried that Ramakrishna's initiation into an order of monks earlier in 1864 meant that he would send her away. Instead, he welcomed her, and she became his greatest disciple. Now eighteen, and considered fully mature, she again asked about children –

28 See Swami Purnatmananda (ed.), Reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi by Monastics, Devotees and Others, trans. Maloti Sen Gupta, Kolkata 2004, p. 9.

29 Swami Chetanananda, Sri Sarada Devi and her Divine Play, St. Louis, MO 2015, p. 65.

30 Swami Tapasyananda, Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother. Life and Teachings, Madras 1977, p. 97.

evidence of the ordinary longings she still retained. She is said to have lived with him in an unconsummated union for six months, during which she cared for him during intense periods of altered consciousness, fearful of his welfare but keen to help him in his spiritual search.

Moreover, Ramakrishna sacralised her in a ritual to Kali, adoring her as Shodashi, the pure maiden. She was later reported as saying: »First he painted my feet with *alta* [a red dye] put vermilion on my forehand, and clad me in a new cloth. He then fed me with sweets and a betel roll. I saw him doing all this, but I […] was in an ecstatic state and completely oblivious to the world«[31].

She then lived in the tiny room in the balconied building where musicians played for the pilgrims[32]. It was only in 1874 that a well-to-do householder provided her with decent accommodation[33]. She became increasingly important to the band of disciples that surrounded Ramakrishna, and ultimately became famous for the food that she cooked, varying the menus for each one according to his need and temperament. The men spoke often of the pleasure in her maternal indulgence, which seemed also to act as a metaphor for the way everyone »took in« God differently.

Her life, however, remained difficult, as she moved with her husband and his entourage when Ramakrishna was diagnosed with throat cancer. She tended him to the end but refused to behave as an ordinary widow after his death, retaining her marriage bangles, wearing a red-bordered *sari* (rather than replacing it with the pure white which widows wore), and refusing to shave her head. Her refusal to conform to these penitentiary customs was part of her belief that Ramakrishna was still alive, especially within her. She remained strong despite her sweetness. When she was apparently attacked by a mischievous disciple, she slapped him and held his tongue to make him stop. She tried to help sex workers against Ramakrishna's instructions, believing that she needed to use her own judgement to honour him. Moreover, in the aftermath of Ramakrishna's death he went on pilgrimage and travelled to many sacred sites between 1886 and 1887, thereby gaining a more expansive view of India than that of her husband. Ultimately, she was housed in Bagbazar, a Calcutta neighbourhood where she had an entourage of Brahmin women; and was supported especially by Yogananda, her attendant.

In Calcutta she received male visitors when veiled, but in the small home constructed for her in Jayrambati, her native village, she felt freer and appeared with her face uncovered. In this rural outpost, she became famous far and wide for her wisdom, counsel, blessings, and example. Her western friends were barred from

31 Chetanananda, Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play, p. 65.

32 Id., Sri Ramakrishna and his Divine Play, St. Louis, MO 2003, p. 680.

33 Ibid.

this home (she feared, it was claimed, upsetting the local people with this »invasion« of foreigners), but she willingly suffered the ill-health of this insalubrious district and the daily struggle of procuring provisions for her many visitors. She also experienced the heartache of raising a troubled and demanding »daughter«, the offspring of Ramakrishna's mentally unbalanced sister[34].

3. Western Women

The western women discussed below first came to Vedanta through Vivekananda, and only later to Sarada Devi. The first interaction involved them in the guru-disciple relationship and precipitated a process of spiritual self-questioning; the second connection came after a deeper commitment to Vedanta and important journeys to India. Their attraction to Hinduism entailed a religious transformation and was an experiment made possible by a new transnational context. All the women described below already came to these encounters with a rich – and sometimes complicated – spiritual history, which partially explained their susceptibility to Vivekananda's teachings. It is important here to understand that Hindu universalism was the final and most important of their religious engagements.

Let me begin with Sara Bull (see figure 4), a midwestern heiress and widow of the great Norwegian violinist, Ole Bull, who came into Vivekananda's orbit in 1893–4 and remained devoted to him and his cause for the rest of her life.

She was a wealthy, cosmopolitan socialite. Through Ole, Sara knew European and American singers, musicians, and artists, but was also comfortably ensconced into the Puritan establishment of Cambridge, Massachusetts, where her brother had married a Longfellow, the family who had produced the great American poet. Like Vivekananda's other disciples, she had become disillusioned with her Christian upbringing, and probably read the translations of the *Dhammapada*, a collection of the Buddha's aphorisms by the Harvard professor, Irving Babbitt. These words were as love-filled as any of the gospels, and this message, along with Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, were crucial in disseminating Buddhism in America and in her interest in »Oriental« sacred texts[35].

She participated in the post-Civil War vogue for spiritualism that was also tied to a more gentle view of Christianity. Women like Bull sought to create a vision of heaven that was softer and more intimate than that of their sterner Puritanical childhoods. Influenced by the spiritualist works of Elizabeth Phelps, this paradise had pearly

34 See the interesting account of Swami Saradeshananda, The Mother as I Saw Her. Reminiscences of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, trans. J.N. Dey, Madras 1982.

35 Irving Babbitt, Dhammapada. Translated from the Pali with an Essay on Buddha and the Occident, Oxford 1936, p. 3.

Figure 4: Sara Bull, a friend and supporter of Vivekananda.

gates and harp-playing angels, a vision of domestic bliss where ginger biscuits and strawberries were consumed[36]. Bull turned to spiritualism after her husband's death in 1880 and probably knew Henry Steel Olcott's *People from the Other World* (1875), a classic theosophical text which chronicled the famous spiritualist *séances* of the Eddy Brothers in Vermont.

This trajectory increasingly sidelined notions of »duty«, »sin«, »redemption«, and »punishment«, all themes which Vivekananda argued against from his earliest arrival abroad. The young William Hocking, a philosopher and friend of Bull's, recalled how Vivekananda called out during the Parliament: »Call men sinners?? – It is a sin to call men sinners!«. Hocking claimed that a »gasp [ran]through the hall«, as Vivekananda trampled on doctrines of original sin and Man's Fall. For Hocking, who had left his faith and turned to science and agnosticism instead, the prospect of a softened Christianity was almost literally a godsend[37].

Bull was even less orthodox than the young philosopher. She associated with Judson Minot Savage, a Unitarian Minister and medium, who had thrown away dogmas and creeds to embrace evolution, although not natural selection. Instead, he focused on »immanence«, on what was already within and only needed to burst

36 Faust, The Republic of Suffering, pp. 171–210.

37 Marie Louise Burke, Swami Vivekananda in the West. New Discoveries, his Prophetic Mission, vol. 1, Mayavati [4]1992, p. 118.

forth: »Things evolve from within, […] instead of being built and shaped from without«[38]. We tend to presume that ideas of »inherence« and heritability imply determinism, or even fatalism. But for people like Savage and Bull, such beliefs championed the »germ« of individuality and contained the first step towards self-realization. They envisaged a release from conventional Christian constraint, where nurture cultivated maturation. They thus appreciated Vivekananda's view of the *atman*, the »subtle body« or »soul« that remained intact despite the many cycles of reincarnation, which enabled the individual to move towards greater perfection.

The legacy of the Lutheran mystic, Emmanuel Swedenborg, was equally important in creating an inclusive fraternity bound together by what he called »influx«, the divine »life of everyone, whether man, spirit or angel«. Judson Minot Savage – like many others in New England society – were influenced by Swedenborg, who had written that the »deepest communication between our body and our spirit is with our breathing and heartbeat«[39]. Such teachings may have prepared Bull both for karma and for the »breath« or *prana* in yogic concentration. Indeed, contemporaries drew a line between Vivekananda and Swedenborg, with the *Detroit Free Press* describing him as the European successor of Vivekananda, »clothing in modern garb an ancient conviction […] [that] every individual has in himself perfection«[40]. Interestingly, this remark accepted Vivekananda's claim of Indic precedence and antiquity.

Bull next abandoned spiritualism under the influence of Mohini Mohan Chatterji, a Calcutta lawyer and scholar sent by Helen Blavatsky as one of her theosophical *chelas* or disciples to London and Ireland. Through his teaching, she read the Bhagavad Gita seriously and saw that many of her most prized Christian beliefs were confirmed in this Indian sacred text[41]. The encounter enabled her to re-engage with Christianity and to acquire an unaccustomed spiritual serenity. She now believed that Vedanta could strengthen rather than undermine faith by confirming the »same« God was everywhere. This turn to Indian spirituality as a way back

38 When she knew Minot J. Savage, he was writing, Poems of Modern Thought, London 1884; he later wrote Life Beyond Death. Being a Review of the World's Beliefs on the Subject, New York, NY 1905.

39 Emmanuel Swedenborg, A Swedenborg Sampler, trans. G.F. Dole et al., West Chester, PA 2011, p. 9.

40 Vivekananda, The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 3, pp. 496–502.

41 Mohini M. Chatterji, The Bhagavad Gita, or the Lord's Lay. With Commentary and Notes, as Well as References to the Christian Scriptures, Boston, MA 1887; and Mriganka Mukhopadhyay, Mohini. A Case Study of a Transnational Spiritual Space in the History of the Theosophical Society, in: Numen 67 (2020), pp. 165–190.

to one's own Christianity, would remain important in the early twentieth century among renegade Christians[42].

Vivekananda offered his first lessons in yoga at a summer encampment named Green Acre in Maine in the summer of 1894, where Sara Bull with another friend, Sarah Farmer, of Unitarian upbringing, continued the work of the World's Parliament. Green Acreites were interested in racial »uplift«, feminism, religious universalism, and often anti-imperialism[43]. Green Acre – which continued for 15 years before being absorbed into Bahá'í – was also linked to new forms of healing that derived from Christian Science and Theosophy[44]. Vivekananda repeatedly sought to separate Vedantic teaching from these seemingly overlapping teachings; and yet, he investigated them thoroughly, often using their vocabulary (both spiritual and scientific) to convey his meaning. He advanced similar ideas from an Advaitic perspective, absorbing western spiritual idioms, and recasting his explanations of Vedanta to make them comprehensible[45].

Bull's trajectory provides an example of a not uncommon road to Vedanta. And yet, it poses other questions. If, for example, Minot Judson Savage seemed to share so many of Vivekananda's ideas about individuality, human development, and the relationship to the »divine«, why was his Swedenborgian-Unitarian-spiritualist universalism insufficient for her needs? Why did she turn to Vivekananda? Her path is instructive *precisely* because there was nothing in her history that predestined her to such a trajectory.

Certainly, the encounter with the Bhagavad Gita seemed to enable her to enter an ethical realm where the fear of divine punishment simply evaporated. But there was more, and it was above all Vivekananda himself that mattered. He had described how the relationship between the guru and the disciple was one between the individual's soul and the divine, that the love the guru offered was even higher than that of parental love. She was enthralled by his warmth, attentiveness, and humor, qualities that were so very different from Christian clergymen of New England. Throughout her massive correspondence – and until her death when she was haunted yet again by malignant fears and spiritualist demons – she remained distressed by her unhappy relationship with her daughter, Olea. The ache remained with her forever, with Vivekananda tending her pain and personally bent on their reconciliation[46].

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42 Thomas Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, London 2009, pp. 191–199; and Romain Rolland, The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel, vol. 2, Almora 1947, pp. 395f., suggest how India might revivify Christian mystical traditions.

43 See Harris, Guru to the World, pp. 189–216.

44 For Bahá'í and a comparison to Vedanta see id., Vivekananda, Sarah Farmer, and Global Spiritual Transformations in the Fin de Siècle, in: Journal of Global History 14 (2019), pp. 179–198.

45 Harris, Guru to the World, pp. 167–216.

46 Ibid., pp. 395–410.

Stricken by these difficulties, she was delighted to become a new »mother« and even saw herself as Sarada Devi's mirror image – despite the vast difference in education, sensibility, and culture. She first encountered Sarada on March 17, 1898, when she arrived with Josephine MacLeod and Margaret Noble (also known as Sister Nivedita), the other western women vital to all of Vivekananda's early enterprises. For Sara Bull, Sarada Devi was a goddess whom she likened to the Virgin Mary. As a Brahmin woman normally constrained by interdictions against dining with non-Hindus, it was remarkable that Sarada both welcomed Vivekananda's western female associates and shared food with them.

From the beginning, Bull sought spiritual illumination from Sarada, seeking to understand what »obedience« to the Guru might mean. Sarada explained that in spiritual matters, the guru was an authority, but otherwise, the best means of serving him and his teachings was by using one's own discernment, even if this meant going against his suggestions. Such remarks recall the way Sarada had »disobeyed« Ramakrishna when she helped sex workers. She even remarked to another female devotee: »One may be outspoken even with one's Guru – it is not a sin«[47]. »Freedom«, therefore, existed within »obedience«, another indication of the paradoxical cancelling of opposites to which both she and Vivekananda repeatedly referred.

While in India, Bull had donated a massive sum to help construct the Ramakrishna Math and Mission that Vivekananda was establishing[48]. Moreover, she may well have believed that with Vivekananda and Sarada she was creating a new »world religion« and thus furthered the cause of universalism. She somehow comprehended Sarada's importance to this undertaking when she urged Sarada to be photographed (see figure 5). As a woman who lived mostly in seclusion, Sarada's acquiescence in this plan was nothing short of audacious[49]. This early depiction is famous and has now travelled around the world.

Sara Bull's life changed after meeting Sarada. She made sure to keep an image of Sarada near her while in America, and sent a monthly stipend of 60 rupees, so that Sarada could use the money as she saw fit. She also left a large, and disputed, legacy on her death to the Ramakrishna Mission. Above all, she exemplified what Vivekananda meant when he asserted that he sought no conversions. Bull recovered her Christianity, but now somehow felt that Vedanta had encompassed herself and the world. Sarada was intimately involved in this process.

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47 See »Sara Ole Bull«, in: Purnatmananda, Reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi, p. 150.

48 Swami Prabhananda, The First Phase of Ramakrishna Movement (1872 to 1905). Laying the Foundation, in: Swami Lokeswarananda et al. (eds.), The Story of Ramakrishna Mission, Kolkata 2006, p. 253.

49 See Purnatmananda, Reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi, pp. 149–151.

Figure 5: Sri Sarada Devi was the wife and spiritual consort of Ramakrishna.

4. Josephine MacLeod

Josephine MacLeod was different from both Sara Bull and Margaret Noble, as Vivekananda was never her guru. Instead, she came to Vivekananda as friend, counsellor, and international advocate. If she was not a bona fide renouncer, she was similar to Margaret Noble and Sara Bull in swearing herself to celibacy and in worshipping him: for example, when Vivekananda died, she had Lalique, the great French jeweller, create a magnificent bejewelled »reliquary« that contained a few strands of Vivekananda's hair[50]. She wore this necklace for the rest of her life. These women all shared this devotion.

Josephine was the unmarried sister of Betty Leggett, herself a wife to Frank Leggett, a rich wholesale grocer. The sisters were the daughters of Scottish immigrants and raised in Calvinism. Moreover, they had experienced a peripatetic and intermittently impoverished childhood before becoming prosperous when Betty married (for a second time) Leggett. While Betty became a European hostess, Josephine was put in charge of her children from the first marriage, as well as Frances, the child of the new union. She travelled with the family and kept them afloat, both through the practical administration of their affairs, but also through her spiritual links to Vivekananda[51].

50 Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, Tantine. The Life of Josephine MacLeod, Friend of Swami Vivekananda, Dakshineswar 1990, p. 136.

51 Harris, Guru to the World, p. 367.

Like Bull, she experimented with different spiritual possibilities, but never wavered once she had met Vivekananda. Josephine believed that Vedanta had freed her, especially from the fear of sin and punishment, and had given her the cause of aiding India on its path to self-reliance. Vivekananda depended on Josephine for her practical and moral help and benefitted from her knack for bringing people together both during social gatherings and even across continents. Indeed, it was through her offices that Okakura Kakuzo (the famous Japanese art historian) came within their orbit when he helped to shape the Bengal School of Art. And, if Freud knew about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, he learned about them through Josephine, who had travelled to Switzerland to meet the famous pacifist Romain Rolland and to promote the Math and Mission. Rolland later wrote to Freud about Ramakrishna[52].

Josephine, with her usual perspicacity, wrote of Sarada: »She is the real thing, gentle, strong, human and with such insight!«. On another occasion, she asserted that Sarada »is the divine Madonna of this new religious Order«. In describing her in this way, she acknowledged the Christian lens through which she saw Sarada's spiritual achievements. She also understood Sarada's importance as a guru when she spoke of »two young monks« and the way Sarada »baptized them on the forehead and top of the head with Ganges water and said, ›All sins of this life are destroyed and of all previous lives‹«[53]. Again, baptism was her model, even if she understood that Christian atonement was different from Hindu austerities. She was also clearly moved by the way Sarada took their transgression onto herself, releasing the young men into a new life in a way that reminded her of Christ's sacrifice. Josephine, like many others, believed that Sarada had prevision, that she was able to know in a glance if someone was worthy of her discipleship.

She shared the views of Sarada's devoted follower, Gopal Chaitanya, when she quoted him: »Sarada Devi's disciples are numbered by the thousands while Ramakrishna's were a handful and Swamiji's [Vivekananda] is by hundreds, for you see, Sarada Devi outlived Swamiji by over twenty years' [sic]«[54].

Quoting Chaitanya again, Josephine perceived the difficulty of Sarada's daily life:

> In her own immediate family she was much put upon. Her niece, a very disagreeable girl, sleeping in the same bed and pestering her life a good deal […] to the end she was a heavy burden and an invalid. What I love to know is the intimate real home relationships of this great woman, who was literally worshipped while she lived[55].

52 See »Josephine MacLeod«, in: Purnatmananda, Reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi, p. 143.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., p. 144.

55 Ibid., p. 145.

Once again, Sarada Devi's mystique was grounded in an ordinariness that was widely deemed to be extraordinary. One could relate to her troubles and feel that she shared one's own. Like the veils that obscured her face, the supernatural existed in what was invisible.

5. Margaret Noble

A woman of Scots-Irish descent, Noble was an educator and reformer in London's *avant garde* who followed Vivekananda to Calcutta in 1898. He christened her the »Dedicated One«, or Sister Nivedita, and she set herself the task both of articulating his world significance and embedding aspects of his theology into a nascent Indian nationalism[56]. She was a friend of Kropotkin and had connections to early Indian radicals such as Aurobindo Ghose, Bhupendranath Dutta (Vivekananda's brother) and Ashwini Kumar Dutta. The last was a pioneer in the Indian boycott movement, or Swadeshi, which was so important during the struggles over the partition of Bengal after 1905[57]. Sister Nivedita is well-known and often venerated in Bengal and in India at large.

She »Hinduized« herself much more thoroughly than Sara Bull. For a time, she lived in semi-seclusion in Calcutta, worshipping both Kali and Sarada Devi, and trying to become the »Hindu woman« that Vivekananda claimed he wanted. At the same time, she remained profoundly Christian; her letters reveal extraordinary moments when she taught Sarada's attendants about the Christian wedding ceremony; continued to construct little mangers with animals at Christmas; and continued to pray, fervently, invoking Shiva – the Creator of the Universe and the patron of yoga, meditation, and the arts – but also as a Christian.

Despite her serious study of Hinduism, much of Noble's »conversion« rested on a constant translation of Christian ideas and symbols into Hinduism, a form of psychic back-and-forth that internalized both difference and universalism. This process was the essence of her religious transformation. The Baby Jesus was likened

56 See Harris, Guru to the World, pp. 308–394; Reba Som, Margot. Sister Nivedita of Vivekananda, New Delhi 2017; see Sister Nivedita, The Master as I Saw Him, in: Pravrajika Atmapranam (ed.), The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita, vol. 1, Calcutta [3]1972, pp. 15–277; Lizelle Reymond, The Dedicated. A Biography of Nivedita, New York, NY 1953; Gwilym Beckerlegge, The »Irishness« of Margaret Noble/Sister Nivedita, in: Prabuddha Bharata 122/1 (2017), pp. 118–136, at p. 122; Swami Prabuddhaprana, Sister Nivedita in Contemporary Newspapers, Dakshineswar 2017; and Amiya Sen (ed.), An Idealist in India. Selected Writings and Speeches of Sister Nivedita, Chennai 2016, pp. 1–45.

57 Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908, New Delhi 2011.

to Baby Krishna; Indian gods and goddesses compared to the saint cults of Catholicism; and Mary re-embodied in Sarada Devi. Above all, she was unusual in the way her Hinduization occurred through a double-barrelled critique of Protestantism. She was an Irish Protestant, yet readily admitted that she had always been attracted to »priestcraft« and Catholicism. She thus already had close at hand a religious »other« which might have offered the aesthetic spirituality she craved. Why then did she take this further step towards Vivekananda and Hinduism?

The reasons were many – and were both existential *and* intellectual/political. She, unlike Bull, openly articulated her dislike for what she saw as Protestantism's »dryness«. For example, she disliked the work of the French Protestant scholar, Paul Sabatier, whose *Vie de Saint François d' Assise* (1893) had presented the saint as a human rather than divine being whose innate radicalism was tied to his identification with the poor. Although she also focused on the plight of the masses, Nivedita rejected the book's liberalism, pietism, and individualism because it had »so little of the Catholic Aroma«! This reference conjured not only the perfume of incense, but her desire to uphold a sensuality that Protestantism somehow lacked. And she objected because Sabatier's work was »so *definite*«. She continued: »I have watched beside a Life greater in degree [she spoke of Vivekananda] but of one kind with that of Francis, and [I] know […] that things are not definite«. When seeing pictures of Giotto's frescoes, for example, she maintained that Assisi's Catholicism revealed that »things […] are not definite – but flowing – and plastic – like a child's dreams«[58].

Vivekananda's guru, Ramakrishna, famously prized childhood and ridiculed adult, householder responsibilities. Even Vivekananda, despite his manly air, would climb onto »Kali's lap« at moments of spiritual crisis or recuperation, enjoying the »non-self« of childhood mysticism as a necessary counterweight to practical action. As an innovative teacher of children in her earlier career in America, Noble understood imaginative play (and had sought to cultivate it in Britain, America, and India). She believed that the young, unlike adults, did not distinguish overmuch between temporal reality, their psychic inventions, and what was invisible. This merging, she insisted, was essential for mystical creativity. It also, in her view, underpinned the unity of Self and Cosmos that Vivekananda had preached in Advaita.

She like so many in her generation – including her patroness Sara Bull – became disenchanted with Christianity because it perceived »truth« too rigidly and thus suffered from the challenges of science and Biblical criticism: »In all sincerity hearts cry out for the moorings of their childhood but the waves and the billows of Doubt

58 Sister Nivedita, Letters 1903–1911, in: Sankari Prasad Basu (ed.), Letters of Sister Nivedita, vol. 2, Calcutta 1960, pp. 630–632.

are the whole reply – ›Truth! Truth! Truth‹ implores the spirit of man, and ›Truth, or our GOD?‹ queries back the mocking spirit of the Age«[59].

In contrast, Indic thought, she claimed, distinguished between eternal and symbolic truths and was hence untroubled by western fears of »killing God«. India did not reject the divine simply because scripture was not literally true. She explained that the sub-continent's:

> humblest scholar, dealing with his dearest myth, will distinguish between Eternal Truths or Vedas, and symbolic truths, or Purans.
> When JESUS says thou shalt love the Lord thy God – he will say – »it is a Veda« – but when it says »JESUS was born in B[ethleham]. Of J[oseph]« – it is a Puran[60].

By distinguishing between different kinds of »truth« she cast aside what she saw as peculiar western spiritual insecurities. Protestantism had taught her that there was a distinction between »superstitions« and »true religion«. In northern Ireland, especially, »superstition« was denounced by Protestant anti-clerics while the Catholic clergy condemned »heathenish« (Celtic) practices among the Irish poor. Hinduism, and especially Vivekananda's Hindu Universalism, permitted her to re-think and soften the adamantine boundaries of both and to expand what »Universal Truth« meant. She yearned to relate every myth and ritual to these central truths: »You see, I was already so convinced beyond return of the falsehood of beliefs«[61]. Understanding the difference between Universal Truth and Symbolic Truth – while embracing both – was central to the spiritual reconciliation that Hinduism provided.

Moreover, her study of the »symbolic« put her at the cutting edge of western thought. From the interpretation of dreams, through her analysis of Celtic and Indian fairy tales, to the symbolic study of art and architecture, the »mythological« was central to the study of collective consciousness. She felt that Vedanta's teachings had allowed her to unravel these connections.

She also came to believe that Christianity was inherently exclusive. Salvation came not »through the medium of [a] Church or [a] Creed«, which had the effect of creating only walls that divided the »Faithful and the INFIDELS«, and necessarily fostered »militarism and imperialism«. She essentialized Vivekananda's teachings about flexibility and adaptation and celebrated the possibility of the Hindu »embrace«. As she remarked: »Hinduism would not be eternal were it not […] for this

59 Nivedita, Letters of Sister Nivedita, vol. 1, p. 353.
60 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 354.
61 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 685f.

power of self-addition and re-adaptation […]«[62]. This idealist universalism meant that she was blind to the problems of Hindu »tolerance«. She never considered that individuals and communities might not want to shelter under the Vedantic umbrella and would perceive Advaita as intrinsically Hindu.

I have described Nivedita here in rather narrow intellectual terms. But she was passionate, and completely altered by the impact of her unusual adventure of following a Hindu guru to the slums of Calcutta. She lost her western airs and conceded that the British Empire, rather than being a force for good, was in fact coercive and subjugating. Indeed, it was under Vivekananda's direction that she came to this conclusion, as he upbraided her for a patriotism that he considered a »sin«[63].

Nivedita never separated out her political and intellectual aspirations from her affective connections; and, in the world of Bagbazar and in her dealings with Vivekananda, she recognized that she was undergoing a profound transformation and creating a new family, one to whom she felt as loyal – if not more loyal – than to her northern Irish relatives. She spoke vividly of Vivekananda as a new Father, the man she had chosen to replace the man who had died when she was ten. She wrote too of a »personal love« for Vivekananda that had changed her life, and she acknowledged that his instruction had been both the most intensely »*personal*« and »*impersonal*« of her life[64]. She came to believe that the strength of her love for Vivekananda had taught her a greater love, both for herself and humankind.

But she wrote too of Sarada Devi, a new Mother, who would become as important as Vivekananda. To understand the impact of Sarada on her, we need to know something of Nivedita's own past. She had first been raised by a grandmother in northern Ireland during her first four years, before rediscovering her parents in England when they came with a new sibling[65]. She wrote that her own mother had been stern, unforgiving, and critical, and Nivedita acknowledged that she had internalized this harshness when judging herself. But with Sarada Devi, things were different.

At first, Nivedita was struck by Sarada's limitations and proclaimed that Sarada was perfect »in feeling«, but had »no range« in »*thought*, outside […] practical experience«[66]. She soon, however, wondered if Sarada's judgement might be better than her own. For an often intellectually snobbish Nivedita, this was a revelation. As she lived with Sarada and created, with her, a feminine community in Bagbazar in Calcutta (her home, the school for girls, and Sarada's entourage nearby), she also inhabited the enclosed world of the *zenana*, and reflected on the relationship

62 Id., Complete Works of Sister Nivedita, vol. 3, p. 384.

63 See Harris, Guru to the World, pp. 308–330.

64 Nivedita, Letters of Sister Nivedita, vol. 1, pp. 378–380.

65 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 72–74.

66 Ibid., pp. 75–77, at p. 76.

between domesticity, maternalism, and spirituality. Aspects of her »reactionary« profile came from this celebration of the Indian home, idealizations that tended to lock away women in a cultural nationalism almost as restrictive as the *zenanas* that hid them.

These idealizations of the perfect »Hindu household«, no matter how discomfiting to our contemporary sensibilities and deceptive of the larger reality, derived from Nivedita's constant amazement at Sarada's capacity to discern and judge with sureness and integrity; she also did so with a lightness of touch that Nivedita did not have. Sarada's winsomeness was matched by self-possession. Nivedita explained what she meant when speaking of the Mother's comportment during the first photography session: »You know that photograph (Mother's first photograph) meant the first time she had ever looked straight at a grown-up man outside her own family, or been seen by one. Yet what self-consciousness was there? Not a grain«[67].

She was amazed at Sarada's gestures, how, »when a man speaks to her, he stands behind her, and she pulls the white veil very far forward over her face«[68]. Nivedita said that Sarada whispered to an older woman who, in turn, repeated her words to the man. Nivedita was astonished by the way Vivekananda was in awe of her and had never seen Sarada's face.

As the consort of the *avatara*, the monks often regarded her as holy as her husband and treated her with deference. Stories confirm the way that Sarada and her female entourage ceased their laughter and chattering the moment a monk announced a male visitor: »Even fanning ceases, veils are quietly dropped, saris drawn up to cover the whole person – a back is turned to the door, if the lady sits in the middle of the floor […] The man comes […] and touches the threshold with his forehead, or comes in and touches the Mother's feet«[69]. Yet again, the veil was important not only to Sarada's modesty, but also in heightening religious longing. In a society in which visual »beholding« (*darshan*) of the goddess was so prized, Sarada's hiddenness exemplified and intensified her sacrality. For Nivedita who always idealized people, Sarada was »old« and »new« in a rare combination (see figure 6):

> To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new? In her, one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of woman may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as

67 Purnatmananda, Reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi, p. 115.

68 Ibid., p. 122.

69 Ibid.

Figure 6: Sri Sarada Devi (left) with Sister Nivedita, born Margaret Elizabeth Noble.

> wonderful as her sainthood. Her whole experience is of theocratic civilization. Yet she rises to the height of every situation […][70].

Sarada Devi, at first glance as different from Sara Bull, Josephine MacLeod, and Nivedita as can be imagined, was none the less the key figure of the group. She believed herself to be Ramakrishna's legatee, but she fulfilled her role through a combination of orthodoxy and unconventionality. She remained veiled, obscure even to Vivekananda, but insisted that Ramakrishna lived on, hence why she retained her marriage bangles that widowed women were obliged to discard. These attributes made her Vivekananda's perfect support – she remained in seclusion but was willing to break Brahmin taboos by eating food with the foreign women whom he brought to her door. Her willingness to be photographed was another instance of an almost scandalous innovation. She was admired precisely because she was an »ideal type« (especially to Nivedita) but was also a woman with problems not unlike their own. Moreover, she seemed to have this lofty spiritual intelligence deeply grounded in practicality.

Nivedita championed what Sarada represented, and worshipped her as a goddess, but she stayed on her own unique path as teacher, author, journalist, and radical. Sara, the society lady of Cambridge, Massachusetts, supplied both the money and the emotional support to keep the early endeavour afloat. Josephine survived them both and contributed further to the homage that Sarada enjoyed. If they revered Sarada, however, we may regard her »sacralization« more ambivalently. Her

70 Ibid., pp. 111f.

self-abasement and apparent tranquillity gave her a degree of spiritual dominion that Vivekananda acknowledged. Although she emerges from the hagiographies as strong and determined, the pain of her childless destiny is obscured in her saintliness. And, while her motherhood to her troubled niece was real, this part of her life was sealed away from the western women and her »public« in urban Calcutta. Although the »feminization of religion« also placed western women on a pedestal, Sarada's spiritualization was even more enveloping. Nivedita both promoted this ideal but at the same time sought to break the mould for herself by doing work generally reserved for men.

From a twenty-first-century perspective we may find Sarada's idealization troublingly anchored in female self-abnegation and repression – indeed the very opposite of »emancipation«. Nonetheless, Sarada was worshipped both as a remarkable human being and as a bona fide goddess. No matter what we feel, however, there is no doubt that religious transformations, once placed in a global and transnational frame, help us radically shift our ideas about the »feminization of religion« in the nineteenth century. They reveal how western women could be radical in their anti-imperialism and hostility to Christian mission, but also appreciative of a vision of maternal authority and female spirituality that many western feminists, then and now, would regard as reactionary. And yet, Sarada was their guide, despite their more »feminist« inclinations while back in the west. There was, therefore, no predictable set of positions that qualified as »progressive« in a Hindu Universalism which championed »self-realisation«, but which was also permeated by an anti-colonialism that resisted what were seen as cultural impositions. This was a form of »self-realisation« that necessarily had to be cast in a very different mould.

Cristiana Facchini

»God in Freedom«. Luigi Luzzatti and his Global Theory of Religious Freedom

1. Overture: Chicago 1893 and Rome 1908

Two evocative images encapsulate the essence of religious debates during the long nineteenth century. The first pertains to the World's Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago during the Columbian Exposition in 1893. While the exposition transformed Chicago into the famed »White City« symbolizing the emergence of a powerful industrial and technological nation, it also fostered a distinctive discourse on religion[1].

Amid the flourishing industrial metropolis, the first World Parliament of Religions convened as an ecumenical gathering of representatives from diverse religious traditions. Spearheaded by progressive figures within American Protestantism, the Parliament provided unprecedented public visibility to lesser-known religions, previously familiar only to a handful of scholars. Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and various Christian denominations were represented, alongside modern religious movements such as Christian Science, Spiritualism, and the Bahá'í faith.

While the World's Parliament of Religions has faced its share of criticism, it undeniably embodied the defining tensions and complexities of an era marked by the rise of the nation-state, the colonial enterprise, and evolving discourses on religion. This period, often described as one of secularization – what Max Weber famously called the »disenchantment of the world« – is frequently portrayed as a time when religion was relegated to the margins of an increasingly irreligious society. Yet, alternative perspectives suggest a contrasting narrative: the nineteenth century as an age of religious flourishing, accompanied by the advance of science

1 Richard Hughes Seager, The World's Parliament of Religions. The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893, Bloomington, IN 2009; Reid R. Badger, The Great American Fair. The World's Columbian Exposition & American Culture, Chicago, IL 1979; Amy Kittelstrom, The International Social Turn. Unity and Brotherhood at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893, in: Religion and American Society. A Journal of Interpretation 19/2 (2009), pp. 243–274. The Parliament performed religions in many different modes. On this topic see also: John P. Burris, Exhibiting Religion. Colonialism and Spectacle at International Exposition, 1851–1893, Charlottesville, VA 2001; some chapters in Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums, and Heritage, Berkeley, CA/Los Angeles, CA 1998.

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and also human rights. As traditional churches waned in their influence over lifestyles and worldviews, new religious movements began to emerge. Confronted with the rapid transformations brought about by science and technology, existing traditions were compelled to repurpose their goals – either by offering solace to societies grappling with the upheavals of industrial capitalism and the spread of racism, or by advocating for the ideals of lost traditional societies. In some cases, entirely new religions arose to address the existential anxieties of the time[2].

This intricate and fluid religious landscape was not confined to isolated regions but spanned a world increasingly interconnected by the forces of economic globalization and colonial expansion. A nascent globalized world was taking shape, transforming not only economies and societies but also the ways religion was understood, imagined, and practiced.

The second image takes us to Rome, where Anesaki Masaharu (1873–1949), a professor at the Imperial University of Tokyo, met with Luigi Luzzatti, the renowned economist and member of the Italian Parliament. During his years in Europe, Masaharu immersed himself in the study of philosophy and the humanities, laying the groundwork to become one of the pioneers of Comparative Religion (*shūkyōgaku*) in Japan[3].

In his notebook, Anesaki recorded his visit to Assisi and Rome while researching Saint Francis and medieval Italian art to lay the groundwork for some of his comparative studies. When in Rome he visited Luigi Luzzatti. The two men engaged in discussions about religion, focusing on the differences between Buddhism and Christianity. Their dialogue highlighted Buddhism's historical tendency toward tolerance, particularly its lack of support for religious wars and violence, in contrast to Christianity's more contentious history in this regard[4].

The study of Buddhism in Europe began during the Baroque period, gained traction among members of the Enlightenment, and matured into a formal academic field in the nineteenth century[5]. This wave of interest in Oriental religions spread throughout the west, captivating intellectuals who perceived them either

2 Christopher A. Bayly, The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914, Oxford 2004 (the chapter on »Empires of Religion«); Jürgen Osterhammel, The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century, engl. trans. Princeton, NJ 2014.

3 Annibale Zambarbieri, Luzzatti e la cultura dell'estremo Oriente, in: Luigi Luzzatti Presidente del Consiglio, edited by Pier Luigi Ballini and Paolo Pecorari, Venezia 2011, pp. 325–366; Jason A. Josephson, The Invention of Religion in Japan, Chicago, IL 2012, pp. 246, 248. Susanna Fessler, The Pure Land of Assisi. Anesaki Masaharu in Italy, in: East Asian Studies Faculty Scholarship 15 (2010); see also her translation into English of his travel diary, id., Hanatsumi Nikki – The Flowers of Italy, Kumamoto 2020.

4 Zambarbieri, Luzzatti e la cultura dell'estremo Oriente.

5 Urs App, The Birth of Orientalism, Philadelphia, PA 2010; Philip C. Almond, The British Discovery of Buddhism, Cambridge 1988.

as religions without a deity (Buddhism) or infused with deeper spiritual meaning. Émile Durkheim for instance, in his *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, often referred to Buddhism as a religion without deities, in the attempt to ground his theory of religion that moved beyond the concept of God as its central focus[6]. It is worth noting how intellectuals, politicians, and scholars of religion shared a mutual fascination with Buddhism, and how this interest seamlessly permeated public life.

Moreover, famous orientalists such as Friedrich Max Müller played a central role in shaping the scholarly representation of Buddhism and other religions of Asia. His immense project, *Sacred Books of the East* brought several texts of Oriental religious and philosophical traditions to the attention of a western scholarly audience[7]. This enterprise involved intellectuals belonging to these religious traditions as well, therefore Japanese scholars also contributed significantly to defining the contours of Buddhism. This effort was notably showcased at the World's Parliament of Religions, where Japanese representatives sought to position Buddhism as a global religion – a modern gift from Japan to the world and a source of national prestige[8]. Yet, their ambitions were overshadowed by Swami Vivekananda, who emerged as the Parliament's most celebrated figure by introducing a modernized vision of Hinduism to the global stage[9].

These two images highlight the significance of the intellectual and political debates surrounding religion while providing an opportunity to introduce the topic of this article and its main protagonist, Luigi Luzzatti (1841–1927). One of the few prime ministers of the Kingdom of Italy of Jewish descent, Luzzatti was the supporter of an interesting theory of »religious tolerance«, or »religious freedom«. Neither a dedicated historian of religion nor a famous orientalist, Luzzatti was instead a prominent politician, an expert of Constitutional Law, and a gifted economist who actively contributed to the reform of the Italian banking system. His remarkable biographical trajectory serves as an ideal starting point for exploring several key themes about the role and interpretation of religion in the long nineteenth century, whilst crossing the personal choices of a man who belonged to a minority that went through a long process of political emancipation[10]. Furthermore, this article

6 Émile Durkheim, Les forms elementaries de la vie religieuse, Paris 1912.

7 Nirad C. Chauduri, Scholar Extraordinary. The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller, London 1974; Arie L. Molendijk, Friedrich Max Müller and the Sacred Books of the East, Cambridge 2016; For a critical reading on the »invention« of Oriental religions see: Tomoko Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, Chicago, IL 2005.

8 Judith Snodgrass, Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West, Chapel Hill, NC/London 2003, p. 2.

9 Ruth Harris, Guru to the World. The Life and Legacy of Swami Vivekananda, Cambridge/London 2022.

10 For the process of political emancipation of the Jews, see the more recent David Sorkin, Jewish Emancipation. A History Across Five Centuries, Princeton, NJ 2019.

highlights the emergence, by the early twentieth century, of a distinctive public discourse on religion and »religious pluralism« – one that transformed how religions were conceptualized and engaged within an increasingly interconnected world.

2. Leaving the Jewish Fold: A Grand »Juif d' État«

> Few Italian political men are so well known, at least outside the Peninsula, as Luigi Luzzatti. At home, his untiring, political, economic and scientific activity, his long parliamentary career, have kept him constantly before the public eye. Abroad he is known because he negotiated important commercial treatises and represented Italy at international congresses, while his writings have had the honor of being translated in several languages. […] He is the most encyclopedic man of the Kingdom[11].

These few lines, written by Helen Zimmern in 1915 for a book designed to introduce a British audience to prominent Italian political figures of the time, capture some essential traits of Luzzatti's personality. Zimmern, a British woman of German-Jewish heritage, was a distinguished journalist who relocated to Florence at the turn of the nineteenth century. There, she became a contributor to prominent publications such as *Corriere della Sera* and the *Florentine Gazette*[12].

Luigi Luzzatti, a Jewish statesman, had become a prominent figure in the Italian Parliament and had briefly held the office of Prime Minister in 1910/11, by the time of Zimmern's book. Her portrayal of Luzzatti underscored his profound impact on economics and politics, while also highlighting his keen interest in religious matters. To Zimmern, Luzzatti embodied the successful integration of Jews into Italian society[13].

The transformations that enabled Jews to attain full citizenship in their respective countries, along with their paths to integration into these new forms of society, have been widely analyzed and often encapsulated in the concepts that combine

11 Helen Zimmern, Italian Leaders of To-Day, London 1915.

12 See, id., Corriere di Londra, 1884–1910, edited by Caterina Del Vivo, Milan 2014. See also New York Times, January 13, 1934.

13 See also her portrayal of another famous Italian Jew, David Levi: Helen Zimmern, David Levi, Poet and Patriot, in: The Jewish Quarterly Review 9/3 (1897), pp. 363–402; Samuel H. Margulies, Dichter und Patriot, Trier 1896. On Levi's public Jewish figure see: Alessandro Grazi, David Levi. A Child of the Nineteenth Century, in: Tullia Catalan/Cristiana Facchini (eds.), Portrait of Italian Jews (1800s–1930s), in: Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History 8 (2015), URL: <http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=363> (2025-04-23) and id., Prophet or Renewal. A Jewish Freemason and Saint-Simonian in Nineteenth-century Italy, Leiden 2022.

the notions of emancipation and assimilation[14]. The period that began with the Habsburg Empire's reforms and continued with the French Revolution brought immeasurable changes to Jewish society, fostering the emergence of a modern bourgeoisie and middle class throughout the nineteenth century. These changes did not erase the social question, as millions of impoverished Jews in the Russian Empire continued to face persecution, both through violence and legal restrictions. By the end of the nineteenth century, millions of these »eastern« Jews had emigrated to the United States joining waves of Italian, Polish, and Scandinavian immigrants[15]. The legal process that enabled Jews in western Europe to become part of national communities granted them an unprecedented social and political status; nevertheless, it was neither without cost nor free of obstacles. The rise and spread of political antisemitism are a case in point. Emerging in different waves and across various countries, political antisemitism was often kept in check by the liberal system's ability to neutralize it[16]. However, in the aftermath of World War I, this began to change.

Indeed, in 1934, two decades later, Hector Bolitho, another British journalist, published a collection of short portraits of prominent Jewish figures. The cultural and political context had shifted dramatically since the earlier period. One world war had ravaged Europe, deeply unsettling its political values. The Bolshevik Revolution had marked the demise of »religion« while new »national and social revolutions« took shape under the banners of Fascism and Nazism. Against this backdrop, a book devoted to *Twelve Eminent Jews* in 1934 carried a very different resonance from the former published in 1915 by Helen Zimmern[17].

Luigi Luzzatti had actually passed away in 1927, just a few years before his last book was translated into English under the title *God in Freedom* (1930). In Bolitho's book, Luzzatti appeared alongside other distinguished Jews who had left an indelible mark on European culture[18].

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14 A whole generation of historians have dwelt with this topic. As a point of reference see, Jacob Katz, Emancipation and Assimilation. Studies in Modern Jewish History, Westmead 1972.

15 Migratory waves reached also south America, and other western European countries.

16 See Abigail Green/Simon Levis Sullam (eds.), Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism. A Global History, Cham 2020.

17 Hector Bolitho, Twelve Jews, Freeport, NY 1934. Although the author claims the book bears no political claim, as it was planned years before the rise of Nazism (Introduction).

18 The list is the following: Lord Bearstead (Marcus Samuel), the founder of Shell; Benjamin Disraeli, the celebrated British politician; Paul Ehrlich, the renowned scientist; Jacob Epstein, the acclaimed sculptor; Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis; Ludwig Mond, a pioneering scientist; Marcel Proust, the eminent French novelist; Walther Rathenau, the German Foreign Minister; Max Reinhardt, the influential film director; Leon Trotsky, the revolutionary figure; and Chaim Weizmann, the prominent Zionist leader and scientist. The collection of articles, modeled on

A few years later, a distinctly different form of representation emerged. Articles on Luigi Luzzatti published in Fascist Italy grew increasingly aggressive as the regime became more overtly antisemitic. With the enactment of the racial laws, the figure of the »eminent Jew« was recast as a particularly dangerous adversary. *La difesa della razza*, a virulently antisemitic publication, portrayed the former prime minister as the quintessential representative of Zionism and Judaism, thereby rendering him a public enemy. Moreover, Luzzatti was blamed for the perceived decline of Liberal Italy. He was accused of being responsible for the mass emigration of Italians to America, the deterioration of diplomatic relations with Romania, and for his unwavering protection of religious minorities[19]. Luzzatti was vilified as part of an »alien race« that had »invaded« and appropriated Italy during the nineteenth century[20]. Alongside many European Jews who had played a pivotal role in shaping the modern world, Luzzatti was swiftly recast as a national enemy.

All biographical accounts of Luigi Luzzatti closely adhere to his *Memoirs*[21]. Luzzatti was born in 1841 into a prominent Jewish family in Venice, whose prosperity stemmed from the socio-economic transformations of the eighteenth century that had fostered the rise of a Jewish upper-middle class. Part of this new social stratum embraced the ideals of the *Risorgimento*, the movement for Italian unification. By 1848, indeed many young Jews had joined the revolutionary ranks that ultimately brought about the unification of Italy under the House of Savoy. The political elite of Luzzatti's generation shared a common cultural upbringing and a similar trajectory of political acculturation. Their worldview was shaped by diverse ideological currents, including the legacy of the French Revolution, the influence of Napoleonic ideals, and the Romantic conception of nationhood[22].

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the biographical genre, highlighted individual (Jewish and non-Jewish) contributions to modern science and society. The chapter on Luzzatti was penned by Luigi Villari.

19 On his attempts to provide a dignified emancipation to the Jews of Romania see: Cristiana Facchini, Luigi Luzzatti and the Oriental Front. Jewish Agency and the Politics of Religious Toleration, in: The Jews and the Nation-States of Southeastern Europe from the 19th Century to the Great Depression. Combining Viewpoints on a Controversial Story, edited by Marco Dogo and Tullia Catalan, Newcastle 2016, pp. 227–245.

20 Francesco Cassata, »La difesa della razza«. Politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista, Torino 2008, pp. 133–138. »Fra i Juifs d'État italiani, è soprattutto Luigi Luzzatti, il ›ministro degli ebrei‹, a essere oggetto degli strali del quindicinale interlandiano: secondo Gino Lupi, ad esempio, egli è colpevole di aver compromesso, nel 1914, i buoni rapporti diplomatici con la Romania per intervenire contro la politica antisemita del primo ministro Bratianu e a sostegno dei ›suoi correligionari‹«.

21 Luigi Luzzatti, Memorie autobiografiche e carteggi, 3 vols., Bologna 1933. See recent publications of his works: Giuseppe De Lucia Lumeno, Luigi Luzzatti. Scritti e interviste 1919–1927, Roma 2021.

22 On these topics there is a relevant bibliography, yet not a systematic account of the historical trajectory of Jews from the ancien régime to the national state, which takes into consideration

Luzzatti received both a secular and religious education but chose to distance himself from religion at an early age. As he recounted in his *Memoirs*, he left Judaism, the faith of his childhood, at the age of sixteen:

> I broke the Easter fast […] without my parents knowing, and I remember […] the turmoil in my conscience. […] But that was a memorable day for the life of my soul. I began to doubt – not with any scientific premeditation, but out of youthful boldness – the truth, or rather the necessity, of my religion's practices. Later, as the years passed and I studied philosophy and history, my doubt became more scientific. Yet religious sentiment remained the core of my inner life […][23].

It is a fascinating passage, woven into his autobiographical account to highlight his personal intellectual, political, and psychological trajectory. Recalling the revolutions of 1848, he stated that he »shared in all the emotions of the siege of Venice«, ultimately underscoring that he was »raised in the worship of his homeland« (nel culto della patria)[24]. Among nineteenth-century intellectuals, the idea of a »conversion« to something new – be it science or, as in this case, patriotism – is often emphasized.

»Leaving the Jewish fold«[25], was often both of rite of initiation, and a gesture of rebellion against the world of the fathers, maybe against values embedded in religious traditions. In this case a relevant role was played not exclusively by the

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individuals, men and women. However, see: Tullia Catalan, Italian Jews and the 1848–49 Revolutions. Patriotism and Multiple Identities, in: The Risorgimento Revisited. Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy, edited by Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall, New York, NY 2012, pp. 214–231; Elizabeth Schächter, The Jews of Italy, 1848–1915. Between Tradition and Transformation, Elstree 2011. For a broad picture: Corrado Vivanti (ed.), Storia degli ebrei in Italia, vol. 2, Turin 1997.

23 »Ruppi il digiuno pasquale […] all'insaputa dei miei genitori e ricordo […] il turbamento della mia coscienza. […] Ma quello fu un giorno memorabile per la vita dell'anima mia. Ho cominciato a dubitare senza premeditazione scientifica, per baldanza giovanile, della verità, o meglio della necessità delle pratiche della mia religione. Poi il dubbio divenne scientifico col procedere degli anni, collo studio della filosofia e della storia. *Ma il sentimento religioso rimase il centro della mia vita interiore* […]«.
Quoted from Mario Toscano, Luigi Luzzatti e l'ebraismo, in: Luigi Luzzatti. Discorsi parlamentari, vol. I: 1872–1899, Roma 2013, p. LXVI; Luigi Luzzatti. Memorie autobiografiche e carteggi, vol. I: 1841–1876, Bologna 1930, pp. 5, 13. This passage is discussed by Marino Berengo, Luigi Luzzatti e la tradizione ebraica, in: Luigi Luzzatti e il suo tempo, edited by Pier Luigi Ballini and Paolo Pecorari, Venice 1994, pp. 527–541.

24 »Partecipai a tutte le emozioni dell'assedio di Venezia e crebbi nel culto della patria«. Cf. Luzzatti. Memorie I, pp. 3f., also quoted in Toscano, Luigi Luzzatti.

25 I take the sentence from Todd M. Endelman, Leaving the Jewish Fold. Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History, Princeton, NJ 2015.

political events but also by the teachers, some of whom embraced new interpretations of Christianity, even within the rigid confines of the Catholic world and its culture wars[26].

Leaving one's traditions both carried risks and awards: in certain cases, it enabled the access to prestigious careers in the state administration, in politics, in the university or in liberal professions. Luzzatti's ascent to the highest echelons of the Italian state reflects a broader pattern seen in the biographical trajectories of many nineteenth-century European Jews. Indeed, prominent political figures like Luzzatti can be analyzed through the lens offered by Pierre Birnbaum, using the concept of the »*Juif d' État*«, which helps explore the relationship between Jews and power. While in the early modern period – and, by extension, the Middle Ages – the figure of the »*Court Jew*« was introduced to examine this dynamic, the modern era is characterized by the extension of civic rights to religious minorities: Jews and Protestants in Catholic countries, and Catholics in Protestant-led nations. Birnbaum writes:

> The status of minority faiths was transformed: Protestants and Jews now entered the State on equal footing with their Catholic colleagues in terms of academic credentials. Of course, in practice, things were less clear-cut – connections and allegiances still played a role in shaping careers – but the fundamental change had taken place. As a result, a phenomenon almost unique for its time emerged: Jews gained access to high public office without the need for conversion, leading public lives as senior officials while, in their private and personal spheres, remaining – at varying degrees – faithful to their own traditions. These *Juifs d' État* (State Jews), as they have been called to distinguish them from their predecessors, the *Juifs de cour* (Court Jews), who were more oriented toward business and banking, displayed an immediate and genuine passion for their new roles in service of the public good[27].

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26 On liberal Catholics and Luzzatti, see: Roberto Pertici, I rapporti tra Stato e Chiesa nella concezione di Luigi Luzzatti, in: Luigi Luzzatti Presidente del Consiglio, edited by Pier Luigi Ballini and Paolo Pecorari, Venice 2013, pp. 171–258.

27 Pierre Birnbaum, Les Fous de la République. Histoire politique des Juifs d' Etat, de Gambetta à Vichy, Paris 2014. »Le statut des confessions minoritaires en est transformé: protestants et Juifs entrent maintenant dans l' État à égalité de diplômes avec leurs collègues catholiques. Certes, les choses sont en réalité moins claires, les influences et les solidarités déterminent toujours en partie les carrières, mais l' essentiel est là. Dès lors, un phénomène presque unique à cette époque se fait jour: des Juifs accèdent à la *haute fonction publique sans se convertir*, menant une existence publique de hauts fonctionnaires alors même que, dans leur for intérieur et dans leur vie privée, ils demeurent, à un degré ou à un autre, fidèles à leurs propres traditions. Ces Juifs d' État, tels qu' on a proposé de les nommer pour mieux les distinguer de leurs prédécesseurs, les Juifs de cour, tournés davantage vers le monde des affaires ou de la banque, se montrent d' emblée véritablement passionnés par leurs nouveaux rôles au service de l' intérêt public«.

Like Luzzatti, several others navigated similar paths, blending intellectual pursuits, cultural engagement, and political ambition. But political and religious choices, especially when accompanied by intellectual activities, could also be costly. There are many examples of scholars and intellectuals whose careers were disrupted by the results of their research, especially on religious matters[28].

Jews faced diverse options regarding their religious identity and affiliation during this period. Some chose atheism, rejecting religious belief altogether. Others found a sense of belonging in Masonic Lodges, which often championed secular statehood and anti-clerical positions, aligning with broader Enlightenment ideals and esoteric ritualism[29]. Still, others chose to remain within the Jewish fold, which, far from being monolithic, was itself undergoing significant differentiation in various regions. This internal transformation reflected the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, leading to the emergence of diverse movements such as Reform Judaism, Orthodoxy, and Zionism, each offering distinct responses to the challenges of the era. Evidence from the period points to a broad range of personal positions, some of which conferred quite an important role to the »religious question« in both theoretical and practical terms[30]. Holly Case indicated that the nineteenth century was an epoch of »questions«, among which stood out clearly the »Jewish question«. The political and intellectual trajectory of Luigi Luzzatti may be properly interpreted as at the crossroad of few »questions«, both the Jewish and the religious one[31].

The conflict triggered by the process of Italian unification reached its apex in 1870, when Rome was incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See lost its territorial sovereignty[32]. In its aftermath, significant efforts were made by European

28 Many scholars of religion of the time, for instance, were either fired or put under trial. For instance, the famed Ernest Renan paid a high price for his publication on the life of Jesus, and if Renan became later an embedded intellectual of the Third Republic, others with similar trajectories faced immense troubles. On Renan see: Robert Priest, The Gospel According to Renan. Reading, Writing, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century France, New York, NY 2015; François Hartog, La Nation, la religion, l' avenir. Sur les traces d' Ernest Renan, Paris 2017.

29 See for instance Francesca Sofia, Gli ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione, in: La Massoneria, Torino 2006, pp. 244–265; a more general approach in Jacob Katz, Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723–1939, Cambridge, MA 1970.

30 It is still very useful Paul Mendes Flohr/Jehuda Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World. A Documentary History, Oxford 2010. For some reading of nineteenth century's trajectory of Judaism, see: Cristiana Facchini, Narrating, Performing and Feeling a »Religion«. On Representations of Judaism, in: Dynamics of Religion, edited by Christoph Bochinger and Jörg Rüpke, Berlin 2017, pp. 273–296.

31 Holly Case, The Age of Questions, Princeton, NJ 2018.

32 David Kertzer, Prisoner of the Vatican. The Popes' Secret Plot to Capture Rome from the New Italian State, Boston, MA/New York, NY 2004; Giovanni Miccoli, Fra mito della cristianità e secolarizzazione, Genova 1985; Daniele Menozzi, La chiesa cattolica e la secolarizzazione, Torino 1993.

and Italian politicians to address the ensuing tensions between the nascent state and the Church, of which the *Laws of the Guarentigie* issued in 1871. Among the most committed politicians to resolving the ensuing conflict between the Church an the state was Luigi Luzzatti[33].

By this time, Luzzatti had indeed already charted his career path in economics and law. After graduating from the University of Padua in 1863, he moved to Milan, where he taught Economics and Statistics before returning to Padua in 1866 as a professor of Constitutional Law. Shortly thereafter, he embarked on a series of reforms to the banking system, implementing policies aimed at extending credit to rural areas. His reputation as a distinguished expert in political economy and constitutional law grew rapidly, both in Italy and abroad. Over the course of his career, he frequently served as a state minister and, in 1910, became one of Europe's first Jewish prime ministers. As Luigi Villari noted in his brief portrait included in Bolitho's book, Luzzatti »rose early, and began by studying the history of religion; then he wrote an article for the *Sole* or the *Opinione* and prepared his lectures«[34].

While Luzzatti's political and economic contributions have been extensively studied, his profound engagement with religious themes remains comparatively underexplored. Recent historiography has highlighted his efforts to mediate the conflict between the Kingdom of Italy and the Church. Despite resistance from conservative factions within the Catholic Church – exacerbated, in part, by his Jewish heritage – Luzzatti maintained strong ties with prominent liberal Catholics and Jews of his era. These connections are vividly documented in his extensive correspondence, offering valuable insights into his intellectual and cultural milieu[35]. Before engaging with one of his most relevant publications on the »religious question«, it is worth quoting his autobiographical notes on one aspect of this complex topic:

> I always keep before my mind the luminous images of those great parliamentarians, those principal architects of the redemption of our homeland, the perpetual glory of a party to which I have belonged and will belong until the last moment of my life. These great spirits – from Cavour to Minghetti, from Ricasoli to Sella, from Pisanelli to Bonghi – *secularized the State*, endowed it with its sovereign, secular character, and established and sanctioned religious freedoms. These freedoms ultimately found their highest expression

33 See the entry: Paolo Pecorari/Pier Luigi Ballini, Luigi Luzzatti. Dizionario biografico degli italiani 66 (2006), URL: <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-luzzatti_(Dizionario-Biografico)/> (2025-04-23); Dora Askowith, The Life and Work of Luigi Luzzatti, in: Luigi Luzzatti, God in Freedom, New York, NY 1930.

34 Luigi Villari, Luigi Luzzatti, in: Bolitho, Twelve Jews, p. 137.

35 Pertici, I rapporti tra Stato e Chiesa. See also Luigi Luzzatti, Dio nella libertà. Scritti scelti su libertà religiosa e relazioni tra stato e chiese, edited by Laura De Gregorio, Roma 2013.

> in the Zanardelli Penal Code, which forever abolished the interpretation of Article One of the Statute – a distinction that had previously set the dominant religion apart from tolerated faiths in the Italian State. This entire epic cohort, this legion of great figures with whom I collaborated and whose ideas nourished me, today represents a shared heritage of all Italian liberals. It embodies the unwavering belief that the greatness of the State lies in its independence from any sect or church, regardless of its name or designation[36].

Luzzatti, along with many other members of the Italian parliament, played a crucial role in defining and refining the very structure of the secular state – a contribution recognized by several scholars. However, his legacy has also been, at least in part, erased[37]. Yet one might argue that his interests extended beyond this central issue, both in his search for the historical foundations behind it and in his pursuit of a broader theory that, unlike many similar works, aspired to be truly global in the context of his time.

3. »God in Freedom«: Searching for a Theory of Religious Freedom

> I am an old liberal, that is to say a follower of a doctrine that is not easy to understand and is still less easy to practice. This doctrine may be summarized in these words: *Free churches in a sovereign state*[38].

The book that encapsulates his tireless work in this field was first published in Italian in 1926 and later translated into English in 1930. *God in Freedom*, the

36 »Ho sempre dinanzi alla mente le immagini luminose di quei grandi parlamentari, di quei fattori principalissimi della redenzione della patria, gloria perpetua di un partito al quale io appartenni e apparterrò sino all'ultimo istante della mia vita: spiriti magni, che da Cavour a Minghetti, da Ricasoli a Sella, da Pisanelli a *Bonghi secolarizzarono lo Stato*, gli diedero il suo carattere di *sovranità laica*, instaurarono e sancirono le libertà religiose, le quali nella loro ultima espressione ebbero il coronamento del Codice Penale di Zanardelli, che aboliva per sempre la interpretazione data all'articolo primo dello Statuto, interpretazione che distingueva nello Stato italiano la religione dominante dai culti tollerati. Tutta questa epica coorte, tutta questa legione di grandi, coi quali collaborai, nelle cui idee io mi nutrii, rappresenta oggidì un patrimonio di tutti i liberali italiani e costituisce la immarcescibile fede di coloro, i quali pensano che la grandezza dello Stato consista nella sua indipendenza da ogni setta, da ogni chiesa, con qualunque nome e con qualunque qualificazione si ammanti«, quoted in Toscano, Luigi Luzzatti, pp. LXXf.

37 See Margiotta Broglio's evaluation of the problem and attempt to understand how Luzzatti and Ruffini were forgotten by a generation of scholars after World War II (both Communists and Catholics). Francesco Margiotta Broglio, Luzzatti e la libertà di coscienza e di religione, in: Luigi Luzzatti. Discorsi parlamentari, vol. I: 1872–1899, Roma 2013, pp. XLIX–LXIII.

38 Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. 421.

English version of *Dio nella libertà* (1926), is a collection of articles on a wide range of religious topics written by the Italian Prime Minister over the course of his career. It is loosely modeled after an earlier version published in 1909, under the title *Libertà di coscienza e di scienza*[39].

This first publication should be placed in context and analyzed alongside a similar work by a younger fellow jurist, whose objective, though pursued with a different methodology, was not dissimilar. Francesco Ruffini (1863–1934), a professor of canon law at the University of Turin, was a member of Parliament and one of the few academics who refused to swear allegiance to the Fascist regime in 1931[40]. Like Luzzatti, he authored a book that traced the history of religious tolerance within the framework of western Christendom[41]. His work provides a masterful analysis of the evolution of the notion of religious freedom, focusing primarily – and with great expertise – on the history of western Christendom, looking also at the »forerunners«[42]. The discussion about these topics is highlighted by a correspondence between Ruffini and Luzzatti, which not only illuminates their mutual perspectives but also conveys the impression that these issues were, in some way, marginalized in the public arena[43]. As we shall see, whilst Ruffini looked at the history of »religious freedom« within the context of western Christianity, with a particular attention to the history of the anti-trinitarians, Luzzatti's exploration extended to the extra-European context, paying a tribute to Asia as well. Without directly comparing the two works, it is sufficient for now to stress one of the key topics under discussion: the notion of the modern state as the provider and guarantor of liberties, including religious freedom for the individual. Was religious freedom the precondition for other types of liberties such as freedom of conscience and science? This was one of the questions that often arose in these works.

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39 Id., Dio nella libertà. Studi sulle relazioni tra stato e chiesa, Bologna 1926.

40 Helmut Goetz, Il giuramento rifiutato. I docenti universitari e il regime fascista, It. transl., Milano 2000; Giorgio Boatti, Preferirei di no. Le storie dei dodici professori che si opposero a Mussolini, Torino 2003. On Ruffini, see: Andrea Frangioni, Francesco Ruffini. Una biografia intellettuale, Bologna 2017.

41 On the correpondence between Luzzatti and Ruffini Cf. Sandro G. Franchini, »In fine siamo I due soli«. Il problema della libertà religiosa nel dialogo tra Luigi Luzzatti e Francesco Ruffini, in: Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, t. CLXXIV, Venezia 2015–2016, pp. 1–78. See also Pertici, »Religioni libere entro lo stato sovrano«. Ruffini was both a university professor and a senator of the Parliament.

42 Francesco Ruffini, La libertà religiosa. Storia di un'idea, Turin 1901. The English translation: Id., Religious Liberty, London/New York, NY 1912. The traslation was by J. Parker Heyes. This translation was widely discussed among scholars in the Anglophone world and elsewhere. See Franchini, »In fine siamo i due soli«.

43 Id., »In fine siamo i due soli«.

If these two works were published within a relatively short span of time – coinciding with the French law on the separation between state and church of 1905 – the book reissued by Luzzatti in 1926 must be understood within a markedly different historical context. By then, the impact of World War I and the rise of Fascism had reshaped the political landscape, even if these shifts were still difficult for the intellectuals involved to fully grasp[44].

In this final section of the chapter, we turn to the latest edition of this book – its English translation – to explore the ideas it presents and to distill some of the key themes of both the work and its author. In doing so, we gain a clearer understanding of how these intellectuals engaged with and shaped the very process of secularization.

In the American preface, Max J. Kohler wrote:

> Luigi Luzzatti's Dio Nella Libertà (God in Freedom) was published in its original form in Italian in 1909 under the title La Libertà di Coscienza e di Scienza. Soon thereafter it appeared in French, German and Japanese translations. In 1926 the distinguished author enlarged it to about double its original size, to constitute the second volume of his collected Italian works. It is this edition which is here presented in English garb. The editor hereof has no hesitation *in describing the work as the most valuable and comprehensive book heretofore published on the history of religious liberty*. The erudition and versatility of the author are remarkable. He includes sketches of champions of religious liberty who lived in the Far East long before the beginning of the Christian era, and his narrative embraces the movements for the separation of church and state in our own day in France, Scotland, Wales and Geneva[45].

At nearly 850 pages, *God in Freedom* delves into a broad array of issues, compiling many of the author's articles on diverse topics. It offers the distinctive vision of an accomplished political leader and demonstrates an engaging public application of

44 Ruffini had also published other works, while his career took also a political turn. He was very critical of fascism, since its very inception. Many of his works were re-printed and printed after World War II. Among his publications, see: *La libertà religiosa come diritto pubblico subiettivo* (1924); *Relazioni tra Stato e Chiesa: lineamenti storici e sistematici*, edited by F. Margiotta Broglio (1974); *I giansenisti piemontesi e la conversione della madre di Cavour* (1929, and 1942), *La vita religiosa di Alessandro Manzoni* (I–II, 1931), *Scritti giuridici minori* (edited by Mario Falco, Arturo C. Jemolo, Edoardo Ruffini, 1936), *Studi sul giansenismo* (edited by Ernesto Codignola, 1943).

45 Italics are mine. Max J. Kohler, Preface, in: Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. XIII.

scholarly research on religion. The book weaves a compelling dialogue between east and west, bridging oriental religions with certain forms of Christianity[46].

As mentioned, the thematic structure of the book builds upon the framework first established in 1909, however expanding each section with a diverse selection of articles. Part 1, a substantial work in itself, explores the historical foundations of the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state. It seeks to identify its core origins – featuring a chapter on its early precursors – while also examining case studies, including the Italian Law of the *Guarentigie*. Additionally, it includes reflections on the relationship between religion and science, particularly in the context of faith and intellectual freedom.

Part 2, titled *Voices Far and Near from India in Regard to Sacred Writing* is much shorter but original in content, bringing together articles on Buddhism, Tagore, and the comparison between Buddhism and Christianity.

Part 3 is entirely new compared to the previous text and is dedicated to Saint Francis, the medieval saint who would later be proclaimed the patron of Italy by Pius XII in 1939. This is a particularly controversial topic, given Luzzatti's Jewish heritage. However, in my view, it reflects his personal fascination with religion – Christianity in particular – while also engaging with significant scholarly debates of the time that witnessed a global interest in the study of Saint Francis[47].

Part 4 is divided into two sections: a miscellaneous section covering various topics and another focusing more specifically on constitutional issues. Part 5 is devoted to the Jews, serving as a sort of commitment to his community of origin, with a special focus on the status of Jews who were still persecuted in certain European countries, particularly in the Russian Empire and Romania[48]. There is also a conspicuous section of Appendixes, which gathers responses to criticism voiced against the book. The most interesting ones are those between Luzzatti and Benedetto Croce, the outspoken representative of Italian neo-idealism, and those ones between Luzzatti and conservative Catholics[49].

The American edition is a new text by itself, as it adds an introduction by Dora Askowith and a section of »supplementary American chapters« by William H. Taft, Irving Lehman, Max J. Kohler, and Louis Marshall that focus on American history

46 On this topic see Cristiana Facchini, Luigi Luzzatti e la teoria della tolleranza religiosa. Per una storia del consumo pubblico delle scienze delle religioni, in: Annali di storia dell'esegesi 33/1 (2016), pp. 275–300.

47 See id., Incontri inconsueti. Modernisti tra gli ebrei e spiritualità contemporanee, in: Alfonso Botti et al. (eds.), Modernisti ed ebrei, Monographic issue of Modernism 5 (2019), pp. 15–61.

48 See Facchini, Luigi Luzzatti and the Oriental Front.

49 See Pertici, I rapporti tra Stato e Chiesa, pp. 190–200.

and the protection of human rights[50]. The preface, as mentioned above, is signed by Kohler. The translation was supported by outspoken members of Reform Judaism, which had long been engaged with the question of religious minority rights in their own country[51]. Indeed, *God in Freedom* presents at least three undercurrents that relate to the Jewish question. One element regards Luzzatti's Jewish identity, which has been investigated several times for the purposes of disclosing his allegiance to special forms of Judaism, not to mention his understanding of Zionism, which had become an increasingly relevant political player in the aftermath of World War I[52]. The second issue concerns his interpretation of the Jewish religious past in comparison to his views on the history of Christianity and Oriental religions. The final point pertains to his commitment to protecting religious minorities, with a particular, though not exclusive, focus on eastern European Jews[53]. Whereas the latter constitutes a chapter in the history of antisemitism and the politics deployed especially by politicians of Jewish descent to cope with the »Jewish question« against the backdrop of a changing global system, the former issues are more complicated to disentangle, and yet particularly relevant to fully comprehend Luzzatti's engagement with the complex »religious question«, which will not be treated here.

Luzzatti's theory of religious freedom cannot be fully understood without disentangling his personal interpretation of the History of Religions, as it was being developed across different European countries. As I suggested in a previous publication, it is crucial to emphasize that Luzzatti – like many other scholars and intellectuals of his time – focused on constructing a counter-history of European religion. This counter-history did not view Christianity solely in its dominant and institutional forms (such as the Catholic Church or the Lutheran and Anglican traditions) but rather as a diverse and often conflicting array of different voices. Luzzatti was deeply drawn to the various expressions of Christianity and their remarkable diversity, as he himself stated on multiple occasions. A second crucial point that needs to be emphasied is the complex interplay between scholarship and its public use (or misuse). Luzzatti serves as a particularly emblematic case in this regard, being a refined consumer of specialized scholarly works, using them as tools

50 Luzzatti, God in Freedom, pp. 647–794. Many of these lawyers and minority rights activists were also members of Reform Judaism. On Louis Marshall see, M.M. Silver, Louis Marshall and the Rise of Jewish Ethnicity in America. A Biography, Syracuse, NY 2013.

51 A recent reprint: Luigi Luzzatti, God in Freedom. Studies in the Relations between Church and State, trans. Alfonso Arbib Costa, New York, NY 2005.

52 Berengo, Luigi Luzzatti e la tradizione ebraica; Toscano, Luigi Luzzatti e l'ebraismo; Sergio Minerbi, Luigi Luzzatti e il sionismo, in: Clio 4/4 (2007), pp. 683–692.

53 See for instance his activities on behalf of the persecuted Armenians. Ester Capuzzo, Luigi Luzzatti, gli ebrei, gli armeni, in: Luigi Luzzatti e la Grande Guerra. Temi e vicende dell'Italia divisa: dall'intervento ai trattati di pace, edited by Pier Luigi Ballini, Venezia 2016, pp. 189–222.

to promote his broader social and political theories. While not a scholar of religions per se, he was an eclectic and active consumer of religious studies, to which he sought to contribute his own highly personal, ideological, and influential interpretation. His position within the political sphere operated in two significant ways. First, as a prominent statesman, Luzzatti built an extensive network of connections with some of the most important scholars of religion of his time. Through these relationships, he engaged in intellectual exchanges and discussions on a wide array of topics, from church reform policies to ethical issues[54]. Furthermore, Luzzatti's interest in Asian cultures positioned him as both an author and a consumer of orientalist materials. His engagement with these topics provided him with the insights necessary to contribute to the broader debates on nineteenth-century Orientalism.

4. Expanding Religious Freedom: Global Framework, Ancient Roots

Regarding his theory of religious freedom, Luzzatti's work reveals at least three distinct areas of interest. The first concerns the separation of church and state and the evolution of this constitutional principle. While many of his articles focus on the Italian context – addressing the delicate issue of international relations with the Catholic Church and, at times, Catholic minorities – his true interest lies in a broader, comparative perspective. He seeks to explore different geographical regions and religious traditions that may have shaped this development. Indeed, whilst his »constitutional history and comparison« seeks to describe different typologies of relationship between state and church (or religion, for that matter), Luzzatti's stance on this issue takes a distinctive turn, as he states in the introduction to *God in Freedom*:

> The three great types of separation of church and state, around which minor experiences cluster, are represented by the United States of America, Japan and India in Asia, France in Europe. The various experiments of the Latin republics of Central America developed from those of the United States. Japan and British India still shine as solitary instances of tolerance in Asia, but their example will surely be followed by other Asiatic nations. France, with her striking reforms, has, as it were, forced the difficult and delicate problem of separation upon the attention of all the states of Europe and thus wields compelling

54 See his correspondence with Paul Sabatier, the influential scholar of Saint Francis: Sandro G. Franchini, Chiesa, fede e libertà religiosa. In un carteggio di inizio Noveento: Luigi Luzzatti e Paul Sabatier, Venezia 2004.

> power for good or ill. It will be well to present in their main outlines these great politico-ecclesiastical institutions, shining like beacons in the moral world[55].

Furthermore, he observes that while in Europe this process was achieved through conflict and as the result of political pragmatism, in America and Asia there were instances where these notions emerged organically from within – in other words, from a profound love for God.

> The dominating idea of religious freedom in the United States issues primarily from an ardent and unlimited love of God; it is a celestial piety which governs these constitutional guarantees. The remembrance of ancient fetters, of old restrictions and limitations, of a privileged tyranny of a dominating priestly caste, of offenses against conscience which, renewing and increasing by productive silence, renew and improve their God, dislike of supporting with revenues beliefs judged to be false – all this broke out decisively in those sublime and creative moments in which people cast off for a time all dross and all crimes and appear, through their kindness and dignity, nearer to the Divine Father[56].

While recognizing the greatness of classical theorists and thinkers who championed the principle of religious guarantees, Luzzatti sought out the actions and obscure forces that created democracy. According to him, the pursuit of religious freedom was not driven solely by a critical or negative vision of divinity but rather by an ardent and boundless love of God. Luzzatti posed a fundamental question: »Where is the true and first City of God, that is, the city where God could be worshiped in freedom, without coercion, without persecutions, without privileges, in a perfect constitutional manner?«[57]. The most well-known example was the small city of Providence, founded by Roger Williams (1603–1683), one of the earliest proponents of radical religious liberty. But who was Roger Williams? In 1631, he left England and sailed to Salem in search of an ideal City of God. Disillusioned with what he found, he purchased land from the Indigenous people and established a community where the principle of separating Church and State was upheld, allowing full freedom of worship for all – Jews, »heretics«, and various Christian denominations. Providence became a refuge for agnostics and religious dissenters. Williams, like many radical Christians, was a mystic, prone to visions and revelations, which ultimately led to the foundation of Unitarianism. According to Luzzatti, the laws of Rhode Island dealt exclusively with civil matters, and from Williams' visionary ideas emerged principles that shaped the future doctrine:

55 Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. 7.
56 Ibid., p. 8.
57 Ibid., p. 126.

> Every one has from God a natural and inalienable right, according to the intimate counsel of his own conscience and his own reason; and no citizen shall be offended, molested or limited in his person, his freedom or his property in the way of worshiping God, in the form or the time which best please his conscience or for his religious profession, for his feelings and his convictions, provided he does not disturb public peace or other persons in the practice of their religion[58].

The English dissenters who fled religious persecution were not always tolerant toward other groups. Indeed they often sought to established closed communities[59]. However, the extreme pluralism of Rhode Island, combined with the influence of Dutch thought – particularly that of Spinoza, who was regarded as a foundational figure in shaping religious tolerance in the United States – helped establish a doctrine of religious freedom that, at least in theory, extended to Muslims, Jews, and even Catholics.

Luzzatti articulated a theory of tolerance rooted not in theological conflict but in theology itself. The principle found in this tradition was not that of the French *politiques* but rather one based on an absolute and unconditional respect for faith. A key theme, frequently debated by authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was the idea that God desired to be worshiped through multiple religious traditions. This notion, echoed in both Jewish and Christian texts, may have originated from medieval Arabic sources and perhaps from the apologetic writings of Flavius Josephus. Luzzatti embraced this idea as a foundational element of religious tolerance[60].

After addressing the complex issue of the separation of Church and State in the United States – including its implications for Catholics – Luzzatti turned to a particularly intriguing aspect of his argument, demonstrating that the same holds true for Asia, focusing on the first decrees of the great emperor Ashoka, who had converted to Buddhism[61].

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58 Ibid., p. 128, with reference to »declaration in matters of religion in the colony of New Hampshire«. For a more contemporary reading of Roger Williams see Martha C. Nussbaum, Libertà di coscienza e religione, Bologna 2009 (a translation of Liberty of Conscience. The Attack on Equal Respect, 2007).

59 Michael J. Lewis, City of Refuge. City of Refuge Separatists and Utopian Town Planning Lewis, Princeton, NJ/Oxford 2016; see also Ruffini, La libertà religiosa.

60 On this famous idea rooted in the work of the medieval Muslim philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl see: Daniel Regnier, Utopia's Moorish Inspiration. Thomas More's Reading of Ibn Ṭufayl, in: Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme 41/3 (2018), pp. 17–45; on this idea in Josephus see Mauro Pesce, Il cristianesimo, Gesù e la modernità. Una relazione complessa, Roma 2018, chapter 5.

61 Zambarbieri, Luigi Luzzatti.

5. Belle Epoque's Orientalism

> But we must acknowledge that the true revelations about those creeds were made by science, and that the believers came to know the poems of Brahmanism and Buddhism – which seemed destined to die – through the work of men of science[62].

Luzzatti's positive evaluation of Buddhism represents a typical trend of European and American culture and might be treated accordingly, looking at the impact that the study of religions had on society and culture. Albeit it is a bit unusual for the Italian context of the time, the debate on oriental religions was lively in many European countries, as stressed above. *God in Freedom* offers some insights into this topic. The first way into this debate is through his wider approach to the question of the »forerunners« of religious freedom. In the introductory chapters, which bring together contributions on the »precursors and apostles of religious freedom«, Luzzatti broadens his exploration beyond the Christian tradition, examining other cultures as well. While Ruffini, in his text, also devoted attention to these »precursors«, he primarily focused on classical antiquity, highlighting figures from ancient paganism, the Church Fathers, and the fading influence of pagan traditions before extending his analysis to later historical periods[63].

As scholars insisted upon the relevance of the Edict of Milan as one of the first legal framework meant to enhance religious freedom, Luzzatti claimed that it was in Asia that the first Edict of this type was conceived. According to Luzzatti, it was in Buddhist Asia that the concept of freedom of conscience and its constitutional implementation first emerged, thanks to emperor Ashoka after his conversion to Buddhism in the third century BCE. Unlike in some western approaches, which were often shaped by convenience and pragmatism, Ashoka's decrees rested on a profound commitment to religious coexistence, after a process of conversion that changed the religious attitude of the »king without sorrow«[64]. »It is from India, as far as we know now, that the first decree on freedom of conscience came. The value of this demonstration lies in its being founded exclusively upon ethics without any admixture of political or conventional elements«[65].

> Here religious freedom does not issue, under the form of tolerance, from a political compromise of conflicting beliefs, nor from the amiable skepticism of an indifferent

62 Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. 297.

63 Ruffini, La libertà religiosa, pp. 19–96.

64 Charles Allen, Ashoka. The Search for India's Lost Emperor, London 2012. For a recent debate on this topic see, Robert Yelle, Was Aśoka Really a Secularist avant-la-lettre? Ancient Indian Pluralism and Toleration in Historical Perspective, in: Modern Asian Studies 56 (2022), pp. 749–775.

65 Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. 54.

> government; it is not drawn from a vague and discolored theism which considers all religions as the developments of a higher typical idea and as simple deviations from it. The profound beauty and the peculiar novelty in King Piyadasi's edicts consist in the fact that religious freedom issues from the very fount of religion; it is an indispensable condition of divinity; it is the essence of faith; it is, as it were, faith in the goodness of faith. The more does the celestial – flame burn in the hearts of believers, the more they must feel an obligation to allow it to burn freely in other hearts. In such a way not only is the germ of persecution removed from creed, but there is created – also as a religious act – a spiritual attitude by which both faith and liberty become two forms of the same substance, two indissoluble terms, two indivisible blessings[66].

Drawing from a wealth of research conducted on early India, Luzzatti incorporated this material onto his own discours on religious freedom. The role of the state, in this perspective, would be to cultivate respect toward each religion – not by funding or instructing religious ministers, but by ensuring that civil officials uphold and reinforce these fundamental principles. A state should provide an education that nurtures both a deep appreciation for one's own faith and a genuine respect for the beliefs of others. Paraphrasing Schopenhauer – who argued that just as Greek thought had once revitalized European civilization, so too would Indian literature and philosophy – Luzzatti saw in ancient India a political and religious model that could help renew modern European society, which he viewed as being fractured by both theological intolerance and militant atheism[67].

Although Islam, like Judaism, was a normative religion and therefore less capable of offering plural attitudes to religious worship, it produced great examples of »religious pluralism«, implementing policies supporting religious diversity. In this case the example is provided by the story of another emperor, Akbar, who reigned over the immense Mughal empire in the early modern period (1542–1605) with wisdom and respect for all different cults, while in Europe Christians were persecuting religious minorities and killing each other. »India, the mysterious, unknown land, the cradle of humanity, in the opinion of some philologists, was to bring forth the blossom of spiritual freedom and of full tolerance, and to pass it on a precious gift to her progeny, in order that they might truly feel like brothers«, he

66 Ibid., p. 56.

67 On the concept of the »Oriental Renaissance«, see also Raymond Schwab, La renaissance orientale, Paris 1950. The English edition of this work, *The Oriental Renaissance* (New York, NY 1984), includes an introduction by Edward Said (pp. VII–XX). Said's renowned *Orientalism* (1978), however, presents a radically different approach to the question if compared to Schwab's. To properly assess Luzzatti's whole vision on religion it would be necessary to have a broader understanding of the impact on Oriental studies in Italy. For some preliminary approach see, Zambarbieri, Luigi Luzzatti.

wrote[68]. Akbar was, similarly to Ashoka, a warrior but, in difference to Ashoka, who had been searching for a greater »austere philosophy«, he came from an intolerant Muslim dynasty[69]. In his edict of 1593, Akbar offers – according to Luzzatti – a policy of »conciliation on religious grounds« as a response to orthodox Islam, which was, accordingly, unable to substantiate a resolution to conflict[70]. Luzzatti made ample use of works written by Italian Jesuits, which were partly re-published at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and precisely he mentions Daniello Bartoli's edition of Father Rodolfo Acquaviva's report on Akbar[71]. Luzzatti highlights the report where the Jesuits stressed the notion according to which God desires to be worshipped in many ways despite man's deep belief to possess the best and unique religious truth[72]. Luzzatti supports the idea that Sufism – the mystical tradition of Islam – was the individual and personal path that offered Islam a response to its strict dogmas. This notion was developed by many scholars of his time who were interested in religious experiences detached from »ritualism«[73]. Moreover, the emperor became instructed in other religious traditions, learning from Parsees (Parsis) on Zoroastrianism, or from the Jesuits about Catholicism[74]. Akbar implemented laws meant to minimize the power of the Ulema, and abolished several religious rules, according to the ideal that the emperor held a superior, yet syncretic, form of religious knowledge.

> He succeeded in accomplishing what would before then seemed folly or sacrilege, and he made the Ulema himself sign a decree which conferred on him, the emperor himself, the

68 Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. 59.

69 References are here pointing to J. Talboys Wheeler, History of India in the Earliest Ages, London 1874.

70 Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. 61.

71 Father Daniello Bartoli was one of the most influential historians of the *Compagnia di Gesù*, the Jesuit order. Reference here are to Daniello Bartoli's work on Aquaviva, in the edition of 1819 (Della storia della Compagnia di Gesù. L'Asia). On Bartoli see the more recent: Daniello Bartoli, L'Asia, Turin 2019.

72 Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. 61.

73 A remarkable example of this interpretation of religion may be found in William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, New York, NY 1902. Here references to Sufism are not relevant as the ones to certain Indian religious traditions.

74 »Count F.A. von Noer has written an excellent book on the Emperor Akbar (Leyden, E. J. Brill, 1883). In other portions of this chapter I have made use of this thorough and accurate work. Count von Noer consulted numerous works, among others that of Abul Fazl, Akbar Nameh, and that of Badaoni, both Oriental authors, and all the German contributions to the subject and many English ones, besides the work of the French Jesuit, P. Pierre du Jarric, published in 1621, containing the most significant facts about India and particularly the Portuguese propaganda of Christianity and Akbar's relations with the Jesuits«. Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. 62. For du Jarric, see: Akbar and the Jesuits, published in New York in 1926 and reprinted in 2008.

> spiritual government of the empire according to his judgment. Thus came the dawn of a memorable day, when Mohammedanism ceased for some time to be state religion. This was indeed one of the great examples of separation, an admirable event at the thought of which my liberal spirit exults: any primacy in religious matters was abolished. Be it noted that this great act was accomplished while in Europe the Holy Inquisition was burning heretics alive; it came shortly after the Massacre of St. Bartholomew; while a foreign and detested church was imposed on Catholic Ireland; while the Jews were everywhere being relegated to the ghetto and the Judenstrasse; while Dutchmen, Huguenots, Puritans and Quakers were fleeing from the Low Countries, from France and from England, to seek in the forests primeval of the new continent a place where they might worship God in freedom[75]!

Luzzatti strongly asserted that the concept of religious freedom was not only rooted in Asia but also built upon more solid ideological foundations. He underscored this point repeatedly. In a lecture delivered from the Chair of Constitutional Law at the University of Rome on December 16, 1906 he claimed:

> In this respect European civilization and that of the United States of America, which is an offshoot of it, do not possess a monopoly of religious freedom, as is generally said, in accordance with the habitual affirmation of the infallibility of white and Christian people. The Asiatic continent (China, Ceylon, India, especially Japan which is the shining center), the entire Buddhistic world with more than four hundred and fifty millions of believers, outside European and Christian influence, has written pages that will not die in the book of the law of nations, and has supplied examples worthy of history and song[76].

Of particular relevance is, for Luzzatti, the case of Japan, a country which was undergoing a process of fast modernization, and that eventually opted for a system of wide religious freedom, including also Christian groups of different confessional traditions, who were also aiming at converting. By the beginning of the twentieth century Japan emerged, in the global system, as a powerful player, and it attracted attention also thanks to its intellectuals, and its own attempt to make Buddhism more visible to a western public. Other examples are drawn from cases now long forgotten, for instance the Bahá'í movement, which attracted a great deal of western gaze in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1852, a sectarian Muslim group, the Bábís, faced severe religious persecution. Luzzatti drew upon an English translation of a Persian account, edited and annotated by Edward G. Browne

75 Luzzatti, God in Freedom, p. 66. This chapter was signed in 1925 although it relies on books and sources discussed in previous years.

76 Ibid., p. 73.

(1862–1923), a British Orientalist and scholar of Persian literature. The account, *A Traveller's Narrative*, documented the plight of this emerging nineteenth-century movement, which had attracted the attention of noted orientalists and scholars[77]. Luzzatti observed that the Bahá'í vision of the state bore striking similarities to western political ideals:

> The admirable petition that we are here examining recalls that memorable historical period when the powerful government of Persia did not interfere with the various creeds existing in the country, and the different believers, united, followed the standard of the great king. That was the period of Persia's prosperity and power, which is connected with respect for all religions. But when the custom of interfering with the beliefs of the various sects and of exploring the intimate religious thoughts was resumed, then Persia saw her dominion diminished. She lost the provinces of Khuran, of Syria and of Chaldea, and, why not say it? even the greatest part of the Kurdistan region was lost to Persia through offenses to freedom of conscience and the fanaticism of the rulers. To this also must be ascribed the independence of Afghanistan and the revolt of the Turkoman tribes. With these proofs of clear damage, what necessity can there be to persecute the innocent? Violation of religious freedom diminishes empires. These recollections of the simple Oriental Persian Babists make one think of the words of the Dutch, persecuted for the same reasons by Philip II. Intolerance gradually destroyed the Spanish empire. The principle that the greatest redeeming idea is closely bound up with the peace and greatness of the state shines nowhere better than in these Persian arguments[78].

According to Luzzatti, one of the main ideas espoused by Bahá'í followers (Babist) was not unlike that of northern Europe: religious intolerance weakens political power and impoverishes the nation. Notably, the Bahá'í faith gained visibility in the western emisphere during the Chicago World's Fair, where, in the decades that followed, a magnificent »house of worship« was constructed[79]. Like many of his contemporaries, Luzzatti was captivated by the east, believing that Europe's cultural and spiritual renewal depended on learning from its traditions – especially in fostering both devotion to one's own faith and respect for others. Yet, his silence on the intersection of Orientalist fascination and antisemitism is worth investigating,

77 The work of Browne was published in 1891, in two volumes. These events were commented by the notorious intellectual, de Gobineau and by the orientalist Ernest Renan. Ibid., p. 82.

78 Ibid., p. 84.

79 On the history of this building see, Candace Moore Hill, Bahá'í Temple, Chicago, IL 2010.

as is his apparent disregard for the ways in which European romanticization of eastern religions fueled racial ideologies. But that is the topic of a different chapter[80].

6. Final Remarks

God in Freedom navigates the religious culture of the late nineteenth century, only to refract itself, in a profoundly transformed context, into that of the early twentieth century. Interpreting Luzzatti's contribution to the theory of religious freedom from a single perspective risks being reductive. His reflections on religion encompass a broad intellectual spectrum that can only be fully understood within a transnational framework, where discussions on religion follow complex trajectories that defy rigid categorization. More than any other work, *God in Freedom* provides a lens to analyze the intersection between scholarly discourse on religion and its public implementation. To fully grasp this aspect I must briefly reflect on the public consumption of religious studies. The metaphor of the »market« has frequently been used to describe religious landscapes in certain historical periods, particularly those characterized by a diversity of religious traditions and groups. It has been applied, for example, to both the Roman Empire and contemporary society, often in contrast to European secularization theories. Rather than disappearing from public consciousness, religions underwent a process of scholarly reinterpretation, which became institutionalized in different ways depending on the country. New and compelling theories emerged, offering frameworks for understanding and shaping contemporary realities. Interpretations of Christianity, Judaism, and Oriental religions influenced debates on modern civilization – sometimes inspiring theories of religious renewal, at other times fueling the rise of racial ideologies. The gradual democratization of academic research amplified the voices of scholars from diverse religious backgrounds, multiplying interpretations of religious phenomena – whether as historical subjects to be studied or as contemporary issues to be understood. Some entered public discourse through the growing influence of mass media, reshaping both perceptions and portrayals of religion. Newspapers, photography, cinema, and the dissemination of religious imagery through advertising and other media platforms brought previously marginal aspects of religious life into the mainstream. In this regard, Luzzatti's work is emblematic, engaging with all the major themes that animated nineteenth-century scholarly debate and presenting them in a way that only a statesman of his renown could. He repeatedly drew attention

80 These aspects need to be further investigated and may not be treated in this article. On the one hand, his work is relevant as he himself was fully involved against Anti-semitism. On this, a first preliminary interpretation in Facchini, Luigi Luzzatti and the Oriental Front.

to contemporary religious phenomena: the rise of Asian spiritual leaders and the fascination with the Orient, the growing appeal of deeply emotional and Christ-mimetic forms of Christianity (e. g., the figure of Saint Francis), the struggles of Jewish communities in the east, the discovery of Buddhism as an ideal religion for the modern world, and a vision of Christianity that extended beyond the Catholic Church. Luzzatti offered the educated public of his time a key to understanding pressing political and cultural issues, urging a recognition of religious diversity. He employed the academic study of religion as a tool to construct a political discourse that promoted inclusion, particularly for distant traditions – such as those of Asia – that were becoming increasingly visible in European intellectual circles. *God in Freedom* reflects the world described by Christopher Bayly and other global historians, who have explored, among other transformations, the evolution of religious thought and practices in the nineteenth century. It also intersects debates about religion and modernity, the latter a term now despised, and yet very relavant in order to understand complex historical phenomena.

This work must also be understood within the context of Italian political and religious history, given Luzzatti's prominent role as both a constitutionalist and an economist and his effort to historicize and understand the thorn question of the separation between religion and state. His wide-ranging engagement with religious cultures reflects a distinctly nineteenth-century belief in the transformative potential of religious traditions to address concrete social and political challenges. Perhaps it is precisely in the juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory elements that we best capture the richness and complexity of this period: a Jewish prime minister of a newly unified nation championing an inclusive and universal vision of religious tolerance encapsulates, more than any single personal trajectory, the fluidity and intricacy of the time.

One final word may be in order to consider the relationship between an individual from a religious minority and the challenges of navigating the religious fluidity – and the conflicts – of the time. In exploring a plausible religious positioning – or identity – for Luigi Luzzatti, several possibilities come to mind: the world of Liberal and Reform Judaism, although he was not, strictly speaking, a Reform Jew; or the broader category of »assimilation«, though that hardly provides a precise conceptual framework. In his writings, Luzzatti identified himself as a »liberal«. While he never abandoned Judaism and never officially converted, I would argue that he is best described as a »theist«. In a well-known letter, published in 1926 and later reproduced in English in 1930 (without naming the addressee), he wrote:

> My dear Monsignore: Many thanks for your letter so full of sincere faith and practical kindness. Every man who opens his soul to great ideals has a mission. Mine is to defend publicly, religious freedom, to fight in behalf of this greatest truth, to save it from lay

and ecclesiastical intolerance. In every part of the world where believers suffer for a faith sincerely professed (and faith prospers in sorrow, as no one can doubt the sincerity of martyts) I rise, speak and act. I am proud of having at times saved Christians and Jews alike from oppression. In Korea, a few years ago, certain Catholics, prosecuted for the propagation of their religion, were acquitted, the defending counsel quoting from my book, Freedom of Conscience and of Science (translated into Japanese by the Law Faculty of the University of Tokyo)[81], in which I demonstrate that historic Buddhism was immune from the guilt of persecution. Therefore, the Japanese who occupy Korea ought not now to stain themselves with this crime. *I am, Monsignore, outside all the churches*; the Jewish creed, into which I grew to manhood, and all the others. But I have passed and am passing half of my scientific and public life in studying the fundamental religions which represent, in every historical period, the forms of the highest morality in action. And I compare myself to a human bee which sucks honey from all heavenly flowers, and is not through yet. I have a profound respect for my own religion, even if I have lost my ardent faith in it; but when I am faced with reproach for my Hebraic origin, or when the Jews are persecuted, then, in the face of injury and mockery, I feel myself again to be, and *I declare myself to be, a Jew*. My favorite ancestor is the prophet Isaiah. I am proud of the understanding to which I have attained of the greatness of Christianity. *I am a student of the hundred and more of its manifestations, rendered concrete in the churches*; and I still shed tears, inspired by a celestial kind of melancholy, over the eternal pages of the Sermon on the Mount. A Great Priest, the highest of all, after reading my introduction to the Little Flowers of St. Francis declared (and caused his statement to be delivered to me) that I was an excellent Christian. And he sent me his blessing. I retain an ineffaceable remembrance of that pious Pontiff. When any question arose of defending the religious freedom of the Catholic church in offices under the government in which I often participated, I have done my duty by opposing the prejudices of unbelievers; and I continue to do so as a free writer. But no one must try to convert me. At my age, in the face of my incessant meditations over philosophy and faith, this would not be possible. *Consider me, Monsignore, as a heretic who, were he able, would be the apostle of a new faith that would be a composite of all other faiths*. If you want to make the acquaintance of this new kind of believer, I shall be happy to shake hands with you. And our conversation will be of the purest sort, because it will be free from any desire to proselytize[82].

This remarkable letter captures the complexity of Luzzatti's spiritual and intellectual orientation. Rather than fitting neatly into established categories – Jewish, Christian, secular – he embraces a position that is at once personal, ethical, and universal. His

81 Published in 1915.

82 The letter was sent to Monsignor Bonamartini, who invited him to convert to Catholicism. See Annibale Zambarbieri, Introduzione, in: Franchini, Chiesa, fede, pp. XIIf.

self-description as a »heretic« and would-be »apostle of a new faith« underscores not a rejection of religion, but a deep engagement with its moral and cultural dimensions across traditions. Luzzatti's theism, as articulated here, resists doctrinal boundaries while affirming a commitment to religious freedom, historical understanding, and interfaith respect. In an era marked by both religious upheaval and ideological rigidity, his position offers a compelling example of a pluralistic, yet principled, approach to faith and identity mediated through the means of the constitutional state. A state whose features were collapsing, at least in Europe, at the time of the English edition. A state and society that belonged to the »world of yesterday«[83].

83 Stefan Zweig's *The World of Yesterday* – his memoir, published in German in 1942 (*Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers*) – offers a vivid depiction of the world of the Habsburg Empire and the broader cultural milieu of the »long nineteenth century«. Zweig's reflections on the lost world of European intellectual and cultural life resonate with Luzzatti's own experience. Both were shaped by a European tradition that balanced liberalism with a deep respect for religious and cultural heritage. Luzzatti, in his search for a »theist« identity, mirrors the intellectual climate of the time – a period marked by a fluid approach to religious boundaries, where individuals sought meaning outside of institutionalized religions, yet remained deeply engaged with the moral and philosophical questions of their era. Like Zweig, Luzzatti was a product of a multicultural, multi-faith world – a world that, as Zweig so poignantly reflects, was lost in the wake of the wars and ideological conflicts that followed.

II. Universal Religions

Alessandro Grazi

»Religion cannot disappear from this world. It can only change«: Saint-Simonism as a Vector of Religious Transformation in Olinde Benjamin Rodrigues (1795–1851)

1. Introduction

> In the New Christianity, all morality will be deduced directly from this principle »*Men ought to treat each other as brothers*«. And this principle, which belongs to primitive Christianity, will experience a *transfiguration*; after which, it will be presented as constituting the great end of all religious labor[1].

With these words published in his *opus magnum*, *Nouveau Christianisme*, in 1825, the Parisian socialist thinker Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) tried to define the characteristics of a »New Christianity«, which would constitute the foundations of a future pacified humanity. This »universal religion« would also become one of the pillars of Saint-Simonism, a socialist utopian philosophy carried on by his pupils after his death in 1825. The clear reference to one of the traditional Enlightenment values spread by the French Revolution, fraternité, and its »universal« dimension, became one of the strongly attractive elements for a number of liberal Jews who joined the first Parisian Saint-Simonian circle. This clearly universal connotation allowed them to identify with this religion, despite its explicit mention of Christianity. They were able to re-interpret it and mold it to their needs, utilizing and adapting what they considered to be constitutional elements of Judaism, in ways that we will try to explore in this paper. As we will see, Saint-Simonism favored secularizing trajectories of liberal intellectuals, who were dissatisfied with and critical of the contemporary political arena but also, and foremost, of the current state of the

1 Henri de Saint-Simon, New Christianity, trans. by Rev. J.E. Smith, London 1834, p. 6. In the French original »Dans le nouveau christianisme, toute la morale sera déduite directement de ce principe: *les hommes doivent se conduire en frères á l' égard les uns des autres*; et ce principe, qui appartient au christianisme primitive, éprouvera une *transfiguration* d' aprés laquelle il sera présenté comme devant être aujourd' hui le but de tous les travaux religieux«. Henri de Saint-Simon, Nouveau Christianisme, dialogoues entre un conservateur et un novateur, Paris 1825.

https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666571480 | CC BY-SA 4.0

religious traditions, in which they grew up[2]. For instance, Charles Taylor singled out Saint-Simonism as one of the nineteenth-century secularization trajectories that responded to the need »[…] to retain some of the force of Christian piety while denying the dogmatic basis for it«[3]. As we will see more in detail in our specific case, it allowed the re-interpretation of perceived Jewish features in a new secular key, which is however not devoid of a spiritual dimension. By re-reading their past and tradition of provenience, the Jewish Saint-Simonians re-appropriated some characteristics of Judaism and utilized them to make sense of the world in a secular key, all within the frame of Saint-Simonism[4].

In this essay, I wish to explore and unravel some of the mechanisms with which Saint-Simonism favored this transition of originally religious elements into a secular frame, particularly for its Jewish members. It has been noticed how the first Parisian Saint-Simonian group was attended by a proportionally high number of Jewish intellectuals[5]. This numerical disproportion has triggered the curiosity of scholars, who have wondered whether there are specific reasons for it. Thus, recent investigations have explored overlapping elements between Saint-Simonism and some universal elements of Judaism, as reinterpreted by some of its Jewish adherents, hypothesizing concrete contact points[6]. This paper will heuristically pose the question: Did Saint-Simonism play a special role in this religious transformation from a Jewish point of departure? Did it have a particular appeal on liberal Jews?

In the second part of this essay, I will test my observations about the relationship Judaism/Saint-Simonism through the exemplary case of Olinde Benjamin Rodrigues (1795–1891), a French Jewish mathematician and a prominent member of the first Parisian Saint-Simonian circle. Examining some aspects of his life and œuvre, we will have the opportunity to investigate his individual approach to Saint-Simonism from a Jewish angle and will try to draw more specific conclusions about the role Saint-Simonism played in his life, in order to attempt answering the two questions at hand.

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2 Paola Ferruta, Zwischen »Wissenschaft des Judentums« und politischem Messianismus. Saint-Simonismus und deutsche Reformbewegung, in: Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 61/3 (2009), pp. 209–233, at p. 212.

3 Charles Taylor, A Secular Age, Cambridge, MA 2007, p. 389.

4 Paola Ferruta, Nineteenth-Century »New Marranism« and Jewish Universalism from a French-German entangled Perspective, in: Anna-Dorothea Ludewig (ed.), Versteckter Glaube oder doppelte Identität? Das Bild des Marranentums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Hildesheim 2011, p. 102.

5 On Jews in French Saint-Simonism, see Zosa Szajkowski, The Jewish Saint-Simonians and Socialist Antisemites in France, in: Jewish Social Studies 9/1 (1947), pp. 33–60.

6 Ferruta, Nineteenth-Century and Alberto Scigliano, Religion et Politique. Saint-Simonians, Jews and the Jewish Paradigm, in: Alessandra Tarquini (ed.), The European Left and the Jewish Question, 1848–1992, Cham 2011, pp. 37–51.

2. Saint-Simon and Saint-Simonism

Saint-Simonism was a form of utopian socialism theorized by the followers of the aforementioned French philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon. A few paragraphs about his life will be useful to understand his roots and the context, in which he developed his philosophy. Saint-Simon was born into a Parisian family, that belonged to the French aristocracy but had gradually lost its financial fortune by the second half of the Eighteenth-century[7]. He had shown a reflective and rebellious character since a young age. According to different sources, he purposely refused to take Communion when he was 13, as a sign of rebellion to Christianity and a general disdain for tradition[8].

As regards his personality, he apparently cared about being considered extraordinary very much. In fact, he often flaunted the alleged fact that he was born from the lineage of Charlemagne himself[9]. In some aspects of his character, Saint-Simon was indeed a remarkable person. For instance, he possessed an extremely strong will power[10] and a special charisma, which gave him a unique and enchanting personality[11].

He definitely lived an adventurous life. He fought in the American War of Independence against England as one of the soldiers sent by France to help the American colonies. He even served as a captain of artillery at Yorktown in 1781[12].

He survived the battlefield and, once he was back in France, he started attending courses at the École Polytechnique, devoting himself to science and philosophy. By 1808 Saint-Simon had become completely impoverished and managed to get by until the end of his life thanks to the generosity of friends. He attempted to kill himself with a gun in 1823 but failed and caused himself to lose one eye[13].

Now that the main features of Saint-Simon's life have been briefly described, let us delve a bit deeper into his views and their interpretations by his pupils and founders of Saint-Simonism. Between 1815 and 1825, Saint-Simonism was not a proper movement with specific goals but essentially a group of friends gathering around Saint-Simon and discussing mainly about society, philosophy, and religion.

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7 Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. »Henri de Saint-Simon«. Encyclopedia Britannica, May 15, 2024, URL: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henri-de-Saint-Simon> (2025-03-26).

8 Ibid. and Mathurin Dondo, The French Faust Henri de Saint-Simon, Philosophical Library, New York, NY 1955, p. 11.

9 Dondo, The French, p. 5.

10 Ibid.

11 Robert Jones/Robert M. Anservitz, Saint-Simon and Saint-Simonism. A Weberian View, in: American Journal of Sociology 80/5 (1975), pp. 1095–1123.

12 Britannica, »Henri de Saint-Simon«.

13 Ibid.

Saint-Simon's successors were the actual founders of a circle that was first formed in Paris but later multiplied within the same city and then even spread to other areas of Europe.

According to the French philosopher, humanity was basically divided into two classes, producers and non-producers. This was seen as parallel, not as an alternative, to the traditional division of three classes (Aristocracy, Clergy and People)[14]. The class of producers was formed by scientists, artists, industrialists, farmers, workers, intellectuals and »moralists«, while the non-producers' class consisted of aristocrats, lazy parasites (those who lived off their parents' money), soldiers and many political and religious leaders. He thought the present was the era in which the class of producers would finally prevail over that of the non-producers. If the old system relied on exploiting the individual, the new one aimed at winning over nature's forces and obtaining the best for humanity from the planet's resources. In order to do that, however, humanity had to realize certain social conditions, starting from specific premises. According to the first premise, inequality is a law of nature and absolute equality is a utopia. In Saint-Simon's view, making everyone equal would not solve social conflicts. Instead, one must create the perfect conditions for everyone to develop their aptitude and skills, according to each person's inclination and capability. The French revolution and the Napoleonic era had created the premise for the social developments hoped for by Saint-Simon, while the Restoration had wiped out this possibility, bringing society back to the medieval structure of slavery and exploitation of the producers by the classes of masters (clergy and aristocracy), through the concept described as *privilege*. One of Saint-Simonism's goals was therefore to abandon this idea of privileging one social class over another, but not through a class struggle, as suggested later by Marxism, but rather through the abolition of the proletarian class. Rather importantly, Saint-Simonism was among the first doctrines that reconsidered the position of women in society and proposed new solutions for their cultural and political roles[15].

The woman and the artist formed the so-called »social couple«. They both contributed to the goal of educating to passions and morality and of pursuing the unity of society by harmonizing the different classes[16]. Family remained the woman's main sphere[17].

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14 For more information on the detailed content of the Saint-Simonian philosophy see Ghița Ionescu (ed.), The Political Thought of Saint-Simon, Oxford 1976.

15 Frank E. Manuel, The Prophets of Paris, Cambridge, MA 1962, pp. 158f.

16 Ionescu, The Political Thought.

17 For an extensive discussion on Saint-Simonism's view of the role of women see Paola Ferruta, Die Saint-Simonisten und die Konstruktion des Weiblichen (1829–1845). Eine Verflechtungsgeschichte mit der Berliner Haskala, Hildesheim 2014 and Alessandro Grazi, Prophet of Renewal. David

Unlike later strains of socialism, Saint-Simonism did not dismiss religion *per se* and did not propose an entirely materialistic and secular view of the world. Instead, it maintained that the economic situation went hand in hand with the moral one, and that the latter could not be separated from the religious sphere. According to David Levi, an Italian Jewish poet and politician, a promoter of the Saint-Simonian thought in Italy[18], the reason for this was that, although socialism was based on science, the masses were not attracted by pure science and needed »imagination, passion and art«[19]. Precisely because he was convinced that society could never completely renounce religion, Saint-Simon developed the aforementioned concept of universal religion of humanity, initially called *New Christianity*. However, this religion did not retain any aspects of Christianity and, in fact, was later renamed by Saint-Simonian adherents as a generic new universal religion[20].

The same Levi maintained that Saint-Simon's disciples enriched his original view of religion in general with several new attributes and further reflections. For instance, they agreed that religion unraveled gradually and progressively within humanity and that, for this concept, they took inspiration from a »famous pamphlet« written by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, according to which religions constitute the educational power of humankind, and with the progress of humanity, knowledge and religion advance as well[21]. Levi, however, did not precisely indicate which pamphlet he meant. We can speculate it was probably Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts, first published in Berlin in 1780.

For the first Saint-Simonians the new »universal religion« was not only an important and interesting philosophical theme but became the focus of their entire lives. They started describing the organizational structure and activities of their circle in religious terms. Saint-Simon's teachings were called »parables«, its followers were described as »apostles«, its meeting place and organization as a »church«, its leaders as »priests« and the philosophy itself as a »creed« or a »doctrine«. The new members of these circles were said to embrace this philosophy through a »conversion«[22]. This language permeated with religious terms, already present among Saint-Simon's early followers, went on to influence other important thinkers during the nineteenth century. One above all, Giuseppe Mazzini, who borrowed precisely the Saint-Simonian jargon for the development of the religious dimension of his

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Levi, a Jewish Freemason and Saint-Simonian in Nineteenth-Century Italy, Leiden/Boston, MA 2022, pp. 110–123.

18 On David Levi's Saint-Simonism see Grazi, Prophet of Renewal, pp. 72–88.

19 My translation of the original Italian »immaginazione, passione, arte« in David Levi, Prima fase del socialismo in Italia. Il Sansimonismo, in: Nuova Antologia 69/4 (1897), p. 18.

20 Ibid., pp. 17–23.

21 Ibid., p. 18.

22 Ibid., pp. 7–12.

thought[23]. After all, the aforementioned Saint-Simonian and Italian Jew, David Levi, was also a Mazzinian and a member of *Giovine Italia*, the famous Risorgimento republican association founded by Mazzini himself[24]. It is possible that Levi, whose rendering of Saint-Simonism cited here dates back to the 1890s, had Mazzini's language more in mind than Saint-Simon's at the time he wrote his pamphlet.

3. Jews and Saint-Simonism

As aforementioned, the Saint-Simonian movement blossomed after its founder's death in 1825. At this point, Saint-Simon's disciples continued assembling in the name of their teacher and discussing about his views. This brought them to develop the Saint-Simonian philosophy which, in large part, actually differs from Saint-Simon's original thought[25]. They started following precise rituals and wearing specific garments during their meetings, so that they ended up defining themselves as a »church«[26]. For this reason, the first Saint-Simonian circle and the subsequent ones have also been called »sects« by several scholars[27], their philosophy a »doctrine«, and adhering to such philosophy has been described as a »faith«, in order to emphasize its religious, or rather mystical, characterization[28]. In this essay, words like »circle«, »assembly«, »group« or »sect«, but also the frequently used »movement«, will be utilized interchangeably, as a way to underline the many facets of the Saint-Simonian meetings. By 1831, nine Saint- Simonian meeting centers had been opened in Paris. These gatherings were generally divided in two parts: a ritual session, in which the Saint-Simonian adherents wore their costumes and performed their rites, while the public observed, and a second part, in which in a sense the church became a school, and Saint-Simonism was taught to the pupils and its worldview publicly discussed with the attending audience[29].

There is sufficient evidence to state that the number of Jewish members of the first »club« was at least relevant and more Jews joined at later stages[30]. The exact dimension of the entire first group of Saint-Simonians is unknown. But we do know

23 Simon Levis Sullam, L'apostolo a brandelli. L'ereditá di Mazzini tra Risorgimento e fascismo, Bari 2010, pp. 7–12.

24 Grazi, Prophet of Renewal, pp. 85–99.

25 Renato Treves, La dottrina sansimoniana nel pensiero italiano del Risorgimento, Turin 1973, p. 13.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., p. 42 and Jones/Anservitz, Saint-Simon, p. 1102.

28 Arthur John Booth, Saint-Simon and Saint-Simonism. A Chapter in the History of Socialism in France, London 1871.

29 Treves, La dottrina sansimoniana, pp. 19f.

30 Szajkowski, The Jewish Saint-Simonians, pp. 33–60.

that its inner circle was constituted by fourteen people, of which six were Jews: the group's leader, Olinde Benjamin Rodrigues, his brother Eugène, and the brothers Isaac and Emile Pereire belonged to related Sephardi Jewish families that originated in Bordeaux, while both Leon Halevy and Gustave D' Eichthal came from German Jewish families[31]. The latter two converted to Catholicism but, whereas D' Eichthal had already converted when he was 13, Halevy converted later on in life, as a way to marry a Catholic woman. The total number of young Jewish men never exceeded a dozen in the entire first group, nevertheless within a circle that was overall of small dimensions. The group's Jewish members did not only play an important part in numeric terms, as it is confirmed by multiple sources[32], but also and especially as regards the doctrine's contents and diffusion[33].

If we expand the horizon to Saint-Simonism's ramifications in other European states, we do know of other small Saint-Simonian circles in England and Belgium but do not have enough information concerning their members[34]. We are thus unable to make claims about their possible Jewish adherents. In Paris alone, we know of at least nine different gathering locations[35], as aforementioned. We also do know about some Italian circles[36], but we hardly have enough information about their participants. We do know a bit more about one Italian Saint-Simonian church, which was active in the 1830s in Pisa. In this case too, we do not possess enough evidence about the presence of Jewish adepts. Nevertheless, one of its members, the aforementioned Jewish writer and Risorgimento activist David Levi did not only attend the Saint-Simonian rites in the house of their »priest« Giuseppe Montanelli[37], but was also affiliated with the secret societies *Carboneria* and Freemasonry at the same time, located in nearby Livorno[38]. He witnessed how there were several Jewish members of both secret societies in the mid-1830s[39]. Considering the particular sympathy of the Saint-Simonians for the Italian national movement and that several

31 Ferruta, Die Saint-Simonisten, pp. 42–47.

32 Robert Jones/Robert M. Anservitz, Saint-Simon and Saint-Simonism. A Weberian View, in: American Journal of Sociology 80/5 (1975), pp. 1095–1123, at p. 1102.

33 Szajkowski, The Jewish Saint-Simonians, p. 37.

34 Treves, La dottrina sansimoniana, pp. 23–25.

35 Ibid., p. 20.

36 Ibid., pp. 33–43.

37 On Giuseppe Montanelli see Sandro Rogari (ed.), Giuseppe Montanelli fra storia e storiografia a 150 anni dalla scomparsa, Florence 2012.

38 Grazi, Prophet of Renewal, pp. 85–99 and Francesca Sofia, Il vangelo eterno svelato. David Levi e la massoneria, in: Fulvio Conti/Marco Novarino (eds.), Massoneria e Unità d'Italia. La Libera Muratoria e la costruzione della nazione, Bologna 2011, pp. 203–222.

39 Levi, Prima fase.

Saint-Simonians were also *Carbonari*[40], it is plausible to think that in Pisa too the Saint-Simonian circle was frequented by several secular Jews.

Therefore, why would young Jewish men be so magnetically attracted by Saint-Simon and his views? In the attempt of providing an explanation for this question at least concerning the original Parisian circle, Robert Alun Jones and Robert Anservitz adopted a sociological approach and identified three common characteristics of the first Saint-Simonian milieu's members. In their own words, these three features were:

1. very young men;
2. students of natural sciences and engineering, mostly at the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris;
3. »overwhelmingly Jewish«, meaning with a sizeable Jewish presence[41].

Then, they utilized the Weberian categories of »elective affinity« and »charisma« to explain their vicinity to this philosophy and to Saint-Simon in person, whom they all met in different occasions, thanks to his common acquaintances in the academic world of the Ecole Polytechnique. It is reasonable to think that both content and personal acquaintance were good reasons for their interest in this socio-religious system. Saint-Simon was undoubtedly a charming intellectual, as we have seen, and these young men's feelings of attraction for his ideas can also partly be ascribed to the radiating self-confidence of his persona and by the mere fortuitous aspects of their encounter. Nevertheless, there were indeed several elements of his philosophical thinking that turned out to be particularly attractive to young, Jewish men of the French bourgeoisie, and these elements constituted the main reason for their involvement[42].

Saint-Simonism's Enlightenment foundations provided the first attractive basis for these Jewish intellectuals. The classic universalistic values of »freedom, equality, brotherhood« resonated rather positively for a young generation of Jews that was the first or at most the second to enjoy civic equality in France and could finally live without legal discrimination[43]. The same feelings, for instance, were shared

40 Treves, La dottrina sansimoniana, pp. 18f.

41 Jones/Anservitz, Saint-Simon, pp. 1101f.

42 Ibid., p. 1106.

43 On the Jews of France in the age of emancipation and relevant historiographical discussions see Julie Kalman, Orientalizing the Jew. Religion, Culture, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century, Bloomington, IN 2017; France Zvi Jonathan Kaplan/Nadia Malinovich (eds.), The Jews of Modern France – Images and Identities, Leiden/Boston, MA 2016; Lisa Moses Leff, Sacred Bonds of Solidarity. The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France, Stanford, CA 2006.

by other young liberal Jews around Europe, who grew up in similarly bourgeoise backgrounds[44]. Not only Liberal Jews but also some religious Jewish leaders undoubtedly looked at Enlightenment's universal views precisely in their attempt to root Judaism in western cultural-political thought. With different nuances and declinations, they all sought to demonstrate that Judaism's universalistic values predated those of the Enlightenment and, for this reason, when the Enlightenment brought these concepts to the core of western thinking, Jews happily embraced them, as they recognized some of their own values[45]. The popular idea that Enlightenment principles were already embedded within ancient Judaism constituted the foundations of another common concept in the nineteenth century, that is, that Israel was the first democracy of the world[46], which, in turn, drew from a current of philosemitic Enlightenment thought that admired the Mosaic republic[47]. This idea was not only propagated by some Jewish intellectuals but was also rather prominent in non-Jewish milieus, especially precisely in Paris, where several historians of the Collège de France and the Sorbonne, like Edgar Quinet and Jules Michelet, taught about this concept in their courses and elaborated on it or paraphrased it in their writings. Jules Michelet was a prominent French historian, whose *opus magnum* was a six-volume history of France. He also developed a proper philosophy of history, utilizing the methods of historicism, in order to reconstruct the multiple cultural influences and substrata underlying certain historical events. Michelet postulated that ancient society could be divided between Hebrews and Gentiles (Pagans). One major distinction between them was that the Hebrews, illuminated by the true God, were able to establish a legal system inspired by justice, unlike that of the Gentiles[48]. As an even more direct reference to the concept of democracy, he also maintained

44 Cristiana Facchini, Incontri inconsueti. Modernisti tra gli ebrei e spiritualità contemporanee, in: Alfonso Botti et al. (eds.), I modernisti, gli ebrei e l'ebraismo, Brescia 2019, pp. 15–61.

45 Different Jewish intellectuals have used different tools in their attempt to demonstrate that Judaism's universalism predated the Enlightenment. For instance, Joseph Salvador developed his notion of »Mosaism«, a core of moral and ethical principles constituted by the mosaic laws. See Scigliano, Religion et Politique, p. 41, while the Italian David Levi identified the same universal principles in what he called »prophetism«. See David Levi, Ahasvero nell'isola del diavolo. Versi, preceduti da uno studio sull'ebraismo e la rivoluzione Francese, Turin: R. Streglio, 1898, p. 8. As one example of religious intellectual, see Elia Benamozegh, who instead referred back to the so-called »Noachid« laws. See Clémence Boulouque, Another Modernity. Elia Benamozegh's Jewish Universalism, Stanford, CA 2020.

46 See for instance Levi, Ahasvero, p. 8. But this view comes from a French political tradition that I am describing in the following paragraphs.

47 For instance, Adam Sutcliffe, The Philosemitic Moment? Judaism and Republicanism in Seventeenth-Century European Thought, in: Jonathan Karp/Adam Sutcliffe (eds.), Philosemitism in History, Cambridge 2011, p. 86 offers the example of the Irish Enlightenment thinker John Toland (1670–1722).

48 Jules Michelet, Œuvres – Philosophie de l' Histoire, Bruxelles 1840, pp. 177–182.

that Solon, the founder of Greek democracy, knew about the Hebrews and copied some of their laws in a time, in which the Greeks did not know the Hebrews[49].

Edgar Quinet was a slightly younger contemporary of Michelet and his colleague at the College de France. He shared his methodological views on historicism as well as many of his opinions on the philosophy of history. If Michelet read contemporary history, in particular the history of France and the French revolution, through the lenses of classical antiquity, Quinet was more focused on the study of religions. Similarly, however, Quinet too believed that the divine-inspired, higher moral compass of the Hebrews, not only allowed them to survive amidst the ancient populations of the »east«, even when they were reduced to slavery, but also determined conditions of equality among themselves[50].

The argument of the Jews' strong adaptability to their hosting society thanks to their deep attachment to the aforementioned high moral principles was often utilized in the 1800s, in order to perorate the cause of their legal inclusion within European society. In turn, this helped the Jews' ability to adjust to different and adverse situations in diverging socio-cultural environments throughout the ages[51]. Thus, the Jews managed to maintain within them the spark of democracy, the universal principles of equality and freedom for over two thousand years, until the modern philosophers were able to rationalize it through their reasoning[52]. The aforementioned David Levi attended Michelet's university lectures in the 1840s and claimed that Michelet had expressed the same concept in even more extreme ways: »in the Middle Ages, the entire humanity stopped thinking only the Jew was doing the thinking on behalf of everybody and preserved the awareness of the future«[53].

Thus, (some) nineteenth-century secular Jewish thinkers found the ideal frame for their re-reading and re-interpretation of Judaism in that string of Enlightenment thought that pleaded for an inclusion of the Jews in society, by distinguishing the universal dimension of Judaism from its particular manifestations[54]. This separation between the particular and the universal allowed them to be loyal and patriotic citizens of the country in which they lived and yet bearers of a strong feeling of »Jewishness«, that is, their view of what the features of Jewish identity should be. If we focus on the specific case of the French liberal Jews of the time,

49 Id., Œuvres, Histoire de la republique Romain, Bruxelles 1840, p. 471.

50 Edgar Quinet, Œuvres Complètes. Le Gènie des Religions, Paris 1857, pp. 181f.

51 Levi, Ahasvero, p. 20.

52 Michelet, Philosophie de l' Histoire, p. 177.

53 My translation from the Italian original: »L'umanità, […], aveva cessato di pensare. Solo l'Ebreo […] pensava per tutti e serbava la coscienza dell'avvenire«, in: David Levi, Ahasvero nell'isola del diavolo. Versi, preceduti da uno studio sull'ebraismo e la rivoluzione Francese, Turin 1898, p. 20.

54 Sutcliffe, The Philosemitic Moment?, pp. 85–89; id., Judaism and Enlightenment, Cambridge 2003, pp. 225–228.

recent, more nuanced historiographical considerations have tended to emphasize that a higher degree of assimilation would not determine an equivalent subsiding of Jewish identity, thus reversing previous research trends[55]. In other words, an increase of »French-ness« would not cause a decrease of »Jewishness«. They simply reinterpreted Judaism in different ways: At times in normative terms, at times in ethical-moral terms, but never in national terms. This malleability of Jewish identity and its re-interpretation through the Enlightenment's universalist lens was exactly one of the main attractive aspects of Saint-Simonism for them. It is not by chance that many Jews accepted to follow Saint-Simonism's original message but, by doing so, they not only tried to fit Jewish paradigms into it, but also provided their own reading of Saint-Simonism itself, which was different from that of its non-Jewish adherents. As a matter of fact, the universalistic ideals were a specific Jewish reading of Saint-Simonism, as they were especially central in the first phase of the Parisian initial circle, precisely under the guidance of Olinde Benjamin Rodrigues, his brother Eugène and other Jewish members. When later on Prosper Enfantin (1796–1864) obtained the leadership of the movement, the sect's orientation became more esoteric and its attention turned away from universalism[56]. The focus on universalism, however, persisted in other later Saint-Simonian circles even outside of France, as was the case of the aforementioned Pisan sect in the second half of the 1830s.

Concerning further contact points between Saint-Simonism and Judaism as envisaged by its Jewish members, a revealing factor is the personal connection among some of the Jews of the Parisian circle and the Berlin Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment)[57]. This personal connection between *maskilim* (proponents of Jewish Enlightenment) and Saint-Simonians is not surprising, considering that both movements had their philosophical foundations in the Enlightenment itself. In fact, the French Saint-Simonians have been defined as »heirs of the French Revolution's tolerant instances«[58], and the Jews among them as »heirs of the *Haskalah*«[59], bound together precisely by the common thread of Enlightenment's universalism. This is unsurprising, if we consider that the French Jewish intellectuals of the time

55 Leff, Sacred Bonds, pp. 22–39.

56 Ferruta, Nineteenth-Century, p. 100.

57 Literature on the Haskalah is vast. Some of the most relevant bibliography is as follows: Schmuel Feiner, Haskalah and History. The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness, Oxford/Portland, OR 2004; Israel Bartal, Responses to Modernity. Haskalah, Orthodoxy, and Nationalism in Eastern Europe, in: Shmuel Almog et al. (eds.), Zionism and Religion, Lebanon, NH 1998, pp. 13–24; David Sorkin, Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment, Berkley, CA 1996.

58 Scigliano, Religion et Politique, p. 39.

59 Ferruta, Nineteenth-Century, p. 123.

have been called »most faithful heirs of the Haskalah tradition«[60] and that the relationship between French and German Jews in the age of emancipation has been deemed as »symbiotic«[61]. Indeed, the connection of the Parisian Jewish Saint-Simonians and the *Haskalah* – and more specifically the Berlin Haskalah – was not only a theoretical one, based on a similarity of approaches to Enlightenment's universalistic and rationalistic values, but also a rather concrete personal one. The Rodrigues family, to which belonged Olinde Benjamin, had a close friendly relationship with the family of Moses Mendelssohn[62], the main exponent and founder of the *Haskalah*, and other French Jewish intellectuals had personal contacts with some German *maskilim*[63]. Gustave d' Eichtal, another prominent Jewish member of the first Parisian Saint-Simonian circle, spoke German fluently and was very much at ease in high-level socio-cultural milieus in Berlin[64]. The family of another Parisian Saint-Simonian Jew, Léon Halévy, was befriended with the Mendelssohns in Berlin[65]. This favored what the scholar Ferruta has defined as a mutual »cultural transfer« between the French Jewish Saint-Simonians and the German maskilim[66]. This »cultural transfer« did not took place through the exchange of specific cultural material or themes, but rather by importing to France a similar critical approach to traditional religion -both Judaism and Christianity as a matter of fact- and the impulses to renew such tradition[67]. The French Jewish Saint-Simonians basically played the role of intermediaries in a transnational context[68].

But in the minds of these young secular Jews at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Enlightenment was not the only common denominator between Judaism and Saint-Simonism. It has been noted that Saint-Simonism's secularized belief in redemption and tendency toward progressive views were essentially derived from ancient Jewish tradition[69] and placed themselves inevitably in the opposition during the Restoration. This is also clear, for instance, from the logical parallel between Saint-Simonism's »golden age« and Jewish messianism, because both have

60 Jay R. Berkovitz, Jewish Scholarship and Identity in Nineteenth-Century France, in: Modern Judaism 18/1 (1998), pp. 1–33, at p. 22.

61 Jonathan I. Helfand, The Symbiotic Relationship between French and German Jewry in the Age of Emancipation, in: Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 29 (1984), pp. 331–350.

62 Ibid., p. 107.

63 Ferruta, Die Saint-Simonisten.

64 Ibid., pp. 245–340.

65 Diana R. Hallman, Opera, Liberalism and Anti-Semitism in Nineteenth-Century France, Cambridge 2002, p. 289.

66 Ferruta, Zwischen »Wissenschaft des Judentums«, p. 210.

67 Id., Die Saint-Simonisten, pp. 26f.

68 Id., Nineteenth-Century, p. 109.

69 Ibid. and Jones/Anservitz, Saint-Simon, p. 1109.

a collective dimension and cannot be reduced to the redemption of individuals[70]. The Saint-Simonians believed in what has been defined an »active messianism«, that is, a form of messianism that does not simply passively waits for a Messiah, but actively prepares the way for a future polity, characterized by social justice[71]. Saint-Simonian Jews had the mission of supplying »moral-material laws« to their redemption of the world, as a way to reconcile east and west, that is, a »messianic convergence of sacred and profane«[72].

It is precisely this sort of political messianism or, in other words, this intertwinement between religion and politics, that features also in the proponents of the German Jewish Reform movement in the 1830s[73]. After all, this affinity with the German Reform movement has been described also for some Jewish adherents of the Italian Saint-Simonian circle and Freemasonry[74]. As aforementioned, in Pisa's Montanelli's Saint-Simonian circle, a number of adepts were also Jews and they were simultaneously members of Masonic lodges in nearby Livorno, as testified by David Levi[75]. The scholar Francesca Sofia pointed out how a number of values present in the theoretical apparatus of Freemasonry were also the main views of Reform Judaism, so that in Germany and the US, for instance, almost all rabbis who adhered to this movement were also Freemasons[76]. In her words, Freemasonry and the Reform movement shared »the same valuing of the universal element, identical supremacy of morality over faith, similar valuing of the individual over the communal element, identical promotion of philanthropic social action, framed in a philosophy of progress in which the messianism of tradition had a way of decanting itself«[77]. This view, however, has been criticized, as it would not take into sufficient consideration the systemic differences between Jewry in a Lutheran and Jewry in a Catholic context[78].

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70 Ibid.

71 Ferruta, Nineteenth-Century, pp. 108f. and id., Zwischen »Wissenschaft des Judentums«, p. 212.

72 Id., Nineteenth-Century, p. 101.

73 Id., Zwischen »Wissenschaft des Judentums«, p. 212.

74 Francesca Sofia, Gli Ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione, in: Gian Maria Cazzaniga (ed.), Storia d'Italia: Annali 21. La Massoneria, Turin 2007, pp. 244–265.

75 David Levi, La Carboneria, in: David Levi's private archive, folder 30.6.14 (2), Turin: Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento, p. 2.

76 Luc Nefontaine/Jean-Philippe Schreiber, Judaïsme et Franc-Maçonnerie. Histoire d' une Fraternité, Paris 2000, p. 153.

77 Quotation from Sofia, Gli Ebrei risorgimentali, p. 250. My translation of the Italian original »la stessa valorizzazione dell'elemento universale, identica supremazia della morale sulla fede, simile valorizzazione dell'individuo sull'elemento comunitario, identica promozione dell'azione sociale filantropica, inquadrata in una filosofia del progresso in cui aveva modo di decantarsi il messianismo della tradizione«.

78 Facchini, Incontri inconsueti, p. 30.

A further important vessel of cultural transfer between Saint-Simonism and its Jewish members was the crucial concept of *New Christianity*. As we have seen at the beginning of this essay, *New Christianity* was Saint-Simon's religious concept, the religious side of his utopian worldview. Its origins and principles are meticulously illustrated in dialogic form in his *Le nouveau Christianisme*, which was never completed, interrupted by its author's death[79]. Saint-Simon's disciples reclaimed this concept, also as a way to honor their master and to bring his work to a completion, and rebranded it »Religion of Humanity«[80]. Its first foundational idea was that Christianity is indeed a God-revealed religion but its only original divine element is that people should love one another like themselves[81]. Every other further historical development of Christianity was manmade and, in practice, betrayed its original principle. Consequently, everything that was wrong in Christianity's present was attributable to the selfish choices of the clergy[82]. Thus, Saint-Simon's new religion was first and foremost anti-clerical. Inspired by Enlightenment rational and universal principles, this religion was also progressive, as it would represent the perfect last stage of a constant positive progress of humanity, and would then become the religion, in which all other religions would converge: indeed a »Religion of Humanity«. In the interpretation of the Saint-Simonians it enhanced a new kind of religiosity, which was secular but not devoid of spirituality, being permeated by German romanticism, and was indeed quite far from the liturgies of orthodox Judaism[83]. The young Jewish intellectuals of the first Parisian circle generally came from quite traditional religious backgrounds, at times not necessarily observant and in other cases rather observant. During their youth they were dissatisfied with the traditional and religious dimensions of Judaism and abandoned them. They rediscovered their Jewish roots as young adults, through a »re-appropriation« of their Jewish identity in a secular key[84]. They could easily relate to a new form of religion, the one invented and hoped for by their master, in which its human developments and clergy (from their perspective, rabbinical tradition and authorities) could be harshly criticized, while its alleged original principles could be saved. In this evolution from »New Christianity« to »Religion of Humanity«, the Saint-Simonians were able to conserve its key principles of universalism, progress, and anti-clericalism, but could apply it also to their critique of Judaism and Jewish tradition, not only to the criticism of Christianity.

79 Saint-Simon, Nouveau Christianisme.

80 Levi, Prima fase, p. 18.

81 Ibid., p. 2.

82 Ibid.

83 Ferruta, Zwischen »Wissenschaft des Judentums«, p. 212.

84 Ibid.

Their critique, however, extended to the historical developments of Christianity as well. In particular, they were severely critical of the Catholic Church, expressing a wide range of feelings against it, ranging from a mere condemnation of its temporal power to anti-clericalism or anti-Catholicism tout court[85]. Although they were secular and in different degrees critical of both their own Jewish tradition and the Catholic church, they were not completely materialistic but had a strong need for spirituality and alternative religious forms. The »Church of Humanity« fulfilled all these needs perfectly. It gave them the opportunity to criticize the Catholic Church and Jewish (rabbinical) tradition but also offered a positive way out, a new religious framework, into which a new, reinterpreted Judaism could flow: a future religion, in which all types of discrimination would disappear. In their minds, New Christianity could fulfill both tasks[86]. Saint-Simonism helped them precisely in this secularization of Jewish forms maintaining the sense of spirituality they needed. With this step, Judaism's religious dimension was transformed into an ethical and political entity[87].

4. Olinde Benjamin Rodrigues (1795–1891)

After elaborating on the contact points between Saint-Simonism and Judaism in the view of the Jewish Saint-Simonians, let us now try to understand how these aspects intertwined in the life and œuvre of Olinde Benjamin Rodrigues, who was the leader of the movement after Saint-Simon's death and contributed to interpreting his philosophy through a Jewish prism. In order to understand Rodrigues's trajectory, it is necessary to grasp the family context, in which he grew up. He was the son of a family of Sephardi bankers from Bordeaux, who settled in Paris at the turn of the nineteenth-century[88]. In spite of their elevated social and financial status, as newcomers in the French capital they initially held a »peripheral« position

85 On the wide range of Jewish anti-Catholic stances, particularly within the French context, see Ari Joskowicz, The Modernity of Others. Jewish Anti-Catholicism in Germany and France, Stanford, CA 2014. On the spectrum of the different forms of anti-Catholicism, ranging from anti-temporalism to anticlericalism tout court see Fulvio Conti, Breve storia dell'anticlericalismo, in: Alberto Melloni (ed.), Cristiani d'Italia. Chiese, società, Stato, 1861–2011, Rome 2011, URL: <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/breve-storia-dell-anticlericalismo_%28Cristiani-d%27Italia%29/> (2025-03-26).

86 Jones/Anservitz, Saint-Simon, pp. 1106–1109.

87 Scigliano, Religion et Politique, p. 43.

88 Simón L. Altmann et al., Olinde Rodrigues and his times, in: Eduardo L. Ortiz/Simon L. Altmann (eds.), Mathematics and Social Utopias in France. Olinde Rodrigues and his Times, Providence, RI 2005, pp. 5–38, at p. 6.

within Parisian Jewry, as they were not members of any Jewish association[89]. Their importance within Jewish society increased gradually and by the mid-1820s they had reached a central role in the Parisian Jewish community[90]. Nevertheless, they were not observant, as was often the case among French Jewish families belonging to the elite. In line with the habits of the social group to which they belonged, that is, of acculturated elite Parisian Jews, the Rodrigues wished to make their family name sound more Gentile. One branch of their family modified it from Rodrigues Henriques to Rodrigues and another branch from Rodrigues Pereire to Pereire[91]. The same policy applied to their first names, already dating back to their time in Bordeaux. They used to pair a Jewish name with a Christian one. In fact, Olinde's parents were called Jean Isaac and Sara Sophie and were known with one or the other name, depending on the merchants with whom they were trading. Olinde had a Jewish name too, Benjamin, but preferred to go by his Christian name[92]. These and other elements tell us a lot about how they wished to be perceived in the public sphere beyond the Jewish elite. Nevertheless, it should not mislead us to think that they were not proud of or did not care about their Jewish heritage. On the contrary, the Rodrigues reflected a common attitude of the Parisian Jewish high-middle class, who »rejected the ghetto era« on the one hand, but were nonetheless strongly attached to their Jewish legacy and identity[93], as aforementioned. Thus, these names' changes did not only have practical purposes of integration within a Christian society but basically worked as a bridge between their Judaism and Christianity itself[94]. In fact, in its secular re-interpretation of originally religious Jewish concepts Saint-Simonism did not erase Jewish identities at all[95] but, detaching them from their religious and traditional dimensions, actually ended up reinforcing them, at least in terms of attachment to one's roots. This anchoring in his Jewish roots and parallel belonging to French modern, lay society is described by Rodrigues with a reference to the concepts of past and future. However, he sees these two concepts not as a mere dichotomy of totally detached elements in his life, rather as a transition from one to the other, in which what he believed were his Jewish characteristics were taken along his personal journey and contributed to form the man he was at the time he wrote:

89 Ferruta, Nineteenth-Century, pp. 102f.
90 Ibid., pp. 102–113.
91 Ibid., p. 103.
92 Ibid., p. 105.
93 Béatrice Philippe, Les Juifs et l' identité française, Paris 2016, p. 61 and Leff, Sacred Bonds, pp. 22–39.
94 Ferruta, Nineteenth-Century, pp. 102f.
95 Ibid., p. 95.

> I was born into that religion which taught men the power of moral and political unity, whose supreme pontiff prayed for all the nations of the earth, whose great prophet foretold that one day the ploughshare would be forged from the iron of spears, and whose persecuted members, scattered and united throughout the earth, began the emancipation of workers by creating the bill of exchange. I was born a Jew, yet my father wanted to make me a man for the future and not for the past: I never practiced the rites of Judaism[96].

Rodrigues is very well aware and proud of his Jewish heritage. In an apologetic manner, he first strove to emphasize Judaism's important cultural heritage and contribution to western culture, corroborating the idea that it essentially embodied the Enlightenment universal values of »liberté, égalité, fraternité« and played a major role in spreading them; but at the same time, he cared to emphasize his lay nature, pointing out that he had never been observant. The concept we have previously explored, that is, that Judaism contains in itself the universal seeds of the Enlightenment, is thus clearly present in Rodrigues' view, as shown by this example. Therefore, the Saint-Simonian doctrine was used by Rodrigues as a vector of religious transformation, as an interpreter of Jewish universal values.

But how and why did he become one of the first adepts of Saint-Simon and his circle? Jones's and Anservitz's aforementioned element of »charisma« can be perfectly applied to Rodrigues too. He was indeed recruited on the basis of personal charismatic appeal[97]. His Jewishness was not the first input for his participation in the first Saint-Simonian circle. Rodrigues was a brilliant student of mathematics at the Ecole Normale Supérieure and later became a tutor at the Collège Napoléon. He would have started an academic career as a mathematician, had he not been refused a post at the Ecole Normale after the Restoration, precisely because of his being Jewish[98]. He then reluctantly accepted a day job at a bank. A bank job was certainly not Olinde's dream, but it was exactly through a network of bankers that he met Saint-Simon in person and was »immediately captivated by this most

96 Olinde Rodrigues, Religion Saint-Simonienne. Appel, Paris 1831, p. 4. My translation of the original text. All the following translations of Rodrigues's original French texts are my own. Nevertheless, I would like to thank my IEG colleague Dr. Noëmie Duhaut for checking their correctness. Original text: »Je naquis dans cette religion qui apprit aux hommes la puissance de l' unité morale et politique, dont le souverain pontife priait pour toutes le nations de la terre, dont le grand prophèt aunonça qu' un jour du fer des lances on forgerait le soc des charrues, et dont les membres dispersés et unis sur toute la terre, persécutés, commencèrent l' affranchisement des travailleurs, en créant la lettre de change. Je suis né-juif, et cependant mon père voulut faire de moi un homme pour l' avenir et non pour le passé: jamais je ne pratiquai les rites du judaïsme«.

97 Jones/Anservitz, Saint-Simon, p. 1105.

98 Isidore Singer/Jacques Kahn, Olinde Rodrigues, in: Jewish Encyclopedia, URL: <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12799-rodrigues-olinde> (2025-03-26).

curious man«[99]. The charismatic appeal seemed to be mutual and Saint-Simon immediately recruited Olinde and his younger brother Eugène.

Olinde's role within the Parisian Saint-Simonian circle became increasingly more important, up to the point that on his deathbed Henri de Saint-Simon designated him as »his spiritual heir and successor«[100]. Rodrigues too perceived himself as Saint-Simon's successor and was explicitly aware of this[101]. Not only did he call him his *maître* (teacher), but he believed Saint-Simon himself endowed him with the task of spreading his message and views, as some sort of apostle:

> Saint-Simon, my teacher, revealed to me the political future of workers. He made me a pupil of modern science, aware of the dignity of industry, disdaining the work of man's arm and admiring only that of his mind. […]
> Well then! The day announced by Saint-Simon has dawned! I arrive in your midst, before all of you who listen to me, powerful with all the strength of my heart, my mind and my activity, to devote my entire life to fulfilling Saint-Simon's promise[102].

Rodrigues's feeling of fulfilling an almost sacred mission is strongly perceivable in these lines. Very importantly, this mission would have directly been launched by the founder of Saint-Simonism and it would be Rodrigues's task to bring it to a positive conclusion. However, Saint-Simon's personal designation of Rodrigues as his successor was not sufficient to ensure his position as a head of the movement. Internal jealousies and power struggles prevailed, so that Prosper Enfantin and Saint-Amand Bazard (1791–1832) managed to replace Olinde, who formally accepted his replacement in 1829[103]. Enfantin and Bazard were two influential, non-Jewish members of the first Saint-Simonian circle. They entered a power fight with Olinde Rodrigues and other Jewish members of the sect and were responsible for a transition of the group towards a more mystical, occult, and even sensual connotation of their activities. The aforementioned David Levi, for instance, maintained that one of the differences between the Pisan and the Parisian Saint-Simonian circles was

99 Frank E. Manuel, The New World of Henri Saint-Simon, Notre Dame, IN 1963, p. 344.

100 Singer/Kahn, Olinde Rodrigues.

101 Jones/Anservitz, Saint-Simon, p. 1110.

102 Rodrigues, Religion Saint-Simonienne, p. 3. Original French: »Saint-Simon, mon maître, m' a révélé l' avenir politique des travailleurs. Il m' a fait connaître la dignité de l' industrie, à moi, élève de la science moderne, qui dédaignais l' œuvre qu' accomplit le bras de l' homme, n' admirant que celle qu' enfante son esprit. […] Hé bien! Le jour announcé per Saint-Simon s' est levé! J' arrive au milieu de vous, devant vous tous qui m' écontez, puissant de toutes le forces de mon cœur, de mon esprit, de mon activité, pur consacrer désormais ma vie entière à réaliser la promesse de Saint-Simon«.

103 Jones/Anservitz, Saint-Simon, p. 1110.

precisely the former's lack of a certain mystical dimension, promoted by Enfantin and Bazard: »[In Pisa], accepting its main principles, we rejected its mystical and at the same time sensual, strange, and bizarre elements, in which Father Enfantin, Bazard and others indulged […]«[104]. As an emphasis on the mystical dimension of Saint-Simonism, in fact, Enfantin and Bazard wanted to be called »Father« by the circle's members, an appellation that was apparently used also by later adepts of Saint-Simonism, as Levi's text testifies. Rodrigues continued nonetheless to play an active role in the cult even after his dismissal as leader of the circle[105].

Apart from the undeniable personal attraction to Saint-Simon's charming personality and the deep feeling of having been bestowed an existential mission, which elements of Saint-Simonism attracted Rodrigues and allowed him to utilize this socialist philosophy as a vector of universal values from Judaism to a new (secular) religion? In the first place, Rodrigues accepted his master's task of pursuing the mission of New Christianity and wrote down his last words[106]. It is worth citing Saint-Simon's last words entirely, embraced by Rodrigues, as they show his view on the religious transformations of the nineteenth century that we address in this volume:

> The fruit is ripe; you can gather it. My last work, the New Christianity, will not be immediately understood. It has been thought that every religious system ought to disappear because men have succeeded in proving the weakness and insufficiency of Catholicism. People are deceived in this. Religion cannot disappear from this world; it can only change[107].

Rodrigues is equally convinced that religion cannot disappear altogether and perceives himself as one of the protagonists of this transition, precisely through his embracing Saint-Simonism. His transition from Judaism to New Christianity, or in other words to the universal religion of Humanity, did not happen instantaneously but led him through a re-elaboration of the self and of his own history, which included necessarily a new acquaintance and re-reading of his own Judaism as a first step:

> Saint-Simon made me understand, in the depths of my sympathy, this sublime religion which triumphed over pagan Rome and the barbarians by raising human abnegation to the highest power, by consecrating, at least in the shadow of the domestic hearth, the dignity of

104 My translation from the Italian original: »[In Pisa] accogliendone i principi generali, si rigettarono le stranezze e le bizzarie mistiche ad un tempo sensuali, cui si abbandonarono il Padre Enfantin, Bazard ed altri […]«, in: Levi, Prima fase, p. 24.

105 Jones/Anservitz, Saint-Simon, p. 1110.

106 Ibid.

107 As reported by Mathurin Dondo, The French Faust. Henri de Saint-Simon, New York, NY 1955, p. 188.

> women, by calling all classes of society to a first communion, at least spiritual, an infallible omen of a more real and more extensive communion, a magnificent announcement of the universal association of all the children of a same father[108].

The achievement of a universal religion will be the accomplishment of a societal transformation process but also the point of departure for the achievement of the Saint-Simonian utopic world, the »golden age«. Waiting for a »golden age« is nothing more than a further reinterpretation and embodiment of a Jewish religious motif re-used by Saint-Simonism and Rodrigues in particular: messianism. As we have seen, this optimistic expectation is possible thanks to a positive assessment of human progress, science and technology[109]:

> Saint-Simon revealed to me how the still corrupting power of money would one day become a moral power. He revealed to me how science and industry, theory and practice, whose profound alliance the world was unaware of, would one day unite, for the happiness of the world, under the religious inspiration of the fine arts, themselves renewed in their highest source, the love of God and humanity[110].

Money, when justly distributed, will constitute the moral power in the future, and not religion; science and industry will be the source of humanity's happiness; and the religious inspiration will come from the arts which, very importantly, will stem out of both God and humanity, here placed on the same level. Thus, the redemptive expectations of this future universal religion are clearly secular and help us answer our initial question in a positive way without hesitation.

This secularization mode through a re-reading and reinterpretation of one's religious tradition of birth was quite typical among nineteenth-century secular thinkers, Jewish and Christian alike[111]. It is exactly this re-discovery of his own

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108 Original French: »Saint-Simon m' a fait comprendre, dans le profondeurs de ma sympathie, cette religion sublime qui triompha de Rome païenne et des barbares en élevant l' abnégation humaine à la plus haute puissance, en consacrant, au moins dans l' ombre du foyer domestique, la dignité des femmes, en appellant toutes les classes de la société à une première communion, au moins spirituelle, présage infallible d' une communion plus réelle et plus étendue, magnifique annonce de l' association universelle de tous les enfants d' un même père«. Rodrigues, Religion Saint-Simonienne, p. 4.

109 Ferruta, Nineteenth-Century, pp. 108f. and id., Zwischen »Wissenschaft des Judentums«, p. 212.

110 Rodrigues, Religion Saint-Simonienne, p. 3. Original French: »Saint-Simon m' a révélé comment la puissance de l' argent, corruptrice encore, serait un jour une puissance morale. Il m' a révélé comment la science et l' industrie, la théorie et la pratique, dont le monde ignorait l' alliance profonde, se réuniraient un jour, pour le bonheur du monde, sous l' inspiration religieuse des beaux-arts renouvelés eux-mêmes dans leur source le plus élevée, l' amour de Dieu et de l' humanité«.

111 Facchini, Incontri inconsueti, p. 17.

Judaism, through a re-interpretation of Jewish tradition, that reminds Rodrigues, on the one hand, of what he believed were the positive aspects of Judaism but at the same time, made him realize he did not want to remain a Jew but wanted to evolve into something new. What this new thing was supposed to be was not immediately clear in his mind. But one option was absolutely out of the question: conversion to Christianity, as opposed to other Jewish Saint-Simonians. In his own words:

> However, I did not embrace Christianity; my mind, developed by the study of the positive sciences, could not accept these obsolete dogmas, struck for three centuries by the ax of Protestantism and philosophism. What am I then? Atheist? No! I am Saint-Simonian! And the most religious of the Saint-Simonians, after the one I salute, before you, as the most moral man of my time, as the worthy and true successor of Saint-Simon, whose first disciple I was.
>
> I am of this nascent religion, stronger in its unity than the law of Moses, broader in its sympathies than that of Christ; of this religion which includes all aspects of life, which comes to proclaim the complete emancipation of half of the human race, that of woman and industry; I am of that religion which develops all the legitimate sentiments which the past has bequeathed to us, which organizes in its bosom and from this world the retribution according to the works, which groans from the burden carried by the old man or by the woman, as well as from the idleness of youth and the immorality of sold beauty; I am of that religion which calls all members of the human family to peaceful association, in arts, science and industry; which, grateful to the past for the good it has done us, renounces war, fraud and violence; I am of that religion which elevates marriage to its highest morality, by consecrating the religious equality of man and woman[112].

112 Original French: »Cependant je n' ai point embrassé le christianisme; mon esprit, developpé par l' etude des sciences positives, ne pouvait accepter ces dogmes vicillis, frappés depuis trois siècles par la hache du protestantism et du philosophisme. Que suis je donc? Athée? Non! Je suis Saint-Simonien! Et le plus religieux des Saint-Simoniens, après celui que je salue, devant vous, come l' homme le plus moral de mon temps, comme le digne et vrai successeur de Saint-Simon, dont je fus le premier disciple.
Je suis de cette religion naissante, plus forte dans son unité que la loi de Moïse, plus large dans ses sympathies que celle du Christ; de cette religion qui comprend tous les aspects de la vie; qui vient proclamer l' affranchisement complet de la moitié du genre humain, celui della femme et de l' industrie; je sui de cette religion qui développe tous les sentiments légitimes que le passé nous a légués, qui organise dans son sein et dès ce monde la rétribution suivant les œuvre, qui gémit du fardeau porté par le vieillard ou par la femme, aussi bien que de l' oisiveté des jeunes et de l' immoralité de la beauté vendue; je suis de cette religion qui appelles tous les membres de la famille humaine à une association pacifique, dans les arts, la science et l' industrie; qui, reconnaissante au passé du bien qu' il nous a fait, renonce à la guerre, à la fraude et à la violence; je suis de cette religion qui élève la mariage à sa plus haute moralité, en consacrant l' égalité religieuse de l' homme et de la femme«. Rodrigues, Religion Saint-Simonienne, pp. 4f.

Here is Rodrigues's transition finally accomplished: a transition from »I was born a Jew«, who nevertheless never practiced Judaism, to »I did not embrace Christianity« but »I am not an atheist«, to the final »I am a Saint-Simonian«. On the one hand, he is aware of this transition in his life, of the internal turmoil he had to face, while on the other he needs to express his new identity largely through negatives – non-Christian, non-Atheist, but also non-Jew –, because this transformation is not entirely clear to him either. His only positive admission is that he is a Saint-Simonian, with all that this facet of his identity, arguably his main one, entails.

5. Conclusion

As we have seen, in Olinde Rodrigues's view all the main elements of contact between Judaism and Saint-Simonism emerge, or at least what he and the other Jewish Saint-Simonians believed were their main common traits. Enlightenment thought constitutes also for Rodrigues the foundations of everything. It could not be otherwise for a Jew, who attributed the utmost importance to the recently acquired full citizenship rights for the French Jews, or at least to the creation of conditions, which could allow underprivileged categories of society (be it religious or of any kind) to offer their best contribution, each in accordance to their skills and inclinations, and to achieve the top levels of society itself. What follows necessarily is that universalism takes a primary role in Rodrigues's thought. But universalism meant for him a detachment, or better a transition, from his native Jewish particularism towards what he perceived as the universal dimension and validity of Saint-Simonism, the New Christianity or, more appropriately, the Religion of Humanity. Rodrigues's interpretation of this key concept is crucial for an understanding of his individual trajectory, his personal religious transformation from an institutionalized, traditional religion to something different (secular?), that we will now try to better define.

Here, we must make an important acknowledgement. If we simply take the viewpoint of the Saint-Simonians and, in this case, the specific one of Olinde Rodrigues, we have to admit that they would have not described their religious transformation as a secularization trajectory but, perhaps, simply as the transition from a particular religion, albeit with universal principles, to a universal one. This can be assumed by their frequent reiteration that humanity is not a-spiritual and cannot live without a religion per se. Several Saint-Simonians have shown that this point of this doctrine was for them decisive. Rodrigues himself emphasized it and cared about underlining that he is not an atheist or devoid of forms of spirituality. But if we read Rodrigues' transition through the lenses of the German evangelic theologian Michael Nüchtern, we might come to a different conclusion. Nüchtern defined secularization as a »transformation and continued effect of originally religious

motifs and meaning outside of the religious sphere in the narrow sense«[113]. Does Rodrigues transition reflect this type of transformation? I would argue positively. If we consider the first part of Nüchtern's definition, it is uncontroversial to say that Rodrigues took originally religious (Jewish) motifs, that he already thought were in common between Judaism and Saint-Simonism: namely universalism, and messianism. They all definitely have a new effect and play an important role within Saint-Simonism's new universal religion. However, are they used outside of the religious sphere? If the term »in a narrow sense« means outside of the institutional and traditional frame, then the answer is clearly positive. Yet, we have seen that the religious permeation of Saint-Simonism's language is rather deep and so is in Rodrigues's interpretation as well. Nevertheless, I would argue that this religious transformation is one of the many possible secularization trajectories, as it manifests itself within a secular frame.

In conclusion, how can we frame Rodrigues's religious/secular identity? Using older analytical categories, which tended to clearly separate between religious or fully secular identities, it would be extremely difficult to grasp Olinde Rodrigues' personality, as well as that of many other liberal nineteenth-century intellectuals that underwent a secularizing path, having a traditional religion as a point of departure. A suitable term was utilized at the end of the 1990s by the Italian scholars Armani and Schwarz, in one of the pioneering studies of such secularizing trajectories. In their analysis of Italian Jewish bourgeoisie in the age of emancipation, they defined »emancipated Jews« as »elusive subjects«, referring to the difficulty of categorizing them under one overarching paradigm. By »emancipated Jews« the authors meant Jews who undertook different processes (with different levels) of assimilation in Italian society around and after the acquisition of full civil rights, called the »age of emancipation«[114]. Regardless of the fact that the specific terminology around the concept of »assimilation« was still quite ambiguous at the time, the allocution »elusive subjects« is useful in the case of Jewish Saint-Simonians and of Olinde Benjamin Rodrigues in particular. The term »elusive« almost implies a negative definition, or better, in a specular way it describes something these subjects were not, that is, neither religious in a traditional way nor secular. As we have seen, a negative definition would fit Rodrigues' own self-perception, which was founded on three negatives – non-Jew, non-Christian, non-atheist –. Once again, I propose to resort to a profound expert of Saint-Simonism, Paola Ferruta, who has suggested

113 My translation of the original German »die Umformung und das Weiterwirken ursprünglich religiöser Motive und Sinngehalte außerhalb des im engeren Sinne religiösen Bereichs«, in: Michael Nüchtern, Die (un)heimliche Sehnsucht nach Religiösem, Stuttgart 1998, p. 51.

114 Barbara Armani/Guri Schwarz (eds.), Ebrei Borghesi. Identità famigliare, solidarietà e affari nell'età dell'emancipazione, in: Quaderni Storici 38/114 (2003).

figures like Rodrigues had a »kaleidoscopic« religious identity[115], because they had a turbulent trajectory of reflections and transformations behind them, which led them to a complex, constantly evolving, religious identity, that appear to change form and color, according to the point of observation.

115 Ferruta, Nineteenth-Century, p. 112.

Alberto Scigliano

Mosaism Rediscovered: Joseph Salvador's Vision for a Universal Religion in the Nineteenth-Century

1. Joseph Salvador and the Conceptual Birth of Mosaism

The continuous revolutionary process in France from 1789 to 1848 consistently elevated intellectuals, providing a profound ethical and theoretical impetus to the dynamics of politics. In the aftermath of the Enlightenment's diminishing momentum, French intellectuals faced significant challenges in developing new ideological solutions to contemporary issues. These difficulties likely gave rise to distinct demands, merging utopian aspirations with the sensibilities of Romanticism. The perceived void within this revolutionary generation – if it can be described as such – was thought to find fulfillment primarily through literature, the arts, and poetry. Moreover, there emerged a sense of necessity for a novel form of religiosity, one that transcended the boundaries of established religions and the distinctions between European faiths, particularly Judaism and Christianity. This theme was prominently articulated by the French-Jewish historian Joseph Salvador (1796–1873), who advocated for a syncretic religion grounded in a renewed doctrinal framework inspired by the origins of divine revelation[1]. Indeed, Salvador's syncretic religion can be defined as a fusion of elements from Judaism and Christianity, with an emphasis on the idea of historical progress. Salvador perceived Christianity as a continuation and evolution of Judaism, interpreting the two religions as stages of a unified divine plan aimed at promoting universal morality and human advancement.

This phenomenon of syncretic religiosity can be understood as an attempt to transcend the limitations of existing religious traditions by proposing a unifying vision that rises above particularisms without erasing them. Salvador's proposal, as will be further elaborated, is notable for its ability to reinterpret the past through a universalist lens, where Judaism and Christianity were not merely historical and identity-based foundations but also served as ethical platforms for the construction of a shared religious future. This form of religiosity, therefore, goes beyond the mere reinterpretation of its heritage, aspiring instead to play an active role in societal transformation. As a matter of fact, the syncretism of this religiosity did not consist in a simple compromise between diverse traditions but rather in a

1 Francesca Sofia, Gerusalemme tra Roma e Parigi. Joseph Salvador e le origini del cristianesimo, in: Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi 21 (2004), p. 649.

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dialectical synthesis that highlighted Judaism's unique contributions – such as Mosaic ethics and its prophetic mission – within the framework of a broader project of universal renewal.

During this period, Romanticism rejected established and traditional religions – whether popular, orthodox, or heterodox – alongside the Enlightenment's faith in humanity and reason[2]. The interplay of religions, particularly the perceived tension between Christianity and Judaism concerning the supremacy of Christ over Moses, provided the foundation for a political and doctrinal discourse woven into the broader narrative of history. In this context, the Jews emerged as both a metaphor and a symbol within a grand biblical narrative, embodying the duality of particularism and universalism.

It is within this latter aspect that Romanticism retained its capacity to dismantle barriers, amalgamate diverse elements, and introduce new cultural expressions in what it envisioned as a prophetic era. The partial rejection of Enlightenment and encyclopedic ideals aligned with a broader imperative to rediscover and redefine universal values deemed worthy of defense. These aspirations culminated in what has aptly been termed the »mission of the writer«[3], whether it be the idealistic politician or the inspired prophet envisioning the arrival of a new era[4]. As a result, throughout this period, Jewish figures like Adolphe Franck (1809–1893), Isidore Cahen (1826–1902) and Salomon Munk (1803–1867) actively participated in the dissemination of Jewish sources, affirming the prestige of Jewish identity, and contributing to the establishment of a Jewish *Weltanschauung* in nineteenth-century France[5].

The French case is particularly compelling for several reasons, foremost among them the profound appreciation French Jews expressed toward political France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The French government had guaranteed civil equality and the right to representation for Jews, even during the Restoration. This welcoming attitude endured despite Napoleon's erratic policies, including the so-called Infamous Decree, which specifically targeted Alsatian Jews by introducing arbitrary restrictions that allowed Jewish merchants' orders and claims to be overturned. In light of this exceptional historical rupture, the newfound awareness

2 Michael Ferber, Romanticism. A Very Short Introduction, Oxford 2010, pp. 63–92.

3 I am referring to Paul Bénichou, The Consecration of the Writer: 1750–1830, Lincoln, NE 1999 [original edition Le Sacre de l' écrivain: 1750–1830. Essai sur l' avènement d' un pouvoir spirituel laïque dans la France moderne, Paris 1973]. The Italian translation of this work will be cited below.

4 See id., La consacrazione dello scrittore. L'avvento dello spirito laico nella Francia moderna (1750–1830), Bologna 1993, p. 364.

5 Michael Graetz, The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France. From the French Revolution to the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Stanford, CA 1996, pp. 57f. See also, Jay Berkovitz, Jewish Scholarship and Identity in Nineteenth-Century France, in: Modern Judaism 18/1 (1998), pp. 1–33.

among French Jews is both significant and understandable. The dissolution of the *Ancien Régime* demanded a natural re-evaluation of the mental frameworks and identities that had crystallised over centuries. This period of transformation necessitated a profound rethinking of concepts, perspectives, and identities, a process deeply embedded in the experiences of French Jews by the mid-nineteenth century.

In this context, Michael Graetz observed that, during the 1800s, the younger generation of Jews in Paris began to distance themselves from adhering to Maimonides' twelfth principle of the *Shloshah-Asar Ikkarim* (the Thirteen Fundamental Principles of Jewish faith derived from the Torah). This principle encompasses the belief in the imminent arrival of a messianic era[6]. As a result, the concept of the messianic figure underwent a significant transformation, shifting away from the traditional Jewish expectation of a triumphant return to *Eretz Yisrael* – a notion deemed incongruous with the socio-political realities of early nineteenth-century France. Instead, it evolved into a universally applicable, metahistorical idea of redemption. This younger generation of French Jews argued that the French Revolution, which also marked a separation of Judaism from its rabbinical foundations, represented the primary realisation of this concept. The arrival of a mythical Messiah was no longer deemed necessary; rather, Judaism's moral and spiritual principles themselves were reinterpreted as the means for achieving emancipation and redemption.

The recalibration of messianic expectations during this period gave rise to fervent prophecies and rhetoric. The concurrent revision of history and religion compels us to contextualise prophecy, religion, and utopia as integral components of the intellectual discourse of the time. In the nineteenth century, prophecy and utopia formed an effective synthesis of two distinct spheres. On one hand was the metaphysical or spiritual realm, oriented toward ethereal ideals and advancing through archetypes. On the other hand was the institutional or temporal sphere, grounded in practical efforts and the pursuit of tangible projects. While the former anticipated signs of the absolute and the soothing arrival of divine intervention, the latter sought to construct and enforce a new golden age as a remedy for humanity's moral and social decline. The potency of this nineteenth-century synthesis lay in its ability to harmonise metaphysical aspirations with worldly ambitions – an amalgamation that emerged as a decisive response to the perceived failings of the era. The true significance of this vision for religious renewal within this context becomes clearer when we interpret the prophetic dimension of early nineteenth-century thinkers in this way, encompassing figures such as Fourier and Saint-Simon. Indeed, this notion was a fundamental element of the broader framework known as continuous progress or progressive revelation – a concept that gradually took shape within the

6 Graetz, The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France, pp. 64f.

ideology of French Saint-Simonianism[7]. The utopian proto-socialist Saint-Simonians sought a universal synthesis, reflecting on the various epochs of human history with the conviction that ancient Judaism upheld an enduring mission for humanity[8]. From the perspective of Jewish Saint-Simonians, Rabbinic Judaism was seen as having fallen short of fully realising the original essence of the Revelation at Sinai. They concluded that the pure, foundational form of Mosaic Judaism continued to imbue history with its latent values. Early Christianity, Lutheranism, and the French Revolution were viewed as fragmented expressions of Judaism's enduring truth, striving to unfold across the arc of history. The significance of this intellectual milieu is often underestimated, yet it exerted a profound influence on European Jewry as a whole. The lack of a conventional religious reference highlights a conceptual challenge, while also pointing to a second, more historical – or perhaps historicist – issue: the theoretical problem of defining what constitutes true Judaism[9]. A significant aspect of this conviction stems from a distinctly French perspective that emphasises a clear separation between the Mosaic teachings of the Pentateuch and Rabbinic Judaism. The genesis of this new universalistic and Mosaic vision of Judaism can be attributed exclusively to one figure: the historian, intellectual, and polymath Joseph Salvador. Without Salvador's contributions, French discourse on the moral and political significance of Judaism would likely not have emerged.

Joseph Salvador was born on January 5, 1796, in Montpellier, into a family of Sephardic Jewish origin that had endured expulsion under the Edict of 1492. His paternal lineage reflected his Jewish heritage, while his biographer revealed that his maternal ancestry was of Christian origin. This dual heritage, coupled with an early exposure to both religious traditions, profoundly shaped Salvador's formative years and intellectual outlook[10]. The young Joseph Salvador received his education in the public schools of Montpellier, where his intellectual development unfolded during the post-revolutionary era, shaped by the prevailing spirit of emancipation. This period marked a time of profound transformation for European Judaism, particularly within the French context[11]. After completing his studies at the local medical faculty, Joseph Salvador moved to Paris to further his academic pursuits. In the

7 See Loïc Rignol, Le Saint-Simonisme et la théorie du croisement. Sciences des races et politique religieuse au XIXe siécle, in: Pierre Mousso (ed.), L' actualité du Saint-Simonisme, Paris 2004, pp. 277–292.

8 See Alberto Scigliano, Religion et Politique. Saint-Simonians, Jews and the Jewish Paradigm, in: Alessandra Tarquini (ed.), The European Left and the Jewish Question, 1848–1992. Between Zionism and Antisemitism, London 2021, pp. 37–51.

9 See for example the reflections of Alain Finkielkraut, Le Juif imaginaire, Paris 1981.

10 Gabriel Salvador, J. Salvador. Sa vie, ses œuvres et ses critiques, Paris 1881, passim.

11 See Jacob Katz, Out of the Ghetto. The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, New York, NY 1978; Shmuel Trigano, From Individual to Collectivity. The Rebirth of Jewish Nation in France, in: Frances Malino/Bernard Wasserstein (eds.), The Jews in Modern France, Hannover/London

vibrant intellectual atmosphere of the capital, he formed meaningful connections with a group of young Jewish scholars, fostering a shared spirit of inquiry. Over time, Salvador increasingly immersed himself in political and religious discourse, reflecting a deepening engagement with these complex issues.

Salvador's generation remained acutely aware of the challenges faced by Jewish communities under the *Ancien Régime*. At the same time, it was the first to nurture hopes of benefiting from the emancipatory ideals and values championed by the French Revolution[12]. Despite frequent disappointments, including societal skepticism and personal crises of identity, young French Jews emerged as the pioneers of Jewish emancipation in Europe.

Within this context, Salvador completed his studies at the Sorbonne and embarked on an academic career. However, the Bavarian *HEP! HEP!* riots served as a catalyst, compelling him to confront and embrace a more profound awareness of his Jewish identity[13]. Interrupting his career and research in physiology and medicine, Salvador turned his focus toward an in-depth study of Jewish sources, particularly the Old Testament, which he identified as the common foundation of monotheistic religions. This marked the beginning of his distinctive conception of Mosaism – a universal civil and religious ethos rooted in the teachings of Moses. By critically analyzing Jewish texts and reinterpreting them through a universalistic lens, Salvador framed his religious perspective as a key pathway toward achieving broader social reconstruction. At the same time, he challenged the emerging trend of Judaism's depoliticisation, which was being advanced by both reformist and orthodox Jewish movements of the era[14].

Salvador's literary career began with political treatises, most notably *Loi de Moïse ou système religieux et politique des Hébreux*, first published in 1822 and later ex-

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1985; Ronald Schechter, Obstinate Hebrews. Representations of Jews in France 1715–1815, Berkley, LA/London 2003.

12 On this see Jay R. Berkovitz, The French Revolution and the Jews. Assessing the Cultural Impact, in: AJS Review 20/1 (1995), pp. 25–86.

13 The acronym HEP was very likely intended to signify *Hierosolyma est perdita*, a medieval crusader chant. The uprising, still not conclusively identified by historiography to this day, commenced with minor social disturbances attributed to poor harvests, coupled with rumors of conspiracy. The violence against the Jewish population was probably directly triggered by the issue of emancipation, which was under discussion in the Bavarian parliament at that time. Moreover, in Germany during those years, the debate over the acquisition of full civil and political rights by Jews had persisted until 1819. Representatives of Jewish communities, having participated in the Congress of Vienna, formally requested emancipation. German academics and politicians vehemently opposed this, accusing Jews of attempting to gain control over Europe, particularly in the financial and banking sectors. (See Stefan Rohrbacher, The Hep Hep Riots of 1819. Anti-Jewish Ideology, Agitation, and Violence, in: Christhard Hoffmann et al. (eds.), Exclusionary Violence. Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History, Ann Arbor, MI 2002, pp. 23–42).

14 Graetz, The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France, p. 64.

panded and reissued as *Histoire des institutions de Moïse et du peuple hébreu* in 1828, with subsequent editions in 1830 and 1862. These foundational works explored the political traditions of the Israelites and established Salvador's reputation as a scholar. Beyond his analysis of Israelite traditions, Salvador made significant contributions to the study of Christian history. This is exemplified by his 1838 work, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine. Histoire de la naissance de l' Église, de son organisation et de ses origines pendant le premier siècle*. Additionally, he delved into ancient political history with *Histoire de la domination romaine en Judée et de la ruine de Jérusalem*, published in 1847. Demonstrating a broad intellectual scope, Salvador also authored a religious treatise titled *Paris,* Rome*, Jérusalem ou la Question religieuse au XIXe siècle*. Conceived as his spiritual and ideological testament during the 1840s, it was completed in 1858 and ultimately published in 1860.

This complex body of work illustrates Joseph Salvador's development as a learned writer, exploring various aspects of politics, religion, and history with sophisticated scholarship[15]. In particular *Paris,* Rome*, Jérusalem ou la Question religieuse au XIXe siècle*, the last book before Salvador's death in 1873, articulated his ideological legacy[16]. Salvador firmly believed in a universal Jewish mission, outlining a trajectory that began with Moses and would culminate in a forthcoming messianic era characterised by progress and universal brotherhood. Central to this vision was the reestablishment of a world religion as the cornerstone of this renewal. Salvador argued that the transformation of religions would unfold under the guiding framework of the Sinaitic revelation, paving the way for a renewed global order founded on shared religiosity. In his view, the ethical foundations of ancient pre-Rabbinic Judaism provided the common source for both Christian and Jewish theological systems. He presented Mosaism as a unified moral and religious essence rooted in the Torah, framing it as the basis for a universal ethical paradigm. Salvador's conceptualisation of Mosaism aimed not primarily at Jewish emancipation but rather at appealing to non-Jews, seeking to legitimise Judaism in the eyes of French public opinion.

In this endeavor, Salvador drew heavily on Rousseau's assertion that Moses established Israelite institutions without relying on their divine character, a notion that shaped Salvador's universalistic interpretation of Judaism[17]. In Salvador's view, belief in a divine entity was of secondary importance compared to the broader historical and religious impact of Mosaism. By emphasising the ethical doctrines of pre-Rabbinic Judaism, his aim was to establish a foundation for mutual understanding and respect among diverse religious and philosophical systems.

15 Alberto Scigliano, Simile di Solima ai fati. La grand narrative biblista nella cultura ottocentesca, Milano 2020, p. 52.

16 Salvador, J. Salvador. Sa vie, ses œuvres et ses critiques, p. 481.

17 Joseph Salvador, Histoire des institutions de Moïse et du peuple hébreu, vol. 1, Paris 1862, pp. 38f.

Salvador maintained that Moses' original Judaism, embodied in the Old Testament Decalogue, represented a civic religion imbued with both spiritual and political significance. Analyzing the core of Salvador's apologetic ideology – particularly his view of Mosaic Law as a tool for political progress – reveals his intricate fusion of religious and political thought. Salvador argued that the uncorrupted Mosaic faith possessed the potential to enrich both modern religious practices and political systems. Viewing the nineteenth century as a pivotal moment for the revival of Jewish principles, he believed humanity had matured enough to recognise the political wisdom inherent in Mosaic teachings. In this light, he championed ancient Judaism as the foundation for a universal reconstruction of society[18].

During this period, French advocates of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*[19], such as Salomon Munk, Jewish scholar renowned for his contributions to the study of philosophy and Jewish thought who worked to integrate Jewish traditions into broader intellectual and cultural discourses[20], and Adolphe Franck, a prominent scholar who explored Jewish mysticism (notably Kabbalah) advocating for the harmonisation of Judaism with modern philosophy[21], acted as intermediaries between the Jewish community and the scholarly milieu of the Central Israelite Consistory of Paris, established by Napoleon in 1808. Created to centralise and regulate French Judaism[22], the Central Consistory demonstrated a marked openness to the innovative interpretations of Judaism introduced by intellectuals like Franck and Salvador. Moreover, Salvador's influence on Franck was particularly evident in their shared vision of Moses as a legislator who universalised and rationalised the concept of God. As a counselor at the Central Consistory, Franck frequently lauded Salvador's ideas and objectives, viewing Mosaism as a forward-looking framework. He believed that Salvador had successfully aligned the foundational ideals of the French Revolution with the ancient faith of Sinai, presenting Mosaism

18 Id., Paris, Rome, Jérusalem. Ou, la question religieuse au XIXe siècle, Paris 1860, p. 35.

19 On the phenomenon of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see Maurice Ruben Hayoun, La Science du Judaïsme, Paris 1995; Andreas Gotzmann/Christian Wiese (eds.), Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness. Identities, Encounters, Perspectives, Leiden/Boston; MA 2007; Nahum N. Glatzer, The beginnings of modern Jewish studies, in: Alexander Altmann (ed.), Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History, Cambridge, MA 1964, pp. 27–46.

20 On this see Chiara Adorisio, Jewish Philosophy, Science of Judaism and Philology in Salomon Munk and Samuel David Luzzatto's Letters Exchange, in: European Journal of Jewish Studies 11/2 (2017), pp. 115–129.

21 On Franck see Jérôme Grondeux/Jean-Pierre Rothschild (eds.), Adolphe Franck, philosophe juif, spiritualiste et libérale dans la France du XIXe siècle, Turnhout 2012.

22 See Phyllis Cohen Albert, The Modernization of French Jewry. Consistory and Community in the Nineteenth Century, Waltham, MA 1977; Stephen Berkowitz, Progressive Judaism in France, in: European Judaism 49/1 (2016), pp. 19–31.

as a premise for future societal progress[23]. Building on these premises, Franck aligned himself with Salvador's vision of a new religion of humanity. This emerging spiritual framework was not intended to stem from existing beliefs but from the path first established by Moses – the origin of a new, yet profoundly ancient, universal spiritual sentiment. Mosaism was thus envisioned as the cornerstone of a renewed humanity, while Salvador, in turn, was celebrated as the »Jean le Baptiste de la religion à venir« of the nineteenth century[24].

In fact, Salvador actively championed an initiative that fused his revitalised Mosaism with the historical progress of his time. This transformative vision encompassed both political and religious dimensions. Politically, Salvador envisioned the rise of republicanism and democracy, which he believed Moses had originally introduced. Religiously, he anticipated the establishment of a universal faith grounded in Mosaic principles. Salvador viewed the ethical framework of ancient Judaism as a dual civil and religious creed, rooted in the wisdom of Moses, who was seen as the architect of a democratic Israelite republic where religious principles held political significance. In this model, civil laws and religious doctrines served as complementary pillars, forming the foundation of a cohesive socio-political structure. Mosaic governance, characterised by popular participation, justice, and equality, reflected its deeply rooted religious ethos. Thus, Mosaism, in Salvador's interpretation, was neither a theocracy, as some Enlightenment thinkers suggested, nor a hierocratic regime. Instead, it was based on rational and universal principles, offering a model of governance and morality applicable to all humanity[25].

Building on the foregoing, this concise contribution seeks to explore and critically engage with Joseph Salvador's conceptualisation of Mosaism as a prospective universal religion, positioning it as the ultimate religious path for humanity's evolution.

2. Mosaism and the Role of the Jews

Conceived in the 1840s, written by 1858, and published two years later, Joseph Salvador's final work, *Paris,* Rome*, Jérusalem ou la question religieuse au XIXe siècle*, sought to reinterpret Christianity and Judaism, critically examining their relevance as the religions of the future[26]. Structured as an intimate epistolary diary, *Paris,* Rome*, Jérusalem* offers a meticulous exploration of Salvador's understanding of

23 Adolphe Franck, Philosophie et Religion, Paris 1867, p. xi.

24 Ibid., pp. 230–256.

25 Scigliano, Simile di Solima ai fati, p. 59.

26 Joseph Adler, Restoring the Jews to their Homeland. Nineteenth Century in the Quest for Zion, Lanham, MD 1997, p. 130.

Mosaism, emphasising both its historical significance and its potential for revitalisation. Whereas his earlier *Histoire des Institutions de Moïse* focused on the political dimensions of Moses' civic institutions and their democratic ethos, *Paris,* Rome*, Jérusalem* redefines Mosaism as the culmination of a progressive religious trajectory. Salvador argues that the essence of Jewish significance resides in the ancient religious practices of the Israelites. Within this framework, the triad of Paris, Rome, and Jerusalem – presented as symbolic cities – serves as paradigmatic anchors for Salvador, allowing him to synthesise the principal facets of his era and the evolving religious discourse of the nineteenth century[27].

In his discussion, Paris represents the French revolutionary spirit. It is the archetype of democratic values within the modern politics[28]. Nineteenth-century France epitomises what Moses' polity represented in the ancient world: a democratic and egalitarian force amidst empires and nations that embodied its antithesis. Rome, by contrast, symbolises the Catholic conservatism that championed the restoration of the *Ancien Régime* in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Presented as the sole true theocracy of modern Europe, the Papal city is depicted as the usurper of Jerusalem's moral legacy. Its authority derives from the fusion of Christian doctrine with the enduring power of ancient Rome, whose heritage enabled the establishment and dominance of Christianity as Europe's principal religion[29]. Jerusalem emerges in Salvador's vision as the ideal setting for universal reconstruction, signifying the culmination of a process of religious reunification. It symbolises an effort to synthesise Christianity and Judaism, reflecting a determined aspiration to harmonise these two historically divergent faiths into a cohesive whole. Salvador's idealised Jerusalem thus functions as a synecdoche, representing ancient Israel and its Mosaic essence. In this context, it embodies the ethical principles foundational to the pristine Israelite religion, reified in Salvador's conceptual framework.

Each of the three cities – Jerusalem, Rome, and Paris – encapsulates a pivotal aspect of humanity's historical and religious journey since the era of divine revelation. Salvador's unifying vision of Jerusalem, then, can be understood as the archetypal representation of the final stage of humanity's progressive path. This stage is marked by the realisation of human unity through a religion – Mosaism – capable of integrating the revolutionary ideals of the French Enlightenment, which Salvador argued were inherently present in Moses' civil and religious order, while transcending the more authoritarian and Caesarist dimensions of Christianity. Salvador held that moral principles, being transtemporal and in some sense immanent, constituted the true essence of progress. In his view, ethical truths possess an

27 Salvador, Paris, Rome, Jérusalem, pp. 21f.

28 Ibid., p. 35.

29 Ibid., pp. 35, 210.

unparalleled capacity to drive human advancement, far surpassing the contributions of technical or material innovations. Genuine progress, according to Salvador, originates not from physical discoveries but from eternal ideal truths established in antiquity, which the nineteenth century was uniquely poised to rediscover.

Within this framework, the emancipation of the Jews and the establishment of civil equality during the French Revolution are seen as pivotal events that could facilitate a renewed recognition of Mosaic originality and its overarching, unifying principle. Salvador envisioned a synthesis of the revolutionary French spirit with Mosaism, sparking the potential for global renewal. Thus, the *question religieuse* initiated by Moses, intrinsically linked to the political sphere, must transcend traditional interpretations to open a new path – a third way between Moses and Jesus. This path would foster the »natural propagation of the Hebrew seed, of the Jewish principle« (»*la propagation toute naturelle de la semence hébraïque, du principe juif*«), aligning ethical and spiritual progress with the revolutionary ideals of modernity[30].

Nevertheless, Salvador argued that the religious question must be addressed at its very foundation. For him, true religious revitalisation entailed the regeneration of all creeds, including the ossified framework of rabbinic Judaism. From this perspective, traditional faiths, entrenched in stagnant doctrinal dogmas, lacked the dynamism necessary to drive the spiritual renewal demanded by the approaching new era. In contrast, the novel and syncretic Mosaist religion would serve as the catalyst for, and culmination of, the process of religious reunification between Christianity and Judaism.

Just as Judaism and Christianity had historically diverged, Salvador envisioned their ultimate reunification, but under the clear ascendancy of the pristine Mosaist creed. In his view, Mosaism represented the fulfilled epiphany of divine revelation – essentially, the realisation of the messianic message. Functioning as a transtemporal hinge between past and future, the wisdom of the ancient Israelites and their primordial faith would refine and purify the accumulated doctrinal encrustations that had hindered humanity's progress.

While this critique might seem evident in its application to Christianity – given the longstanding theological tensions between these two monotheisms – Salvador extended his argument to include modern Judaism. He contended that rabbinic Judaism, often seen as a counterpart to Christianity, had itself strayed far from the foundational values of Mosaic tradition. In Salvador's view, rabbinic Judaism had become as incapable as Christianity of perpetuating the authentic ideals that had once defined it.

30 Id., Histoire des institutions de Moïse, vol. 1, p. ix.

However, this critique did not extend to the Jewish people themselves. As the designated custodians of Old Testament traditions, Jews, rather than adherents to rabbinic doctrines, were uniquely positioned to carry out the overarching mission of Mosaism. Salvador thus entrusted the Jewish people with the pivotal role of guiding humanity toward this new religious synthesis, fulfilling the ancient promise of their spiritual heritage[31]. Consequently, the perceived shortcomings of rabbinical authority did not reflect deficiencies within the Jewish community itself. Rather, Salvador envisioned the Jewish people as the heralds and champions of the emergent Mosaist faith. In this interpretation, the survival of the Jews as a distinct people amongst the nations was a direct act of divine providence. By exemplifying righteous and egalitarian governance through the institutions of Moses, their continued existence served as tangible evidence of Mosaism's enduring mission. Without this perspective, Salvador argued, the remarkable resilience of the Jewish people – despite more than ten centuries of persecution and segregation – would remain inexplicable. Through a bold reinterpretation of the Christian view of Jewish existence as reluctant witnesses to the Messianic nature of Jesus, Salvador sought to reposition the Jewish people as the bearers of a unique responsibility: the burden-honour of leading humanity toward future progress. Unlike Christians and Muslims, who were tasked with propagating, disseminating, or converting, the Jews were given no such directive. Instead, their ultimate purpose, as Salvador asserted, lay in fostering the religious regeneration of the world at the appointed time. Their mission, shaped by historical endurance and divine intention, was nothing less than the spiritual renewal of humanity when the era was ripe for transformation[32].

As Salvador envisioned it, the role of the Jews was to reform both Christianity and Judaism by addressing the religious corruption afflicting these descendants of the ancient Mosaic tradition. This reform would be achieved through the rediscovery of the original Sinaitic wisdom. The Jews' profound knowledge, coupled with their

31 »Afin d' éclairer la figure et ses conséquences, il faut vous rappeler de nouveau que le peuple juif n' a pas été créé peuple pour lui seul, mais dans l' intérêt universel attaché à ce nom de Peuple. Vous en savez le comment et le pourquoi. C' est en ce sens qu' on ne doit pas le considérer comme une nation ordinaire, mais bien comme un peuple systématiquement consacré à une idée, à un principe, comme un peuple messianique ou initiateur. Dès lors, la force ou l' esprit qui tuait le peuple ancien était censé tuer du même coup l' idée, le principe irrévocablement associé à son existence«. Id., Paris, Rome, Jérusalem, p. 4. Furthermore, moving forward, we read that »La Bible relève le nom de la Loi; le nom de la loi relève le nom d' Israël, et celui-ci le nom de Peuple. Ces deux noms, ressuscités et rentrés dans le monde par la porte de la religion, la loi et le peuple, appellent et commencent une révolution politique dont les développements appellent et attendent, à leur tour, l' accomplissement général d' une transformation religieuse correspondante«. Ibid., p. 106.

32 Paula E. Hyman, Joseph Salvador. Proto-zionist or Apologist for Assimilation?, in: Jewish Social Studies 34/1 (1972), p. 13.

primeval political and religious erudition, would elevate humanity to the true state of holiness articulated in the Scriptures: »And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation« (Exodus 19:6, KJV).

In the context of the nineteenth-century religious milieu, Salvador asserted that it was essential to strip religion of its dogmatic and mystical accretions. Mosaism, he argued, would fulfill humanity's long-standing expectations of progress and sanctity by reviving the ancient values expressed in the Mosaic tradition. Only in the Mosaist future could these values be fully reestablished, offering a transformative vision of holiness and enlightenment for all of humanity.

3. Mosaism and Judaism

At this point, a crucial question arises: does Salvador's conception imply a marked separation between Judaism and Mosaism? The conspicuous absence of a conventional reference to Judaism as a validly recognised religion presents a significant conceptual challenge, as it raises the issue of what constitutes true Judaism. Central to this belief is a vision of religion that draws a sharp distinction between the Hebrew Bible and the *Rabbinica* – the corpus of rabbinical literature.

In Salvador's understanding, the Old Testament embodies a virginal religious purity, while the homiletics of the rabbis are portrayed as futile and burdensome paraphernalia. In this context, Mosaism emerges as a force of liberation, purging Judaism of rabbinic accretions to reveal its true essence. Allowing these rabbinic interpretative structures to persist, Salvador argued, would undermine the defense of Judaism's comprehensive and universal validity.

According to Salvador, rabbinic sectarianism – effectively isolating the ethical marvels inherent within Judaism – had long obstructed the historical energy of Mosaism from achieving its transformative potential. As I have briefly outlined, Salvador conceptualised Jewish principles as intrinsic to universal values such as freedom, self-determination, and democracy. These principles, he believed, were not merely particularistic but integral to the broader aspirations of human beings[33].

Needless to say, Salvador's Romantic vision cannot be assessed through the lens of genuine historical investigation of the Jewish past, nor can it be situated within the framework of Jewish Studies as they were developing in the contemporaneous *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement in Germany and beyond. When analyzing Salvador's account of the Mosaic system, one inevitably questions whether he

33 See Martine Cohen, Les déclinaisons historiques du franco-judaïsme et ses critiques contemporaines. »Peut-on être un juif émancipé?« (Emmanuel Levinas), in: Archives de sciences sociales des religions 144 (2008), pp. 141–161.

engaged with, or was even aware of, sources associated with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* phenomenon. It appears that while Salvador's postulates drew from a variety of materials, there is a conspicuous absence of references to works connected to the *Wissenschaft*. His preferred sources included rabbinic commentaries, medieval rabbinic authorities, and texts outside the Jewish tradition, such as the *Qur'an* and the Gospels. Salvador frequently cited Latin authors like Strabo and Flavius Josephus, Reformed theologian Jacques Basnage (1653–1723), seventeenth-century Hebraists such as John Selden (1584–1654), Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), Johannes Surenhuis (1664–1729), Wilhelm Schickard (1592–1635), and French Catholic exegete Augustine Calmet (1672–1757). The sole apparent link to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is Salomon Munk, a prominent scholar of the movement.

Conversely, it remains uncertain whether the scholars associated with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* ever engaged with Salvador's works. However, it is noteworthy that Salvador's *Histoire des institutions de Moïse* was translated into German by Elias Salomon Nathan (1807–1862), also known as Essenna, a Jewish physician, potentially bridging his work with the German Jewish intellectual milieu[34]. The German translation of Salvador's work, titled *Geschichte der Mosaischen Institutionen und des Jüdischen Volks*, was published in 1836. Notably, the translation by Nathan (or, Essenna) included an introductory chapter authored by Gabriel Riesser (1806–1863), a prominent advocate for Jewish emancipation in Germany and a native of Hamburg. This inclusion suggests that Salvador's work garnered a degree of recognition and interest within the German-speaking Jewish community and its intellectual circles[35].

In light of the intrinsic divergence between Salvador's approach and that of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, it becomes evident that Mosaism represents a metahistorical endeavor to articulate a Jewish rationale for a unique system of thought. As a non-traditional Jew, Joseph Salvador reflects key elements of the prevailing *zeitgeist*, which he reinterpreted and integrated into an eclectic and utopian framework. Consequently, the metahistorical significance of Mosaism is presented as the culmination of a transformative process – a new religious form that would not supplant Judaism but liberate it from the restrictive and antiquated glosses imposed by rabbinic tradition.

Mosaism, as Salvador conceived it, avoided adherence to any pre-codified theology, whether Christian or Jewish. Instead, it envisioned the reunification of Judaism and Christianity, empowered by the force of Mosaism, to collaboratively establish

34 Cf. The Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 9, New York, NY/London 1905, p. 178.

35 On the relationship between Riesser, Saint-Simonianism and German emancipation see Paola Ferruta, Zwischen »Wissenschaft des Judentums« und politischem Messianismus. Saint-Simonismus und deutsche Reformbewegung, in: Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 3 (2009), pp. 209–233.

the ultimate universal religion for the future of humanity. This vision aligns with broader currents in nineteenth-century religious thought, where the concept of a universal religion gained prominence, reflecting the philosophical and political currents of the era. Influenced by Enlightenment ideals of reason and individual autonomy, as well as the Romantic emphasis on faith's enduring mission, intellectuals of the time imagined a religion transcending traditional boundaries of creed and ethnicity. This universal faith aimed to unite humanity under shared moral principles and values, promoting progress, social reform, and a more equitable and harmonious world.

Figures such as Auguste Comte, with his proposal for a religion of humanity rooted in moral education, epitomise this trend. Yet, alongside these aspirations, the nineteenth century was also marked by intense debates over religious identity, nationalism, and cultural heritage. These tensions underscore the complexities and inherent challenges in the pursuit of a unified spiritual vision, revealing both the potential and the limitations of such universalist ambitions[36].

It becomes evident, then, that Salvador's understanding of religions was deeply influenced by an eschatological outlook. Through this lens, Judaism was idealised and reshaped with a Romantic sensibility[37], reimagined as a visionary framework for Jewish identity. As the literary critic Walter Pater observed in his works on Romanticism, bizarrerie and the prominence of unusual motifs were characteristic of the Romantic approach, often assuming a central, epoch-defining role. Salvador's Mosaism exemplifies this tendency. Far from describing a fully developed surrogate or Jewish-like religion, Salvador's Mosaism was not intended to supplant Judaism. Instead, it should be understood as an attempt to reframe and revitalise Judaism without abandoning its essence. When contextualised within its historical and intellectual milieu, Salvador's formulation appears as an ideal response to the exigencies of the period. His efforts to reassess Judaism aimed primarily at promoting the dissemination of its moral values and vindicating Moses' original religion. Salvador's goal was not merely to reconstruct Jewish tradition but to underscore its enduring historical significance and its relevance in the nineteenth century. By aligning the moral underpinnings of Judaism with the broader currents of modernity, he sought to preserve its legacy and relevance in an era defined by rapid social, political, and religious transformation.

As early as the 1840s – the decade during which Salvador's *Paris,* Rome*, Jérusalem* took shape – philologist and historian of religions Ernest Renan had already begun engaging with anti-Judaic ideas, notably the notion that the perceived inferiority of

36 See Andrew Wernick, Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity. The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory, Cambridge 2001. See also Antoine Picon, La religion Saint-Simonienne, in: Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques 87/1 (2003), at pp. 23–37.

37 On this, see Jacob Leib Talmon, Political Messianism. The Romantic Phase, London 1960.

Semitic peoples, including the Jews, made Judaism incompatible with modernity. While Renan's critique of Judaism remained consistently negative, it was framed more in terms of historicism than ethnicity.

Interestingly, during this same period, Renan also advocated for the creation of a positivist universal religion. This envisioned faith would be devoid of exclusivist or mystical connotations, reflecting the broader nineteenth-century intellectual pursuit of a rational, inclusive spiritual framework capable of harmonising with the ideals of modernity[38]. It was precisely on the subject of a future universal religion that, in 1860, Ernest Renan sharply criticised Joseph Salvador's views regarding the role of the Jews in the progressive development of humanity and religion. While Salvador envisioned a syncretic Mosaic religion that would transcend and integrate both Judaism and Christianity, Renan argued that the distinctive characteristics of each faith could not be entirely nullified or seamlessly merged[39]. In fact, this critique becomes even more pointed when considering the historical and intellectual opposition between the superstitious east, embodied by the Jews, and the rational west, represented by European Christian peoples[40].

Evidently, the dominant theme of the period – particularly within the Jewish milieu – was deeply intertwined with the ideals of universalism. Notably, even among certain rabbinic circles, emerged an ecumenical aspiration for a comprehensive, definitive, and universally encompassing religiosity[41]. Interestingly, some rabbis underscored the moral mission of Judaism in relation to France and the broader arc of history. The Mosaic revelation, once perceived as a singular event exclusively concerning the descendants of Moses, evolved into a universal revelation embodying eternal truths destined to radiate from the heart of Judaism into the wider world. In this context, the primacy of Judaism – its historical seniority and its role as the progenitor of other monotheistic religions, including Islam – acquired pioneering significance within the progressive narrative of human history.

In stark contrast to prevalent notions of Jewish inferiority and perceived irrelevance to humanity's advancement, these rabbis ardently championed Jewish preeminence not only in the spiritual evolution from polytheism to monotheism but also in Judaism's ongoing potential to contribute to the religious and social landscape of Europe and France. The concepts of diaspora and exile, traditionally interpreted as divine punishment or condemnation, were reimagined as blessings – seeds scattered among nations to cultivate the moral fruits of the Sinai revelation. From this perspective arose the romantic vision of a divine mission entrusted to the

38 See Ernest Renan, Œuvres Complétes, vol. 3, Paris 1949, pp. 777–813.

39 Id., L' avernir religieux des sociétés modernes, in: Revue des Deux Mondes 29/4 (1860).

40 Id., Œuvres Complétes, vol. 8, Paris 1958, p. 129.

41 Graetz, The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France, p. 65.

Jewish people and an ideal, definitive religion that prefigured and transcended others. These ideas found robust affirmation within the Central Israelite Consistory[42].

In addition to this Romantic sensibility, a Positivist attitude is also discernible, reflecting the rise of Positivism as the dominant cultural paradigm among the bourgeoisie of the time. While a definitive link between Positivism and the French bourgeoisie – of which Salvador was undeniably a part – cannot be conclusively established, there is little doubt that nineteenth-century France saw Positivism as a significant expression of bourgeois ideals. Although Mosaism, in strictly rational terms, had limited potential as a vehicle for religious renewal, it symbolised an idealistic aspiration among the educated elite for a profound shift in the spirit of the age. In this context, Salvador's conception of Mosaism represents a notable intellectual and cultural response to an era of upheaval. It sought to reinterpret and modernise Jewish tradition by transitioning its depiction from a static, antiquated framework to one imbued with progressive and inclusive ideals. This transformation marked a critical evolution, redefining Jewish identity by moving away from entrenched stereotypes and fostering a dynamic, universal perspective. Such a shift reflected broader societal progress toward inclusivity while underscoring the enduring significance of Jewish culture in addressing the complexities of modernity. In this light, Salvador's attempt to reconcile Judaism with modernity emerges as a pioneering effort.

By synthesising and transforming diverse sources – including medieval rabbis like Maimonides (1138–1204) and Nahmanides (1194–1270)[43] as well as contemporaries such as Salomon Munk – Salvador advanced a syncretic religious vision. This effort counteracted the longstanding tendency to exclude Jews from active, autonomous political thought. Since the Napoleonic period, with initiatives like the Parisian Sanhedrin, the Central Israelite Consistory, and the centralised control over Jewish religion, French Jews had demonstrated both adherence to Napoleonic ideals and loyalty to the French nation-state. However, this integration came at a cost: the forced separation of the political and ceremonial spheres of French Judaism.

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42 See L. Isidor, Culte intérieur et culte extérieur, in: Archives Israélites 8 (1847), pp. 473–475; id., Discours d' ouverture du course de théologie professè à l' école centrale rabbinique par M. Wogue, in: Archives Israélites 13 (1852), pp. 12–77; id., Les dogmes du Judaïsme, in: Archives Israelites 16 (1855), pp. 187–193.

43 Moses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides or by the acronym Rambam, was a preeminent medieval Jewish philosopher, jurist, and physician. His seminal works include the *Mishneh Torah*, a comprehensive code of Jewish law, and the *Moreh Nevukhim*, or *Dalālat al-Hā'irīn* (*The Guide for the Perplexed*), a philosophical treatise that reconciles Aristotelian philosophy with Jewish theology. Moses ben Nahman, referred to as Nahmanides or by the acronym Ramban, was a prominent Jewish mystic, biblical exegete, and Talmudic scholar. He is noted for his influential biblical commentaries and his defense of Judaism during the Disputation of Barcelona in 1263, a debate mandated by the Christian authorities.

This process of depoliticisation effectively confined Judaism to the realm of religious practice, inhibiting the potential for political interpretations of Jewish tradition and reducing its influence in the broader political domain. Salvador's work, therefore, represents a reversal of this flow, reasserting the intellectual and cultural agency of Judaism in engaging with modern political and social realities[44]. Conversely, Salvador's Mosaist vision sought to assert the cultural and intellectual preeminence of Moses' original normative work, not only within the framework of traditional Jewish exegesis but also through its integration with classical and modern philosophical thought. In his writings, Salvador skillfully amalgamated Jewish tradition with gentile sources to reconstruct and highlight Moses' political genius. As explained by Salvador, the aim was not to modernise Judaism – an endeavor he deemed unnecessary given Judaism's intrinsic modernity – but rather to project its inherent modern qualities into a broader society increasingly prepared to embrace them.

Furthermore, as previously noted, Mosaism emerges not merely as a religious construct but also as a potent political instrument. Salvador envisioned that once humanity was morally and spiritually uplifted through a revival of the Mosaist creed, the next step would involve the establishment of a universal Jerusalem. In Salvador's own evocative phrasing, this would be a »Jerusalem of the assembly of nations, a universal Zion«, symbolising a unifying ideal for humanity and a culmination of Mosaic principles on a global scale[45]. Even though this envisioned Jerusalem seems more imagined than tangible, Salvador argued that it should nonetheless be governed by a new law of common alliance among the civilised nations of the world. In this unique intuition, Jerusalem was framed as a measure of human progress, with Salvador's eschatology oriented toward ultimate redemption. This final revelation was encapsulated in the concept of an ideal city – a city that would signify the defeat of the adversaries of Israelite values and the triumph of equality, prosperity, and universal brotherhood, transcending all particular confessions.

To elevate this vision, Salvador employed the imagery of the sacred city, Jerusalem, symbolising the core of Moses' institutional framework. However, this utopian Jerusalem was not merely a metaphor but rather the progressive unfolding of history, as illuminated by the enduring example of Mosaism. As such, Salvador's »Mosaist Jerusalem« is a conceptual city that embodies the perpetual testimony of the mission of the sons of Israel. Within this framework, the Jewish tradition of *ha-brit* (the covenant) would be transformed into a universal or international

44 Jay R. Berkovitz, The Shaping of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century France, Detroit, MI 1989, pp. 104f.

45 Salvador, Paris, Rome, Jérusalem, p. 48.

covenant. This political transformation, in turn, would constitute an extension of the broader religious renewal.

As indicated by Salvador, no other law could claim universality except that of the Old Testament, as Moses' Torah uniquely integrated religion and politics. The Torah established a reciprocal relationship between the polis – encompassing city, polity, and institutions – and religio, understood as the ethical and cohesive forces binding individuals and values. This synergy represented the zenith of wisdom. Salvador's fundamental idea, therefore, was that the fusion of Judaism and Christianity, driven by the centripetal force of Mosaism, would culminate in an intellectual synthesis. This synthesis, in turn, would lay the groundwork for a future universal religion of humanity, harmonising reason, ethics, and spirituality[46].

4. Conclusion

The realisation of this fascination with an eclectic and primordial Judaism was far from a fleeting intellectual curiosity. The notion of a purported universal unity, embodied in the golden age of the Hebrew Republic and its Mosaist religion, transcends the nineteenth century, extending from late Humanism through the entirety of the early modern period[47]. Salvador interpreted the vicissitudes of the Jewish people as a dynamic interplay between historical events – such as the Diaspora, the destruction of the Temple, and the fall of Jerusalem – and intellectual dimensions, including the Jewish mission and the enduring relevance of *pensée hébraïque* (Hebraic thought) as a perpetual testimony to Israel's validity. The oppressive forces of Paganism, Latin Christianity, and conservatism posed formidable challenges to the continuity of the Jewish presence in the world. Yet, in the face of such adversities, Salvador envisioned the Jewish community as charged with a profound responsibility: to elevate and refine its intrinsic mission by transcending the constraints imposed by external forces and reaffirming the universal significance of Mosaist values.

The Mosaist order, as Salvador conceived it, represented an idealistic, utopian framework for social and religious organisation. His reimagining of Mosaism as a universal religion took the form of a neo-theological paradigm firmly rooted in the biblical tradition. In alignment with the aesthetic sensibilities of nineteenth-century Romanticism, Salvador's religious orientation favored Mosaic expressions over rabbinic interpretations. He drew deeply from the mythical and emotional resonance

46 Hyman, Joseph Salvador, p. 15.

47 On this see Eric Nelson, The Hebrew Republic. Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought, Cambridge, MA/London 2010.

of biblical Judaism, preserving its essence of primordial joy while envisioning a Messianic redemption. This approach underscored an aspirational pursuit, one that embraced the nostalgic allure of ancient Hebraic narratives while striving for a utopian future of spiritual and societal deliverance.

At the same time, Salvador sought to overcome the doctrinal limitations imposed on Mosaism following the destruction of the Temple. His works articulate a metahistorical vision of ideological redemption, aiming to awaken nineteenth-century Jews to their historical role. This historical function, however, was neither nationalist nor chauvinist. Salvador's Jews were not political agents advocating for a nationalist claim but rather a collective messianic entity, called to advance humanity's progress. As stated by Salvador, the Jewish people were a living monument to the universal and legal principles established by Moses, principles that needed to be rediscovered and reasserted.

In conclusion, Salvador's work must be understood within a broader framework, where Jerusalem and Mosaism serve as symbols of idealistic political and religious aspirations. His biblical fervor should not be dismissed as mere literary fascination but recognised as part of the grand narratives characteristic of the century of prophets and utopias[48]. Mosaism, as codified by Salvador in its most recognisable form, emerged not only as a framework for interpreting his contemporaneity but also as a blueprint for envisioning the future. The universality inherent in the Mosaic experience is, in this context, presented as an absolute truth from which humanity cannot escape. This constellation of Mosaist values serves to construct a narrative of a narrative, offering a meta-framework that intertwines historical legacy with forward-looking aspirations[49]. This represents a re-elaboration of Old Testament discourse, where biblical inspiration both consolidates the interpretation of the past and shapes the theorisation of the future. Salvador's approach employs a synecdotal rhetoric, using representational methods drawn from the Hebrew Bible to provide a robust argument for democratic ideology and universalism. Mosaism crystallised into a renewed exemplarity of the Jewish Old Testament, presenting Mosaist values as a paradigm closely associated with the civic and democratic principles of France during the transformative period between the Revolution and the Third Republic. Yet, Salvador's work avoided theology in the traditional sense. His interpretation of the Old Testament was grounded in the theorisation of a universal mission intrinsic to Judaism.

The Decalogue, as codified in the Sinai revelation, was posited as the immanent Jewish foundation for French constitutionalism. Salvador identified the Ten Com-

48 See Hayden White, Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe, Baltimore, MD 2014.

49 Scigliano, Simile di Solima ai fati, p. 71.

mandments as a divine precursor to the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which he later expanded into a universal apostolate advocating for the progress of humanity[50].

Salvador's tireless effort to reconstruct the Israelite example achieved the remarkable feat of envisioning and proclaiming a future universal religion – syncretic and emancipatory, centripetal but non-absolutist, and both political and moral in nature. The reassertion of Mosaic law through a universalist lens arguably represented the final pre-Zionist attempt to present Judaism as a diachronic experience. This trajectory begins with its primordial purity, born from the Sinai revelation, and unfolds within history while steadfastly preserving its foundational principles.

However, returning to the figure of Moses as the founder of the Jewish religion also necessitated a critical reassessment of established religions, including Christianity and diasporic Judaism. These traditions were criticised for their perceived inability to foster the civilisational progress of humanity. Salvador contended that monotheisms had become stagnant, highlighting the flaws of Catholicism's papal theocracy and Islam's coercive conversionism. Against this backdrop, he proposed that a new and future universal religion – rooted in the Mosaic ideal and uniting renewed and reconciled peoples – would transcend all prior religious forms, building upon the framework of Moses' revelation.

Thus, Moses and the Israelite epic became an interpretive lens through which political ideas could be validated and endowed with absolute legitimacy. This reconceptualisation of Jewish identity, deeply reflective of the contemporary *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, positioned Judaism's uniqueness in its ability to give shape and substance to humanity's messianic aspirations. According to Salvador, the Jewish mission was a diachronic moral calling, culminating in the establishment of a universal religion capable of advancing the progressive arc of human history.

Salvador's rediscovery of Jewish identity was, therefore, an ambitious attempt to reify a future religious synthesis centered on Judaism. This vision aimed to achieve a universal palingenesis – a transformative renewal – anchored in Mosaic principles and capable of guiding men and women toward a harmonious future.

Salvador employed a form of universal Mosaic politics, inherently valid and embedded *ab origine* within the Jewish people, capable of translating Jewish particularism into the public discourse of his time. In this regard, Salvador's thought can be characterised as messianic: he envisions a final destination, but the Jewish ἀποκάλυψις he articulates – understood in its original sense as an ultimate revelation – is not the absolute end of times. Instead, it signifies the maturation and

50 See Ofri Ilany, The Jews as Educator of Humanity. A Christian-Philosemitic Grand Narrative of Jewish Modernity?, in: Steven E. Ascheim (ed.), The German-Jewish Experienced Revisited, Berlin/Boston, MA 2015, pp. 1–14.

fulfillment of Judaism's historical mission. The Messiah prophesied by Judaism, in Salvador's vision, represents the reunification of human beings under the moral and ethical imperatives of the original Mosaic doctrine. As he eloquently expressed in his own words:

> Les livres [bibliques], confidents de ses pensées, sont arrivés à leur destination; ils ont été répandus chez presque tous les peuples du monde; le christianisme les a fait adopter. Mais le christianisme en a interprété l' esprit à sa manière; et le mosaïsme est resté comme défenseur- né de la lettre, comme une opposition qu' on pouvait opprimer aisément, mais dont les racines vivaces étaient au-dessus de toute volonté humaine, et devaient réagir au premier beau jour. Les nations s' agiteraient donc en vain pour reconquérir tous leurs droits, la paix, la stabilité; des entraves multipliées gêneraient longtemps leurs efforts; il faut que cette grande question soit résolue; il faut quece fait étonnant prenne sa place légitime dans l' ordre naturel des faits. L' ignorance seule des populations les a privées d' une force qui, en raison de la marche que la civilisation a suivie, ne peut être remplacée par rien; elles ont manqué de sens, autant que de justice, en frappant, d' une manière aveugle, un peuple constitué pour la loi, en jetant un voile d' oubli sur une loi proposée tout entière dans l' intérêt du people […]. D' après les principes et les institutions mosaïques, l' existence éternelle, universelle […], se manifeste sous le nom de Jehova, l' Être-Dieu. L' existence politique, qui absorbe toutes les autres existences, est le peuple ou Israël. […] Mais Israël n' est pas créé et ne vit pas seulement pour lui-même il est créé comme exemplaire, comme initiateur. Auprès de la race d' Adam, de toute l' humanité, sa mission consiste à faire connaître alternativement par sa propre expérience, les voies qui conduisent les peuples au bien et les conséquences les plus fatales du mal[51].

51 Salvador, Histoire des institutions de Moïse, vol. 2, pp. 330–332.

III. *Wissenschaft* and *Studium* as Agents of Religious Transformation

Irene Zwiep

Steinschneider's Piety: a Study in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Invisible Religion

1. Introduction

Fact: Moritz Steinschneider (Prostejov 1816 – Berlin 1907) was an atheist. In the prelims to his Hebrew bibliographies he repeatedly stated that he saw religion (Judaism not excepted) as a psychological construct with dubious airs and pretences[1]. For him, God was a figment of the imagination and the need for religion was born from human frailty and constraint. At some point in their lives, he argued, all humans ran into the limits of reason and had to face the limitations of their own innate powers of understanding. As a result of this confrontation, some reverted to scepticism and met the world with a healthy dose of doubt and suspicion. Others adopted an easy *Autoritätsglauben*, meekly accepting religious fallacies as truth, while a third category – the horror! – tried to combine theological dogma with scientific fact into a lower form of religious apologetics[2].

Steinschneider himself obviously sided with the sceptics. He rejected religion as a bogus knowledge system, stressed the incompatibility of *Glauben und Wissen*[3] and dismissed the new rabbinic seminaries, where *Wissenschaft* fuelled the battle between Jewish reform and orthodoxy, as a threat to serious scholarship[4]. Once institutionalized, he believed, dogmatic monotheism always showed its true bigoted nature, at the cost of its original humanistic mission[5]. For Moritz Steinschneider, who as we shall see was more a Schillerian universalist than an enlightened rationalist, tolerant secularity was both an academic default mode and a personal moral choice.

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1 For an analysis of Steinschneider's stance on religion and its motivation, see Irene Zwiep, Beyond Orientalism. Steinschneider on Islam, Religion, and Plurality, in: Ottfried Fraisse (ed.), Modern Jewish Scholarship on Islam in Context. Rationality, European Crisis, and in Search of Belonging, Berlin 2019, pp. 201–217.

2 Moritz Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung in die jüdische Literatur des Mittelalters. Vorlesungen, Jerusalem 1938, pp. 5f.

3 »Religion ist nicht Wissenschaft im engeren Sinnen, sondern im Princip natürliche Gegnerin derselben«. Id., Die arabische Literatur der Juden. Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte der Araber, Frankfurt am Main 1902, p. IX.

4 Id., Die Zukunft der jüdischen Wissenschaft, in: Hebräische Bibliographie 9 (1869), pp. 76–78.

5 Id., Die arabische Literatur, pp. 2f.

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Fact: Moritz Steinschneider was accused of trying to liquidate Judaism. Witness for the prosecution was the German-born Israeli historian Gershom Scholem (1897–1981), who in 1944 wrote a political indictment of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the nineteenth-century movement that had sought to modernize Judaism through critical historicism[6]. Scholem, who had put his scholarship at the service of the Zionist project, charged his German predecessors with putting authentic Judaism on sale in their efforts to achieve Jewish emancipation through assimilation into German society. In Scholem's words, they had used their academic skills to conjure up the image of »a purified, rational Judaism«[7], an abstraction that was meant to go down well with Christian politicians but did little justice to the Jewish past and present. By creating this apologetic vision they had robbed Judaism of its nationality and had come close to »the liquidation of Judaism as a living organism«[8]. Scholem had never heard Steinschneider actually say it, but he loved to quote his alleged dictum that the only task left to the *Wissenschaft* after decades of philological dissection had been »to give the remains of Judaism a decent burial«[9].

The allegation, though unverifiable, certainly is plausible from Scholem's point of view. Scholem studied Jewish history to (re)construct an autonomous, national Judaism, grounded in a lively tradition of Jewish mysticism and spirituality[10]. Steinschneider, on the other hand, abhorred all forms of »sentimental« nationalism, including Zionism[11]. An inveterate cosmopolitan, he spent his working life trying to write Judaism not *out of* Germany but *into* the world and, by doing so, to create one open, interconnected, and above all: hybrid cultural space[12]. Yet if this cultural interdependence left Judaism symbiotic and multinational (rather than autonomous and national, as Scholem preferred), its ultimate aim was to sustain and reinforce Judaism, not to exterminate and bury it. For Steinschneider, synergy equalled the vitality, not the end of a culture. For him, the fear of *Mischkultur* that ran through Wilhelmine Germany signalled nothing but cowardice and degeneration.

Fact: Moritz Steinschneider was a pious Jew. To be sure, his view of religion as opium for the fainthearted led him to reject all versions of revealed religion with a

6 Gershom Scholem, Hirhurim 'al chokhmat yisrael (Reflections on the Wissenschaft des Judentums), later adapted and reissued as The Science of Judaism – Then and Now, in: Id., The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality, New York, NY 1971, pp. 304–313.

7 Ibid., p. 309. For an evaluation of Scholem's verdict, see e. g. Charles H. Manekin, Steinschneider's »Decent Burial«. A Reappraisal, in: Howard Kreisel (ed.), Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought, vol. 1, Jerusalem 2006, pp. 239–251.

8 Scholem, The Science of Judaism, p. 306.

9 Ibid., p. 307.

10 For a recent study, with an emphasis on Scholem as a creator of private and Jewish narratives, see Amir Engel, Gershom Scholem. An Intellectual Biography, Chicago, IL 2017.

11 For Steinschneider's anti-Zionism, see Manekin, Steinschneider's »Decent Burial«, passim.

12 See below, pp. 140f.

determination that reminds us of Schiller's campaign for a secular civilization[13]. No denomination could escape Steinschneider's wrath. The Jewish Reform movement was set aside as a logical impossibility. »Die ›Religion‹ kann nicht ›reformirt‹ werden«, Steinschneider wrote, in a sentence that is less noteworthy for its meaning than for the inverted commas he used to put the concepts of religion and reform into critical perspective[14]. Simultaneously, his insistence on what Lessing had called *Selbstdenken* (autonomous thinking) precluded him from accepting religious rule. While trying to avoid the Scylla of Reform, he would not be caught falling into the Charybdis of orthodox dogmatism and rabbinic authority.

Still we may assume that Steinschneider's habitus was moderately Jewish. Upon receiving Prussian citizenship in 1848, he married his long-time fiancée Auguste Auerbach (1823–1898). It is safe to suppose that life in the Steinschneider-Auerbach household continued some kind of informal domestic Judaism as reconstructed by Marion Kaplan in her 1991 study on gender and Jewish embourgeoisement[15]. The couple's six children went by the names of Julius, Jacques, Albert, Anna, Joseph, and Max. Judging by the few pictures that we have, father Moritz's outward appearance was traditional but not orthodox, as was his daily professional routine. From 1869 to 1890, he earned a living by managing the Jüdische Mädchen Schule of the Berlin Jewish community, a humdrum job that sadly interfered with his research into Jewish literary history[16]. During those years he also taught at the Veitel-Heine Ephraim'sche Lehranstalt, a former *beth midrash* that had remodelled itself after the Berlin university in the 1850s and employed various high-calibre non-Reform scholars, including grandmaster Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) and librarian Fürchtegott Lebrecht (1800–1876)[17].

For all his cynicism Moritz Steinschneider was a man of deepfelt moral principles, which he shared with his readers in the introductions to his dry, factual bibliographies. In the posthumous *General Introduction to Medieval Jewish Literature*, the written record of his teachings at the Lehrsanstalt and the summa of his thought, he explained that the highest form of morality was found in the virtue of piety (*Pietät*)[18]. In the modern German lexicon, the Latin *pietas* had acquired

13 See below, p. 142.

14 Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, pp. 4f.

15 Marion A. Kaplan, The Making of the Jewish Middle Class. Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany, New York, NY 1991.

16 In the preface to his Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslime, Christen und Juden, Leipzig 1877, p. VII, we read that Steinschneider had been compiling relevant material since 1845 and that the manuscript had been ready by 1863, but that »die Übernahme einer Schuldirektion« had delayed the definitive publication.

17 See Karl-Erich Grözinger, Die Stiftungen der preußisch-jüdischen Hofjuweliersfamilie Ephraim und ihre Spuren in der Gegenwart, Wiesbaden 2009.

18 Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, p. 18.

a strong religious connotation. In Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* the term was primarily understood as *Frömmigkeit* and taken to express the childish »loving awe for the numinous and the holy«[19]. Given these religious overtones, how did Steinschneider, who had little affinity with the numinous and the awesome, define his idea of secular Jewish piety? And how could he avoid it being contaminated by that other odious sentiment of his latter days: national devotion, aka as patriotism? In the following I will try to determine what Steinschneider meant by *Pietät* and trace the intellectual roots of his definition. As we shall see, it was by staying true to his original project of »writing Judaism into the world« that Steinschneider could reach beyond the religious and the national and dock his Jewish piety into the universal humanism that he had always held so dear.

2. Moritz in Weimar

»It is a paltry, mean ideal to write for a nation«[20]. In a few words this *cri de cœur*, penned down by Friedrich Schiller in October 1789 in a letter to his friend Christian Gottfried Körner, summarizes the rationale for Steinschneider's entire œuvre. Written in the course of sixty-plus years and spanning thousands of pages, his writings seem concerned with one thing only: the reconstruction of Jewish literary history. Upon closer inspection, however, we find that the true focus of his work was not Jewish national literature but the dynamics of literature per se, as epitomized by the legacy of the Greeks that had been rediscovered by the medieval Arabs and preserved for the world by Jewish scholars and translators. On the surface, Steinschneider's work is about sharing bibliographical data. Page after densely printed page, it deals with the material and factual dimensions of intellectual history: texts and manuscripts, authors and titles, dates and places, *Vorlagen* and copies, editions and collections. Yet its true object is what happens in the spaces in-between: in the dynamic between the texts, the ways in which they interact and allow themselves to be translated, their power to revitalize stagnant cultures, and their ultimate sublation into the Great Library of humankind. Thus, while Wilhelmine Germany retreated

19 »[D]as liebe- und ehrfurchtsvolle Gefühl vor etwas höherem, heiligem«; Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, digitized version in the Wörterbuchnetz of the Trier Center for Digital Humanities, Version 01/23, vol. 13, 1845, URL: <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB> (2025-03-26).

20 »Es ist ein armseliges, kleinliches Ideal für eine Nation zu schreiben«. Quoted in Jeffrey L. High, Clever Priests and the Missions of Moses and Schiller. From Monotheism to the Aesthetic Civilization of the Individual, in: Elisabeth Krimmer/Patricia Anne Simpson (eds.), Religion, Reason, and Culture in the Age of Goethe, Rochester, NY 2013, pp. 79–98, at p. 79.

into a single, closed national culture, Steinschneider kept stressing the importance of international encounter and its energizing effect on all participants involved[21].

For Steinschneider Jewish literature, a corpus long overlooked by rabbis and theologians alike, was the key to this vibrant literary poly-system. Following Leopold Zunz, he viewed Jewish literature as a multinational, multilingual library that had always been closely affiliated with the world's great civilizations[22]. He spent a lifetime writing its holdings into their official records. In his catalogues of the Bodleian, Leiden and Berlin, he identified and described the Jewish tomes in the leading oriental collections of his time. In his studies on Jewish folklore he unravelled the interplay between universal memes and particular national formats[23]. He expounded the role of the Jews in the transmission of chess (*Schach bei den Juden*, 1873) and mathematics (*Mathematik bei den Juden*, 1893). In a time that favoured the original and the authentic, he studied »derivative« translations (Arabic from Greek, Hebrew from Arabic and, occasionally, from Latin), hailing the translators as the real guardians of truth. And while he loathed religion, he devoted many years to piecing together the theological debate between medieval Jews, Christians, and Muslims[24]. Finally, in his last, most militant days, he even labelled his survey of Jewish literature in Arabic »a contribution to the literary history of the Arabs«, to the confusion of reviewer Hartwig Hirschfeld, who subtly hinted that the master's advanced age might be to blame for this curious »lapse«[25].

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21 For Steinschneider's thoughts on cultural transfer see Irene Zwiep, Nation and Translation. Steinschneider's *Hebräische Übersetzungen* and the End of Jewish Cultural Nationalism, in: Resianne Fontaine/Gad Freudenthal (eds.), Latin into Hebrew, vol. 1: Studies, Leiden/Boston 2013, pp. 419–443, at pp. 430–436, and »Beyond Orientalism«, pp. 213–215.

22 E. g. in the early lemma on »Jüdische Literatur« which Steinschneider contributed to Ersch's and Gruber's Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste (II.27, pp. 357–376), translated and published as Jewish Literature from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century in London in 1857. In *Zur Geschichte und Literatur* (Berlin 1845) Zunz had defined *jüdische Literatur* as »intimately entwined with the culture of the ancients, the origin and progress of Christendom, the scholarly endeavour of the Middle ages […] sharing its struggles and sufferings […] but with an organism of its own« (p. 3). For a discussion, see Andreas B. Kilcher, Die Sprachen der Literatur. Zur Erfindung der »jüdischen Literatur« im 19. Jahrhundert, in: Naharaim 4 (2010), pp. 274–286, and Irene Zwiep, Writing in a World of Strangers. The Invention of Jewish Literature Revisited, in: Journal of Latin Cosmopolitanism and European Literatures 7: Classics and Canonicity (2022), pp. 1–20.

23 Steinschneider, Zur Sagen- und Legendenkunde, in: Zeitschrift für die religiösen Interessen des Judentums 2 (1845), pp. 380–393; 3 (1846), pp. 281–290; id., Über die Volkslitteratur der Juden, in: Archiv für Literaturgeschichte 2 (1870), pp. 1–21. See also Cathy S. Gelbin, The Golem Returns. From German Romantic Literature to Global Jewish Culture, 1808–2000, Ann Arbor 2011, p. 62.

24 »Ich darf wohl nicht erst versichern, daß meine Arbeit jeder theologischen Tendenze fern steht«, in: Polemische und apologetische Literatur, p. VII.

25 »It is, however, not quite clear why Prof. [*sic*] Steinschneider called his work a contribution to the history of the literature of the *Arabs*« (italics original). Hartwig Hirschfeld, M. Steinschneider's

Throughout his life, the open, dynamic poly-system of literature (and, by implication, of society) was a constant in Steinschneider's work. He had adopted the idea in the early, optimistic days of Jewish emancipation; by the end of the century, it had acquired a new, unfortunate urgency. In the face of mounting antisemitism, some Jewish voices began to advocate a radical retreat from Europe, while others pressed for total assimilation or clung on to the ideal of plurality[26] as a remedy for discrimination and exclusion. Steinschneider, by contrast, had little trust in the political impact of his work and knew better than to argue for Jewish sovereignty or appeal for gentile tolerance. Writing Jewish history, he wrote, was not the way to correct the antisemites[27]. But he did enjoy pointing out, through fact rather than rhetoric, that Jewish history ultimately exposed every nationalist ideology as a perversion of human nature and as a cultural dead-end alley. And yes, he knew that he was preaching to the choir.

Posterity would remember Steinschneider as an inveterate rationalist. In a 1908 obituary, Solomon Schechter hypothesized that Steinschneider, who had been so impartial that [he] occasionally became unjust«, had »never entirely emancipated himself from the rationalism of his youth« in maskilic Moravia[28]. In 1944, Gershom Scholem denounced him as one of the chief architects of »a purified, rational Judaism« that was heading for the grave. And when discussing his critique of religion, I too have overemphasized his indebtedness to enlightened secularity[29]. Steinschneider himself, however, begged to differ. In a letter to Adelheid Zunz-Beermann (1802–1874), sent from Prague in the early 1840s, he assured her that he was »actually not an uptight rationalist«, and who are we not to credit this self-assessment[30]? Steinschneider's individuality, and his inability to »accept any system in its entirety«[31], indeed suggest a more complex disposition.

»Arabische Literatur der Juden«, in: Jewish Quarterly Review 16/2 (1904), pp. 408–413, at p. 409. Hirschfeld had started by »congratulating the octogenarian on the achievement of such a work and expressing the hope that his mental as well as physical powers may remain undiminished for many a year to come« (p. 408).

26 See the plea for *Mannigfaltigkeit* in Moritz Lazarus, Was heißt national?, in: Id., Treu und frei. Gesammelte Reden und Vorträge über Juden und Judentum, Leipzig 1887, pp. 53–113, at p. 93.

27 »Judenfeinde belehrt man nicht, am wenigsten durch Geschichte«, in: Moritz Steinschneider, Hebräische Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher, Berlin 1893, p. XXIV.

28 Solomon Schechter, Moritz Steinschneider, in: Id., Seminary Addresses and Other Papers, Cincinnati, OH 1915, pp. 119–124, at p. 123.

29 Zwiep, Beyond Orientalism, passim.

30 Quoted in Ismar Schorsch, Wives and Wissenschaft. The Domestic Seedbed of Critical Scholarship, in: Marion A. Kaplan/Deborah Dash Moore (eds.), Gender and Jewish History, Bloomington, IN 2011, pp. 27–43, at p. 32.

31 Schechter, Moritz Steinschneider, p. 124.

We should be careful, though, not to confuse his aversion to grand narrative with indifference or eclecticism. Steinschneider's was an engaged, coherent programme which upon closer scrutiny seems to have drawn much of its inspiration from a precedent close to his youth: German (or Weimar) Classicism, a movement which, like Steinschneider, had chosen not to rely on reason alone and has gone down in history as a synthesis of late Enlightenment, early Romanticism, and Neoclassicism. A decisive influence on Steinschneider's theory of history was its preference for philosophical *Universalgeschichte* over episodic *Weltgeschichte*. Friedrich Schiller especially had proposed to study the past to find the essence of humankind, not to force disparate national histories into an »aggregate of bits and pieces«. In May 1789 he famously devoted his inaugural lecture at the university of Jena to this approach[32]. Later that year, in the letter to Körner quoted at the beginning of this section, he dismissed all other, less ambitious methods as »a paltry, mean ideal«. For the philosophical mind (*der philosophische Kopf*), writing history was not an end in itself. Rather than trying to document the past, Schiller's *Universalgeschichte* aimed at unravelling the elemental structures of human society in order to create a better present.

By studying Jewish culture as a part of human civilization to reshape social reality, Steinschneider's work on western literature echoes Schiller's theory of history. His strict humanitarianism sets him apart from all other proponents of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Not even Zunz, the scholar closest to Steinschneider in age, mentality and reputation, had been able (or willing) to extricate himself from contemporary political debate and inner-Jewish polemic[33]. Their colleagues, many of them *Doktorrabbiner*, had chosen an even tighter frame. Spellbound by modernity's promise of progress, they had put their scholarship at the service of religious innovation, with a proliferation of denominations (Reform Judaism, restorative Orthodoxy, conciliatory Conservative Reform) as a result[34]. In Steinschneider's opinion, the rabbinic seminaries that arose around these competing sects represented ever so

32 Friedrich Schiller, Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?, Jena 1789. The characterization of *Weltgeschichte* as »nie etwas anders als ein Aggregat von Bruchstücken« is found on p. 26. For a rich contextualization of Schiller's historiography between Enlightenment and historicism, see the essays in Otto Dann et al. (eds.), Schiller als Historiker, Stuttgart 1995.

33 Zunz's fundamental societal commitment is a leading motif in Ismar Schorsch's compelling Leopold Zunz, Creativity in Adversity, Philadelphia 2016. From the 1850s onwards, he directed his invectives against what he considered the excessive Reform interventions in Jewish liturgy, ritual and custom.

34 For the seminal persona of the *Doktorrabbiner*, see Ismar Schorsch, Emancipation and the Crisis of Religious Authority. The Emergence of the Modern Rabbinate, in: Werner E. Mosse et al. (eds.), Revolution and Evolution. 1848 in German Jewish History, Tübingen 1981, pp. 205–247.

many self-imposed ghettos[35]. For him Judaism had always belonged not to itself but to the world. By conjuring up an intertextual universe, his bibliographies were the ideal medium for showing his readers the nexus between national culture and world civilization and, in passing, between collective humanity and individual responsibility. If Schiller's universal history was meant to instil unity and to advance the ideal of »world peace«, Steinschneider aimed for a Europe that would accept its Jewish citizens on purely cosmopolitan grounds, not by weighing the Jews' economic utility or by judging their civil merit.

Needless to say, Steinschneider had no wish to implement, let alone emulate, Weimar's aesthetic agenda, nor to refine the movement's philosophical foundations. He was a Hebrew bibliographer, not a German poet or a Kantian idealist. Yet in the spare prose of his prefaces his personal affinity with the German classicist values of his younger days is palpable. Therefore, at the risk of lapsing into parallellomania, I will briefly list what I see as the main correspondences, before turning to Steinschneider's thoughts on Jewish secular piety.

Firstly, in line with his universalist historiography, there is his insistence on the fundamental unity of human nature, a basic Enlightenment tenet that was retained by German Classicism. »It is [a scholar's] duty«, Steinschneider wrote as late as 1902, »to highlight the common element in humanity's many circles […] that which brings people closer (das, was die Menschen einander nähert)«[36]. With this stress on inclusive *Humanität* came the dogma of unconditional tolerance. From this dogma it followed that to plead the Jewish cause meant waiving a basic human right, which in its turn meant stooping to the level of the antisemites, who had made waiving these rights their daily routine. Begging tolerance from the intolerant was something Steinschneider categorically refused. »I write about Jews«, he wrote in the preface to the *Hebräische Übersetzungen* (1893), »but not on their behalf, not pro domo. To mobilize the culture of the ancient Jews for the sake of Jews today is to betray an unnegotiable human right«[37]. Lashing out at Jew and non-Jew alike, the line first of all is vintage Steinschneider. Simultaneously, it is a response to publications such as Nahida Lazarus-Remy *Kulturstudien über das Judentum* (likewise published in 1893), which tried to win the gentile hearts and minds for Judaism by extolling Jewish cultural achievement[38].

35 Comp. his famous maxim »für den Geist gibt es kein Ghetto« (the spirit knows of no ghetto) in the preface to Die Hebräische Übersetzungen, p. XXII.

36 Die arabische Literatur, p. X.

37 »Ich schreibe über Juden, aber nicht für sie, nicht pro domo. Die Kultur der alten Juden für die jetzigen in Anschlag zu bringen, wäre Verrat an dem unveräusserlichen Menschenrecht«. Hebräische Übersetzungen, p. XXIV.

38 On Nahida Lazarus-Remy, see Alan T. Levenson, An Adventure in Otherness. Nahida Remy-Ruth Lazarus (1849–1928), in: Tamar M. Rudavsky (ed.), Gender and Judaism. The Transformation

Secondly, there is the centrality of Greek science and philosophy in Steinschneider's work, which had culminated, towards the end of his career, in *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher*. Steinschneider needed more than 1,400 pages to record the transmission history of the Greek sciences as documented in medieval Arabic and Hebrew translations. In staggering detail he listed every single coordinate of every scrap of textual evidence that he had come across in the course of his research. The result was an exhaustive, richly annotated, alphabetical survey of medieval authors, titles, and manuscripts that is still being consulted (and updated) by scholars today[39].

One hundred years earlier, in the brief transitory period between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, the Greek legacy likewise had determined the course of the *Weimarer Klassik*. Yet where Steinschneider chose Greek science as the apex of human achievement, the Weimar authors had focused on art and aesthetics. »I am more and more convinced«, Goethe told his friend Johann Peter Eckermann, »that poetry is the universal possession of mankind […] but […] we must always return to the Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented«[40].

Goethe's trust in the constant Greeks had informed periodicals like his own *Propyläen*, Schiller's *Die Horen*, and August Wilhelm Schlegel's *Athenäum*, all published between 1795 and 1800. In these short-lived journals, as well as in the plays, poems, and translations that appeared during the period, the classics had been much more than a distant literary example. In the work of Goethe, Schiller and the Schlegel brothers, the Greek legacy became a creative force, an aesthetic sparring partner and, ultimately, an instrument of social and political intervention. By bringing together harmonious beauty and lucid reason, the Greek *auctores* inspired the Weimar authors to restore the balance between sense and sensibility, which they felt had recently gone awry. By introducing the sensation of beauty into enlightened discourse, they hoped to stimulate a different set of mental faculties and to expel the exclusive »tyranny of reason«, which only a few years before had caused the

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of Tradition, New York, NY/London 1995, pp. 99–111 and, more recently, Maria Japs, Nahida Lazarus-Remy und »Das jüdische Weib«. Eine projüdische Stimme im 19. Jahrhundert, Bielefeld 2023.

39 Charles H. Manekin, Steinschneider's *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*. From Reference work to Digitalized Database, in: Jewish Studies Quarterly 7 (2000), pp. 141–159. For the long prehistory of the *HÜ* and its celebration of Greek scholarship, see id., The Genesis of *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*, in: Reimund Leicht/Gad Freudenthal (eds.), Studies on Steinschneider. Moritz Steinschneider and the Emergence of the Science of Judaism in Nineteenth-Century Germany, Leiden 2012, pp. 487–529.

40 Quoted and translated from Eckermann's Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens (1836), in: David Damrosch, What is World Literature?, Princeton, NJ/London 2003, p. 12.

French Revolution to degenerate into a Reign of Terror that had revealed the true face of »uptight rationalism«.

Steinschneider's poly-system, too, was rooted in ancient Greece, as the cradle and essence of human civilization. As mentioned above, he was less interested in its aesthetic qualities than in its historical role as an intellectual catalyst and agent of cultural change. In his bibliographies Greek science became the cornerstone of an intellectual republic that had offered citizenship to scholars of all times, creeds, and languages. The linguistic variety, especially, had been hugely consequential. Though never affecting civilization at its core, multilingualism had impacted its outer format, modified its terminology and even, on occasion, shifted its metaphysical priorities. The pursuit of science, in short, was a collective human effort and, by the same token, a locus of steady transculturation and osmosis[41].

In multilingual Europe transmission equalled transformation, with the act of translation as its primary tool. »The world's best cultural mediators«, Steinschneider wrote in the preface to the *Hebräische Übersetzungen*, »are the interlinguals«[42]. In a single gesture, he noticed, they would add new (Arabic, Hebrew, Latin) layers to the Greek originals, and Greek substance to their own cultural traditions. Translations thus became »[b]ridges for introducing foreign ideas […] preparing the transmission *and mixing* of that which is foreign with that which is *perceived as legacy*«[43]. Here as elsewhere, Steinschneider's choice of words was far from accidental. With cultural transfer being standard procedure, he suggested, no modern nation could ever claim to be pure and pristine. As his work went to show, human civilization was a palimpsest, each national culture a mere layer adding colour and texture to that multicultural, hybrid synthesis.

When reading this conclusion, it is hard not to compare Steinschneider's notion of translation as hybridization with Goethe's – no less politically motivated – translation theory. In the *West-Östlicher Divan* of 1819 Goethe had demonstrated his preference for so-called »foreignizing« (source-oriented) over »domesticizing« (reader-oriented) translation methods. According to the foreignizing principle, translators should strive to reproduce not just the content, but also the linguistic and stylistic particularities of the original. This strategy allowed them not only to

41 Though developed in the context of 1940s Cuba, Fernando Ortiz's term transculturation neatly fits Steinschneider's view of the dynamic of cultural history. The term was introduced in the study of Jewish modernity by Andrea Schatz, Kleider auf Reisen. »Nachahmung« und Transkulturation in Isaac Euchels *Briefen des Meschullam*, in: Ashkenas. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden 18 und 19/2 (2008–2009), pp. 321–338.

42 »Die internationalen Culturvermittler sind vorzugsweise die interlingualen«; Hebräische Übersetzungen, p. IX.

43 »Brücken für die Einführung des fremden Ideengutes […] welche eine Vermittlung und Verquickung des Fremden mit dem als Erbgut angesehenen anbahnen«. Ibid., p. XIII (italics mine).

transfer the essence of the source text into the target language, but also to enrich that target language by absorbing foreign styles and idioms[44].

Goethe's insistence on literary osmosis through translation had been a timely political signal. It was a call for international literacy in an era of burgeoning national philology, and for cultural reciprocity at a time when nations became more and more obsessed with the authentic self (*Volkstümlichkeit*). Goethe was not, however, a multiculturalist, as David Damrosch and others have pointed out[45]. First of all, the aesthetic benchmark of his integrative *Weltliteratur* was, and always would be, the literature of the Greeks. And while all nations were supposed to make »a friendly effort«, Goethe envisaged a particular task for the German people, whom he expected to play »eine schöne Rolle« in his cosmopolitan project[46]. Here again, drawing a parallel with Steinschneider is hard to resist. The idea of the multinational, multilingual Jews playing a fine role as interlingual brokers was a persistent trope in his work, with the title of his magnum opus (*Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters – und Die Juden als Dolmetscher*) as a programmatic climax[47].

Thirdly and lastly, we should mention Steinschneider's unique insistence on intellectual autonomy. As noted at the beginning of this paper, Steinschneider believed that weaker minds tended to slip into simple *Autoritätsglauben*, an unquestioning submission to religious authority which spiritual leaders, from the Pope to Rabbi Akiva, had always been keen to exploit[48]. As a sceptic he was proponent of *Autopsie*, i. e., of seeing and thinking for oneself, therefore he preferred to share his findings not via linear narrative but through fragmented bibliography. »Zunz demanded ›reading‹ readers for his writings«, he wrote in the introduction of *Die arabische Literatur der Juden*, »but I have structured this book for consulting readers«[49]. Here as elsewhere, he had even skipped correct syntax »whenever catalogue-style brevity suffice[d]«, to allow his readers to experience the act of autopsy for themselves[50]. The political Zunz, one might say, had offered his readers polemical content, by

44 Lawrence Venuti, The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation, London 1995, pp. 99–102.

45 Damrosch, What is World Literature, p. 12.

46 I quote from Wim Verbaal, Reconstructing Literature. Reflections on Cosmopolitan Literatures, in: Journal of Latin Cosmopolitanism and European Literatures 1 (2019), pp. 1–15, at p. 6, fn. 18. Goethe obviously capitalized on Schleiermacher's ambition to »merge the treasures of foreign and German art and science into a single historical whole, to be stored, *in the all-absorbing German language*, in the heart of Europe« (italics mine), in: Friedrich Schleiermacher, Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens, in: Hans Joachim Störig (ed.), Das Problem des Übersetzens, Stuttgart 1963, pp. 38–69, especially p. 69.

47 Zwiep, Nation and Translation, pp. 436–439.

48 Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, p. 6.

49 »Zunz verlangte für seine Schriften ›lesende‹ Leser, ich habe dieses Buch für nachschlagende Leser eingerichtet«. Id., Die arabische Literatur, p. l.

50 »[A]uf Satzbau verzichtet, wo die Kürze eines Catalogs genügt«; ibid.

adding a Jewish narrative to German national history. Steinschneider, by contrast, had opted for polemical form, using bibliographical fragmentation to force his readers to »see for themselves« and write their own, Jewish and other, histories.

One could say that Steinschneider used an iconic format to guide his readers away from religious coercion towards independent thinking. The *Weimarer Klassik* had cherished a similar ambition, but had chosen a different, more top-down route. In 1795, Schiller had published a collection of letters on the ideal form of social education. Inspired by the bloody échec of the French Revolution, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* was meant to save the noble essence of the Enlightenment by mitigating its violent extremes. Perhaps the most essential value to be protected was radical self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*), the right of human beings to set their own goal or *telos* in life, without the intrusion of others and, especially, of institutionalized religion. As Jeffrey High phrased it, it was not religious tolerance (freedom *of* religion) that was at stake here, but freedom *from* religion, i. e., full personal autonomy in defining one's own path towards a morally good existence[51].

There was, however, one significant paradox in Schiller's project: if free moral choice was the goal, moral education could hardly be the route, since education was a form of indoctrination and therefore, at best, forced human beings to be free[52]. Another knotty point to be tackled was the abstract nature of reason. Being innate in all human beings, the faculty of reason was both a-personal and impersonal, and thus ill-suited to inspire the individual to become a better person. And that was where beauty came in. Where Schelling mobilized aesthetics to help the self connect to nature, Schiller followed Kant in believing that the experience of beauty would enable the individual to tap into his moral fibre. Mediating between the senses and the intellect, beauty neutralized the dictates of both particular religion and universal reason[53]. By replacing the former and soothing the latter, Schiller's aesthetic education not only fostered individual happiness, but ultimately led to a free and morally just society.

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51 For a survey of Schiller's writings against organized religion and personal religiosity, see Jeffrey L. High, Revolutionary Virtue. Schiller and the Freedom *from* Religion, in: Philosophical Readings 9/2 (2017), pp. 76–86.

52 Comp. Steven G. Affeldt, The Force of Freedom. Rousseau on Forcing to be Free, in: Political Theory 27/3 (1999), pp. 200–333, who points at the Platonic roots (viz. the cave analogy) of the idea of forced liberation.

53 »It is not the conceptual rational understanding but the aesthetic experience, the image-representational perception, that is the quintessential, authentic expression of that unitary human essence«. Zvi Tauber, Aesthetic Education for Morality. Schiller and Kant, in: The Journal of Aesthetic Education 40/3 (2006), pp. 22–47, at pp. 41f.

In the final section of this paper we will see that Steinschneider, too, sought to temper rational self-determination by absorbing the individual into a human collective and, *pace* Scholem, into a meaningful Jewish continuum. As in Schiller's work, *der humane Trias* of *verum*, *bonum* and *pulchrum*, i. e. the universal triad of all that was true, good, and beautiful, replaced religion as the benchmark for leading a moral Jewish life.

3. No Jew is an Island

Despite his lack of genuine institutional, denominational, and political affinities, Steinschneider understood the importance of belonging. That is why, in the *Allgemeine Einleitung*, he made an effort to place the autonomous human being in a broader constellation. All of human history, he wrote, unfolded within seven parameters: nationality or *Rassenverhältnis*; geography, viz. our physical surroundings; religion; the socio-political order; culture; language; and, on a metalevel, *Wissenschaft*[54]. Out of these seven, only culture was the true object of the historian: all nations, including the stateless, multilingual Jews, were known and judged by their culture[55]. Always in collaboration with *Bildung*, culture invariably implied hard work. »It is the only true work of the spirit«, Steinschneider acknowledged, »as well as its infinite task«.

When defining culture as »the activity and realization of the *Geist* under certain historical conditions«, Steinschneider explicitly harked back to Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807)[56]. And although he did not deny that in the Jewish case this spiritual process was inspired by some *Idee* of religion, he was not prepared to give religion any say in the actual course of history[57]. Instead, its role was taken up by culture, which he presented as the harmonious conjunction of the national *Geist* with the three transcendentals known as *verum*, *bonum*, and *pulchrum*. As

54 Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, p. 2.

55 »Kulturgeschichte ist das eigentliche Ziel der Weltgeschichte […]. Durch Kultur kenzeichnet man Nationen«. Ibid., p. 11.

56 »[D]ie Thätigkeit des Geistes selbst (etwa Hegel's Substanz des Geistes) also die Verwirklichung des Geistes unter gegebenen Bedingungen«. Ibid.

57 Unlike most of his colleagues, who approached Jewish history as the manifestation of the Jewish *divine* idea (*Gottesidee*), Steinschneider defined Jewish history as the expression of the Jewish *religious* idea – »die Geschichte der Erscheinungen, welche sich mit der Idee einer Religion verbinden«. Ibid., p. 5. For this deliberately »secular« turn, see Zwiep, Beyond Orientalism, pp. 204–208.

transcendentals these three properties were the shared possession of all humankind; they were not, however, evenly distributed among the nations of the world[58].

In Jewish history, Steinschneider pointed out, there had always been a certain disbalance between the three. Whereas beauty, »the natural child of sensuous polytheism«, was underrepresented in monotheistic Judaism, truth and goodness could be found in abundance[59]. While the former was at the heart of Jewish – learned and other – literature, »the Good« had nourished a broad range of institutions which the Jews shared with societies everywhere. And there could be no doubt that it was in this domain that the cultural superiority of the Jews had always manifested itself[60].

In Judaism as elsewhere, »der Begriff des Guten und Edlen« found its realization in four related spheres: in the law; in social and political institutions; in family life; and in national customs and traditions. On the first, most fundamental level, *bonum* was embodied in the idea of justice, whence it found its expression in the law and the constitution, which guaranteed the freedom of all citizens. Weary to be drawn into a theological debate, Steinschneider did not waste many words on Jewish legal history. From its Israelite origins to the present, he stated, Jewish law had been characterized by its simplicity, by its strong sense of equality (witness its exemplary compassion with the stranger, the widow, and the orphan) and its strict application of the principles of equity and humanity. Not a hint of Sinai, not a trace of revelation, not a word about Moses – in Steinschneider's secular universe the principle of the Good behind the Right was not located in any divine moral order[61].

The second domain in which the Good manifested itself was presented under the heading »Socialismus«, where it received an even more summary treatment. Judging by the extant literature, Steinschneider observed, the historical study of

58 »Die Kultur besteht in der harmonischen Bildung zu den drei Grundideen, der humanen Trias: des Guten, des Wahren und des Schönen. In diesen Ideen teilt sich der Beruf der Nationen«. Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, p. 11.

59 »Das Schöne ist bei den Juden vielfach vernachlässigt worden«. Ibid., p. 12. Steinschneider nevertheless devoted more than twenty pages to a description of Jewish sources on material culture and the arts.

60 »Vergleicht man die älteren Israeliten und die späteren Juden mit ihren Zeitgenossen, so wird im Ganzen an einer höheren Cultur nicht zu zweifeln sein«. Ibid., p. 13.

61 Here, again, Steinschneider's radical atheism shines through. In 1818, Zunz had placed the origins of human legislation in the sphere of the divine sciences, with ethics, not religion, as its ultimate source. As a result of this »vertical« classification, law and morality were eliminated from the study of the »horizontal« national culture that was at the heart of his Jewish philology; Zunz, Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur, Berlin 1818, pp. 11–14. Later Zunz joined a score of Jewish scholars who tried to counter Protestant biblical criticism in defense of the Jewish *Gesetzesreligion*. For Zunz's »Bibelkritisches« (1873) and its mixed reception, see Schorsch, Leopold Zunz, pp. 215–219. For an exemplary Jewish response, see Alexander A. Dubrau/Meir Seidler, David Zvi Hoffmann's (1843–1921) Commentary on the Pentateuch in the Context of German-Jewish Orthodoxy's Struggle over the Dogmatic Principles of Torah, in: Journal of Jewish Studies 72/2 (2021), pp. 1–21.

Jewish communal life and organization in the Diaspora was still in its infancy. He therefore limited his treatment to pointing out the most promising avenues for future research, besides signalling their obvious pitfalls (*viz.* too much attention to current affairs and personal trivia). By contrast, the third domain, labelled »Familienleben«, provided an occasion to reflect on marriage as the cornerstone of Jewish life and on the prominent place of women in Jewish law, language, and literature. Steinschneider put exceptional emphasis on female cultural agency when highlighting women's share in Jewish book production, »by participating as authority, author, copyist, typesetter, etc.«[62]. I could not help wondering if, besides being a historical observation, this was a belated tribute to Auguste, who in 1851, under her husband's supervision, had produced a copy (*Durchzeichnung*) of Moses ibn Ezra's *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-l-muḏākara* from a manuscript in the Berlin Royal Library[63]. Another, less flattering aside was, again, directed at Nahida Lazarus-Remy, whose monograph *Das jüdische Weib* (1895) was exposed as a plagiarised version of Meyer Kaiserling's *Die jüdischen Frauen in der Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst* of 1878[64].

In the fourth and final section, on *Sitten und Gebräuche*, Steinschneider rounded off, with customary brevity, his reflection on the manifestations of the Good in Jewish history and society[65]. As this is the closest he ever came to formulating a statement on the life and meaning of the Jewish polity, it is worth analysing this passage in some detail.

He began his exposé with a firm disclaimer: writing about Jewish custom and tradition, he wrote, immediately evoked the »burning question«: should we side with Orthodoxy or Reform? Should we prioritize the construction or the deconstruction of Jewish faith and practice? Quoting Schiller's *Ode an die Freude*[66], he immediately extricated himself from the debate: it was the scholar's task not to add fuel to the flames but to observe and mediate between conflicting positions (a precept which many of his colleagues seemed to ignore). Moreover, in the present context it was neither the contested, divine or human origin of Jewish custom that concerned

62 Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, p. 14.

63 Sabine Schmidtke, Scribal Practices among European Scholars during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century. The Cases of Auguste Steinschneider (Auerbach), Moritz Steinschneider, and Martin Schreiner, in: COMSt Bulletin 6/1 (2020), pp. 51–71, at pp. 62f. Steinschneider had acknowledged Auguste's work in his catalogue of the collection; ibid., n. 27.

64 Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, p. 16. For the reception of Lazarus-Remy's book, see Japs, Nahida Lazarus-Remy, pp. 304–319.

65 Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, pp. 16–19.

66 »[…] und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle // weinend sich aus diesem Bund!«. Ibid., p. 16.

us, nor its relevance for modern Jewish life, but its fundamental humanity, *viz*. its ultimate debt to the universal »*Grundideen* des *Guten* und *Idealen*«[67].

Steinschneider continued by stating that custom (Hebrew *minhag*) was, literally, the backbone of human society. It was the alpha and omega of everything national, political, religious, and moral, as corroborated by the polysemy of the German term *Sitte*, which denoted both custom and ethics. It consisted, he ventured, of generally accepted conventional truths, roughly equivalent to Aristotle's *endoxa*, Maimonides's *mefursamot* and, in post-Enlightenment times, to the self-evidence of Kant's categorical imperative[68]. By the same token *minhag* was not, he warned, to be confused with halacha, *mishpat*, or any other form of rabbinic ruling. It was to be understood as *usus*, usage or habitus, initiated by individuals, imitated by society, and documented, not dictated, by Jewish traditional literature[69]. *Minhag oqer halacha* – custom overrides law, Steinschneider summarized, in a playful allusion to the old halachic principle[70]. By thus redefining *minhag* and giving it – historical and causal – priority over halacha, he offered us an extreme example of what Andreas Gotzmann has called »delegalization«, the modern process of redefining Jewish law and minimizing its sway over Jewish, communal and individual, life[71].

With *minhag* thus conveniently secularized, all that remained was to explain how spontaneous human custom (*die freie Sitte*) was connected to the immutable idea of the Good. Here Steinschneider's associative mind proves somewhat of a burden. In a paragraph cluttered with forced imagery he likened the connection between *Sitte* and *Sittlichkeit* to the dialectic between proverb and culture, between, on the one hand, the item of actual folklore and, on the other, generic national *Bildung*, which nourished as well as depended on its individual expression. The presence of lived folk custom, he continued, suggested urge (*Trieb*) and energy, and was a sure sign of a nation's vitality. On the societal level, the dispute over *Sitte* (not halacha!) was thus a matter of national import, *das eigentlich Nationale*, as Steinschneider wrote

67 Ibid., p. 17 (italics Steinschneider's).

68 Steinschneider's classification of *minhag* as polysemic *Sitte* appears indebted to Hegel's definition of *Sittlichkeit* as conventional ethical order, as opposed to Kant's individual moral autonomy. By putting Kant's categorical imperative on one line with *endoxa* and *mefursamot*, Steinschneider managed to retain its validity while curtailing its rational absolutism. In this he deviated from the Jewish neo-Kantians, for whom »Vernunft, Humanität, Idee, [und] Sittlichkeit« were synonyms; thus Heymann Steinthal, Allgemeine Ethik, Berlin 1885, p. 412 (§ 262). For Hegel's definition as a response to Kant, see Allen W. Wood (ed.), Elements of the Philosophy of Right. A Critical Guide, trans. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge 1991, pp. 58–76 (chapter 3: »Hegel on Morality«).

69 »Customs and traditions grow quietly; when research starts, the vital force has waned«. Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, p. 17.

70 Ibid., p. 18, and see Mishnah Bava Metzia 7:1.

71 Andreas Gotzmann, The Dissociationof Religion and Law in Nineteenth-Century German-Jewish Education, in: Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook 43/1 (1998), pp. 103–126.

in a covert sneer to Reform-Orthodox polemics. On a personal level, loyalty and commitment to *Sitte* (again, not to halacha) was itself an expression of the idea of the Good. By respectfully observing custom, the individual confirmed the nation's connection to Goodness and helped to realize its moral mission. It was, one might say, the one thing a Jew could, and should do for his people. In Steinschneider's words, it was »the piety towards the bond with nation, tribe and family«[72].

On each page of the *Allgemeine Einleitung*, Steinschneider's taste for bibliographical enumeration shines through his prose. The result is a grainy, associative text, full of half-finished thoughts, bookish references, arcane similes, and private asides. It is therefore with some reluctance that I identify the above section as Steinschneider's personal, cosmopolitan »Jewish creed«. And it is with even greater reluctance that I venture to summarize its main articles in six straightforward sentences, to accommodate the reading reader.

Nations are known and judged not by their political prowess, nor by their territorial size, but by the stature of their culture. Of the three transcendentals *verum*, *bonum* and *pulchrum*, the property of Goodness has always been the most constitutive for the culture of the Jews. It has motivated Jewish law, informed its social institutions, and inspired its family life from times immemorial. Above all, the idea of morality (*Sittlichkeit*) expressed itself through *minhag* (*Sitte*), the complex of social customs and conventional traditions that epitomized the good Jewish life. Observing *minhag* was not a matter of religious obligation or halachic coercion, but a voluntary act of piety whose import transcended personal interest. Through its conjunction with the universal principle of goodness, »doing *minhag*« anchored the individual in the nation, while simultaneously mooring the moral nation in collective humanity.

Somehow this does not sound as if Steinschneider were aiming to bury Judaism. He did not explicitly exhort us to preserve its ethical customs; that would have gone against our fundamental claim to *Selbstbestimmung*. He did juxtapose *Pietät* (the reverent observance of tradition) with *Pietismus* (the sentimental idolization of tradition) to indicate that we have a choice, but left it to the reader to make that choice[73]. Moreover, with the help of biological metaphor (*Trieb* and *Energie*; the leafy tree as opposed to the dead herbarium) he advocated Jewish continuity as a moral nation, as always on his own, secular and humanistic terms. As an enlightened sceptic, he had exposed Jewish religion as a moral failure and an intellectual weakness. In the absence of a Jewish state, he had reduced Diasporic Jewish nationhood to the intimate »bond of tribe and family«[74]. Thanks to Jewish

72 »Es ist die Pietät gegen den Bund mit Nation, Stamm und Familie«. Steinschneider, Allgemeine Einleitung, p. 18.

73 Ibid.

74 See also ibid., pp. 2f.

culture, however, Jewish belonging was more than just tribal genealogy. It was a conscious act of piety, not in the sense of *Frömmigkeit*, god-fearing devotion, but in the sense used by Goethe in Weimar, i. e. as the moral disposition that expressed itself in the empathic esteem for all humanity[75]. And with this I wish to rest my case. Fact: Moritz Steinschneider was an antinationalist and an atheist. Fact: Moritz Steinschneider was a pious Jew.

4. Epilogue: Steinschneider's Invisible Religion

Five years after Steinschneider's death in 1907, Émile Durkheim famously redefined religion as a basic constituent of the human social order. In the spirit of nascent structuralism he turned the lens from the divine realm to the earthly cosmos by classifying religion as »a combined system of beliefs and practices pertaining to sacred things […] which unite into one moral community, called a Church, all those who adhere to them«[76]. For Durkheim and the sociologists of religion who came after him, theological truth was conventional and relative; the adherence to a specific corpus of sacred truths and rules, on the other hand, was a global societal mechanism. Religion as a moral social glue – had Steinschneider lived to read Durkheim's definition, he would not have been amused.

In 1967, Thomas Luckmann added an important dimension by launching the notion of invisible religion, a concept that facilitated a less strictly institutional, more diverse and individual take on the social function of religion[77]. To allow for such differentiations, Luckmann distinguished four levels or uses of the term, without imposing any normative standards. On the first, most abstract level, religion was a universal social form that enabled human beings to transcend their biological nature by offering them a meaningful worldview, around which they could gather and organize. It was, one might say, the presence of religion that made the human animal a *human* animal, with »human« roughly equivalent to »operating within a social order in a morally responsible way«. The second use of the term referred to

75 Das Goethe-Wörterbuch, digitized version in the Wörterbuchnetz of the Trier Center for Digital Humanities, vol. 5, 1827, URL: <https://woerterbuchnetz.de/?sigle=GWB&lemid=A00001> (2025-03-26).

76 »[U]n système solidaire de croyances et de pratiques relatives à des choses sacrées, c' est-à-dire séparées, interdites, croyances et pratiques qui unissent en une même communauté morale, appelée Eglise, tous ceux qui y adhérent«. Émile Durkheim, Les formes élémentaires de la vie réligieuse, Paris 2008, p. 65.

77 In Thomas Luckmann, The Invisible Religion. The Problem of Religion in Modern Society, London 1967. For my summary I have used Andrew J. Weigert's lucid (if ultimately critical) recapitulation: Andrew J. Weigert, Whose Invisible Religion? Luckmann Revisited, in: Sociological Analysis 35/3 (1974), pp. 181–188.

the concrete institutional forms that were erected around each particular worldview, as embodied by »church religions« such as Judaism. The third was again universal, denoting the religious disposition innate in every human being or, more precisely, the internalized, subjective form of the objective, generic social form as specified under the first meaning. The fourth referred to each individual's ability to internalize the sacred cosmos of his church religion (e. g. Judaism) and to integrate its hallowed order into his own biography and identity – in Steinschneider's case: to be a Jew. For Luckmann, all human socialization, from the collective order to the individual self, ultimately depended on religious meaning. Covering both sacred worldview and private religiosity, his notion of religion was at the same time universal and particular, objective and subjective, social and personal. Religion, in short, could be visible as well as invisible.

In the 1960s, Luckmann had written his monograph to address »the problem of religion« in European modernity, at a time when institutionalized religion seemed to have lost its power to unite and consolidate[78]. Today, after more than fifty years of scholarly critique, including Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular* (2003), we find ourselves in a different landscape, where the modern secularity that had troubled Luckmann has been complicated by new definitions and by concepts like postsecularism, resacralization and, in José Casanova's words, the deprivatization of religion. Still, when reading Steinschneider, Luckmann's definition may help us pinpoint the lasting role of religion in his formation of the Jewish secular.

From start to finish that role was dialectical. As we have seen, Steinschneider pitched objective *Wissen* against biased *Glauben* and pushed radical autonomy against institutionalized dogma. His approach of religion (*die Idee der Religion*) was anthropocentric rather than transcendent, his dismissal of halacha in favour of *minhag* political rather than theological. Yet by systematically framing religion as the antithetical starting point for a new, secular synthesis, he confirmed its importance as a universal social form and as a basic human need, viz. as Luckmann's visible and invisible religion. This was most prominent when, in the late *Allgemeine Einleitung*, he pictured a Jewish culture energized by *minhag*, a form of social custom that was stripped of all halachic and liturgical connotations to become a source of national bonding and moral inspiration. The piety Steinschneider felt towards Jewish custom was neither nostalgic nor restorative, patriotic nor zealous. By redefining *minhag* as universal moral custom, he simply wished to preserve its constitutive role, in the world, in Judaism, and in what remained of his own, emphatically Jewish biography.

78 The original publication in German went by the title: Das Problem der Religion in der modernen Gesellschaft, Freiburg 1963.

Roberto Alciati

Baldassarre Labanca (1829–1913) in the Search of True Christianity

1. Introduction

This contribution can be summarized as follows: it intends to provide an analysis of a small anthology of writings (or, more accurately, an anthology of quotations) by a university professor active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries[1]. Through his scientific work, this professor sought to propose a »modernization« of the Catholic concept of religion, emphasizing secularization and rationalization. The uniqueness of this project lies in the fact that the professor in question was a former priest who later taught the History of Religions and Christianity.

This alone would make the figure intriguing. His rejection of conventional religious norms, symbolized by his blatant abandonment of the cassock, does not indicate a shift toward atheism. Instead, it marks the emergence of a new vision of Catholicism. This »new« religiosity does not represent a break from the tradition of Christianity; rather, it denotes, in his view, a return to its very essence as taught by Jesus – a revival of long-forgotten truths.

Thus, we have here an individual undergoing transformation (at least as described and proposed), and the outcome of that transformation is a new (yet ancient) form of religiosity. But there is more, which is why I consider the story more valuable – and exemplary – than many others: our »hero« has a dual relationship with religion. Christianity is for him both a subject of study, which had been significantly overlooked until then (at least in Italy), and a belief that he feels compelled to embrace.

The case under consideration is that of Baldassarre Labanca (1829–1913). Trained as a priest in a seminary in southern Italy, then still under the control of the Spanish Bourbons, Labanca later renounced his priestly vocation and pursued a career as a professor in state universities in the newly established Kingdom of Italy. After a brief period teaching philosophy, he shifted his focus to the History of Religions and early Christianity. It was during this phase of his career that Labanca made significant contributions to his personal redefinition of Christianity. This transformative trend

1 I am grateful to Cesare Cuttica for his thorough review of the manuscript and his meticulous revision of the English.

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is evident throughout his entire body of work as a professor of History of Religions and Early Christianity at the University of Rome[2].

In this contribution, I focus on a specific moment in Labanca's career, situated at the intersection of academic research and the public debate about the role of religion – especially Christianity – in European society at the dawn of the twentieth century. Before delving into this story, however, a brief methodological preamble is necessary.

Discussing individuality requires engaging with the historiographical practice of biography, as the customary approach when introducing a relatively unknown figure is to recount her/his biography. This holds true for Labanca, a figure who remains relatively unknown, even within the Italian academic sphere, where his name is often only casually mentioned when tracing the history of the academic study of religions. Notably, Labanca was the first to hold a position in the History of Religions in Italy[3].

This is undoubtedly a significant milestone in the history of Italian universities, as well as an important step in Labanca's academic career. However, upon closer examination, the significance of this event cannot be fully understood by focusing solely on the life of the individual. Attaining a university chair involves the collaboration

2 For reasons that will be explained later in this contribution, the choice has been made not to provide a detailed biographical note about Labanca. These, however, are the reference works: Agnieszke S. Proniewicz, Baldassarre Labanca e la »congiura del silenzio«, Trapani 2018; Cesare Preti, Labanca, Baldassarre, in: Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani 62 (2004), URL: <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/baldassarre-labanca_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/> (2025-03-26); Centro studi alto Molise (ed.), Baldassarre Labanca. Atti del Convegno di Studi, Isernia 2000.

3 An indication of the somewhat limited attention he has received in historiography is reflected in the scarcity of scientific literature available on him. This body of work is confined to a handful of titles, predominantly in Italian (referenced in note 2 above). Additionally, only five articles delve into specific aspects of his contributions: Anne-Christine Faitrop-Porta, Baldassarre Labanca en France, in: Revue de l' histoire des religions 208 (1991), pp. 303–325; Cesare Preti, L'epistolario di Baldassarre Labanca e la cultura europea del tardo Ottocento, in: Quaderni per la storia dell'Università di Padova 30 (1997), pp. 125–196; id., A proposito della cattedra di storia della filosofia nell'Università di Roma (1896). Lettere inedite di Giacomo Barzellotti e Alessandro Chiappelli a Baldassare Labanca, in: Giornale critico della filosofia italiana 89/1 (2010), pp. 89–102; Raffaele Colapietra, La varia umanità filosofia-religiosa di Baldassarre Labanca, in: Gabriella Di Rocco (ed.), Contado e Provincia di Molise. Studi di storia moderna e contemporanea, Campobasso 2013, pp. 333–366; Sergio Tanzarella, Il Gesù di Baldassarre Labanca, in: M. Beatrice Durante Mangoni et al. (eds.), Gesù e la storia. Percorsi sulle origini del cristianesimo, Trapani 2015, pp. 111–132; Roberto Alciati, »Il tacere non conviene nell'ora presente«. Baldassarre Labanca e la bancarotta della teologia, in: Mara Rescio et al. (eds.), »Non uno itinere«. Studi in onore di Mauro Pesce in occasione del suo ottantesimo compleanno, Brescia 2021, pp. 549–557. The extent of neglect surrounding his figure, even within Italy, becomes evident when considering that the comprehensive list of Labanca's writings remains unknown. A partially complete and not always bibliographically accurate list is presented in Proniewicz, Baldassarre Labanca, pp. 297–301.

of various actors, particularly in post-unification Italy, where both the number of universities and university professors was limited[4]. In other words, the events that shape an individual's life cannot be fully understood by merely considering the individual's experience of them, especially if one relies exclusively on personal memories, whether public or private. Biographical events are not insignificant, but their full understanding remains elusive when they are merely described as milestones in the history of a life.

However, especially in historical narratives, this occurs because »the story of a life« is a concept from common sense that has been surreptitiously introduced into the academic practice of history. In this regard, viewing somebody's life as a coherent whole, narrated chronologically, must be approached with caution – almost as cautiously as one would approach mythology[5].

One way to overcome these risks is by adopting the concept of »trajectory« as developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu defines trajectory »as a series of successively occupied positions by the same agent (or the same group) in a space which itself is constantly evolving and which is subject to incessant transformations«[6]. To reconstruct an individual's trajectory, Bourdieu encourages researchers to examine the conditions that facilitated its development, which he refers to as »the successive states of the field through which the trajectory has progressed«[7]. Therefore, to gain a precise understanding of the individual in question, one must describe the array of positions occupied simultaneously at any given moment by all the socially instituted biological individuals who have interacted with him or her. In other words, each movement toward a new position – since it involves the exclusion of a more or less extensive set of alternative positions – signifies a stage in a process of social aging[8].

4 A detailed reconstruction of the events has not yet been written. However, some key passages are outlined in Proniewicz, Baldassarre Labanca.

5 On this point see Pierre Bourdieu, The Biographical Illusion, trans. Yves Winkin/Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, in: Richard J. Parmentier/Greg Urban (eds.), Working Papers and Proceedings of the Centre for Psychosocial Studies, Chicago, IL 1987, pp. 1–7.

6 Bourdieu, The Biographical Illusion, p. 215. Quotes are taken from the reprint in: Wilhelm Hemecker et al. (eds.), Biography in Theory, Berlin 2017, pp. 210–216. The rationale behind this preference is quite simple: »Trying to understand a life as a unique and self-sufficient series of successive events (sufficient unto itself), and without ties other than the association to a »subject« whose constancy is probably just that of a proper name, is nearly as absurd as trying to make sense out of a subway route without taking into account the network structure, that is the matrix of objective relations between the different stations. The biographical events are defined as just so many investments and moves in social space, or more precisely, in the different successive states of the distribution structure of the different types of capital which are in play in the field considered« (ibid., p. 215).

7 Ibid., p. 215.

8 Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford, CA 1992, p. 259.

Bourdieu explains this concept well when discussing the genesis of the literary field.

> Biographical analysis thus understood can lead us to the principles of the evolution of the work of art in the course of time. Positive or negative sanctions, success or failure, encouragements or warnings, consecration or exclusion, all indicating to each writer (etc.) – and the ensemble of his rivals – the objective truth of the position he occupies and his probable future, are effectively one set of the major mediations through which the incessant redefinition of the »creative project« is shaped, with failure encouraging reconversion or retreat from the field, and consecration reinforcing and liberating initial ambitions[9].

For the »intellectual«, the trajectory replaces the »real subject«, that is the set of objective relationships that constitute the cultural production field in which he or she is situated, and which has shaped, if not determined, his or her practical and theoretical choices[10].

Some might view these considerations as an unnecessary sophistication, or perceive them as a titanic effort beyond the reach of a single scholar. However, if reconstructing an individual's trajectory depends on both the relationships they form with their peers and the positions they simultaneously occupy at any given moment, then individual facets of life can be viewed in a new light. This perspective reveals how what is often seen as a sequence of independent decisions is, in fact, intricately shaped by the field itself[11].

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9 Ibid., p. 260.

10 In this way, it is not necessary, as biography suggests, to reveal the whole individual. Often, it is a particular period – rather than the entire arc of one's existence – that determines intellectual legitimacy, since legitimacy is produced through the recognition of already legitimate instances: publishing houses, critics, journals, in other words, the group of agents who have the power to consecrate because they themselves are already consecrated. Two examples of this approach are: Anna Boschetti, The Intellectual Enterprise. Sartres and »Les Temps Modernes«, Evanston, IL 1988; id., Benedetto Croce. Dominio simbolico e storia intellettuale, Macerata 2024.

11 Bourdieu devoted a significant portion of his research to uncovering the dynamics of a field wherein agents – particularly intellectuals and academics – are largely guided, often unconsciously, by the very logic of their training. Within this framework, individuals engage in competitive relationships aimed at accruing field-specific capital in accordance with field-specific regulations. At the same time, competition among actors unfolds alongside struggles for dominance within the field itself – struggles that center on the very rules and stakes defining the field and its capital. According to Bourdieu, a field should be understood as a network or configuration of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively delineated, in their existence and the determinations they impose on their occupants, be they agents or institutions, by their current and potential situation (situs) within the structure of power distribution (or capital) that grants access to the specific benefits at stake in the field. Additionally, their objective relations with other positions (domination, homology, etc.) further shape their roles. However, conducting research in

Curiously, none of the biographies mentioned so far has examined the fragment that will be discussed here. Yet, it is from these life fragments that we can gain a deeper understanding of Labanca's approach to religion – as both a belief and an object of critical scrutiny.

2. *Le Mercure de France* and the Future of Christianity

The episode in question dates to the beginning of 1907 when Labanca received a circular letter from the editorial board of the French literary review *Le Mercure de France*[12]. In the letter we read the following text:

> The religious idea, the religious sentiment, religion or religions, and the influence of a particular religious form on the development of customs have, in recent years, become the subject of an increasing number of works.
> On the other hand, we see struggles everywhere against religious doctrines, against a religion or in the name of a religion. In France, the separation between the State and the Churches; in England, debates on education; in Germany, the dispute against the government and the Catholic center; in Italy and Spain, anti-clerical manifestations; in Russia, the hostility of autocratic Orthodoxy against liberalism; throughout the East, Church conflicts; in the Far East, the victory achieved by Japanese civilization over a Christian nation.
> In the face of this situation, it seemed to us that it would be of great interest to gather, for publication in »Le Mercure de France«, the opinions of our most authoritative contemporaries on the following question:
> Are we witnessing a dissolution or an evolution of the religious idea and religious sentiment?
> We would be grateful if you could kindly participate in this consultation and send us your response, which can be up to 500 words, within a period of fifteen days from the date of receiving this letter[13].

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this manner demands more time than the usual timeframe available for reconstructing a scholar's biography. Therefore, what I am presenting in this paper should be considered just one step within a much larger research project.

12 The letter is preserved in the Baldassarre Labanca Archive at the Municipal Library of Agnone (IS), Labanca's hometown, as part of the extensive collection of received letters. Regrettably, there is no formal inventory of the manuscript material available. Nonetheless, for letters, we have the list of correspondents (including the number of letters sent by each) in Preti, L'epistolario di Baldassarre Labanca, pp. 157–185.

13 »L' idée religieuse, le sentiment religieux, la religion our les religions, l' influence de telle ou telle forme religieuse sur le développement des moeurs font, depuis quelques années, l' object d' un nombre croissant d' ouvrages. D' autre part, nous voyons partout des luttes engages contre les

There are two seemingly contradictory reasons – at least in the intent of the author of this letter – that prompted *Le Mercure de France* to launch this investigation. On the one hand, there is a growing interest in religious aspects, rooted well beyond the churches, namely in intellectual circles and universities. On the other hand, there is a particular geopolitical situation, in which traditional religion (Christianity) and European churches appear to be in a state of irreversible crisis. Rather than referencing the anti-clerical movements in Italy and Spain, which have historical roots predating the early twentieth century, the letter focuses more specifically on concerns related to the Christianity in Russia, England, France, and Germany. Among them, the most unusual reference is certainly the Russo-Japanese War. The defeat of a traditional European power by a non-western and non-Christian nation is seen as significant for Christianity. Moreover, this defeat had a direct impact on the complex socio-political situation in Tsarist Russia, where the Orthodox Church, as has been clearly shown, was one of the institutions most affected by the 1905 revolution, and more generally, from 1905 and 1917, during the peak of the liberal movement, when liberal politicians wielded significant influence in the State Duma and the opposition movement[14].

In addition to these geopolitically significant events, the letter also refers to the law on the separation of Churches and State enacted in France in 1905[15]. While this law is more limited in scope compared to the other events, it nonetheless sparked widespread reactions in Europe, especially in Germany. The letter alludes

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doctrines religieuses, contre une religion ou au nom d' une religion: en France, la Séparation des Eglises et de l' Etat; en Angleterre, les débats, sur l' enseignement; en Allemagne, la querelle entre le gouvernement et le Centre catholique; en Italie et en Espagne, les manifestations anticléricales; en Russie, l' hostilité de l' orthodoxie autocritique contre le libéralisme; dans tout l' Orient, des conflits d' Eglise; en Extrême-Orient, la Victoire remportée par la civilization japonaise sur une nation chrétienne. En presence de cette situation, il nous a semblé qu' il serait d' un haut intérêt de réunir, pour les publier dans le »Mercure de France«, les opinions de nos contemporains les plus autorisée sur la question suivante: Assistons-nous a une dissolution ou a une evolution de l' idée religieuse et du sentiment religieux? Nous vous serions reconnaissants de vouloir bien prendre part à cette consultation, et nous adresser votre réponse, qui pourra comporter jusqu' à 500 mots, dans un délai de quinze jours à dater de la reception de la présente lettre«. Letter dated February 15, 1907 and preserved in the Labanca Archive (signature: b. 56, lett. 325).

14 Cf. John Meyendorff, Russian Bishops and Church Reform in 1905, in: Robert L. Nichols/Theofanis G. Stavrou (eds.), Russian Orthodoxy under the Old Regime, Minneapolis 1978, pp. 170–182.

15 Reference works on the subject are: Jean-Marie Mayeur, La separation de l' Église et de l' État, 1905, Paris 1966; Maurice J.M. Larkin, Church and State after the Dreyfus Affair. The Separation Issue in France, London 1974. More recently, a new examination of the subject has been undertaken in an announced trilogy, of which, to date, the first two volumes have been published: Jean Baubérot, La loi de 1905 n' aura pas lieu. Historie politique des separations des Églises et de l' État (1902–1908), Paris 2019–2021.

to concurrent developments in Germany, where the French Separation law received considerable attention in the Catholic press and journals. For instance, the Liberal Catholic journal *Hochland* dedicated an entire issue to the question, echoing concerns similar to those raised by *Le Mercure*[16]. Interestingly, during the same years, religion was also a subject of heated debate in England. The Government Act of 1902 introduced a religious/secular distinction in mainstream English schooling, granting local education authorities control over secular instruction while reducing the role of faith-based institutions[17].

The letter is signed by the editor-in-chief, Alfred Vallette, a pivotal figure in the literary history of the early twentieth century[18]. However, the idea of this international survey on religion could be attributed to Frédéric Charpin, another contributor to *Le Mercure*[19]. One hundred and fifty replies were approximately received and

16 »Frankreich scheint wirklich die Bestimmung zu haben, die Anstöße zu erdumsegelnden geistigen Bewegungen zu geben. Der Gedanke erscheint durchaus nicht absurd, daß man nach hundert Jahren die gegenwärtige französische Krisis, die in so mancher Beziehung mehr eine religiöse als eine kirchenpolitische ist, als einen epochemachenden Wendepunkt in der Entwicklung der Menschheit bezeichnen wird«. Französisch kirchenpolitische oder allgemein religiöse Krisis?, in: Hochland 3 (1906), p. 235. See on this Samuel Allaert, Regards allemands sur la Séparation française des Églises et de l' État. Les débats de la presse d' opinion (1905–1907), in: Chrétients et sociétés 27 (2020), URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/chretienssocietes/7451?lang=en#ftn1> (2025-03-26).

17 Cf. Nigel Fancourt, The Meaning of Religious Education in English Legislation from 1800 to 2020, in: British Journal of Religious Education 44 (2022), pp. 497–511, at p. 502. Interestingly, the terms »secular« and »religious« appear explicitly in the Act; they will remain present until the educational reform of the late 1980s when the linguistic distinction is abandoned, in view of the need to ensure equal presence in the public education system of non-Christian religions widespread in Great Britain (cf. ibid., p. 505).

18 Departing from his career as a writer, Vallette dedicated the rest of his life, spanning from 1890 to 1935, almost exclusively to editorial activities, first by founding and directing *Le Mercure de France* and then by giving life to a publishing house of the same name. From the 32 pages of the first issue, *Le Mercure* occasionally expanded to 48 pages in its first year, and to 96 pages from 1892 to 1894. Stéphane Mallarmé, for instance, offered his sponsorship with some unpublished works, and many others among the young generation of writers did the same, preferring *Le Mercure* over other reviews. As asserted by directors of rival reviews, *Le Mercure* quickly becomes the sole publication acknowledged by the younger generation – those seeking recognition in the burgeoning field of literary periodicals. For an introduction to the history of *Le Mercure*, see Marie-Françoise Quignard (ed.), Le Mercure de France. Cent un ans d' édition, Paris 1995. Cf. also Pierre Bourdieu, The Rules of Art and Christophe Charles, Birth of the Intellectuals, 1880–1900, Malden, MA 2015.

19 We deduce this from the fact that the year following the launch of the »enquête«, it is Charpin who edited and introduced a volume entitled *La question religieuse*, published by the Société du Mercure de France. Charpin certainly deserves further investigation. Despite the limited bibliography about him, he is generally regarded as a protégé of Abbot Henri Bremond, both hailing from Provence. However, in the recent monograph dedicated to Bremond, he is hardly mentioned (Peter J. Gorday,

published in various issues throughout 1907. Contributors include notable names such as Nikolaj Berdjaev, Henri Bergson, Leon Bloy, Émile Durkheim, Maksim Gor'kij, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Georgij Plechanov, Paul Sabatier, George Tyrrell.

Noteworthy is the fact that even those who hold dominant positions in the field of the History of Religions respond to Charpin's call: Gaston Bonet-Maury, professor of Church History at the newly opened Protestant Faculty of Theology in Paris in 1877 and collaborator of the *Revue de l' Histoire des religions*; Eugène Goblet d' Alviella, the first holder of the chair of History of Religions at the Université Libre de Bruxelles from 1884 to 1914; Maurice Vernes, son of a Protestant pastor, who in 1877 held the chair of History of Religions at the Faculty of Letters of Paris, and in 1886 directed the section of Religious Sciences at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. Curiously, all these academics are correspondents of Baldassarre Labanca.

Even more interesting is the list, decidedly smaller, of Italians consulted. Excluding the politician Romolo Murri, close to the circles of Catholic modernism, there is a scant representation from the literary field: Antonio Fogazzaro, Gian Pietro Lucini (a friend of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's), Pietro Misciattelli (literary amateur interested in Franciscan mysticism). All the others who write for *Le Mercure* are university professors, in some way linked to anthropology (a discipline still almost absent in Italy) and positivism. Indeed, there are Ernesto Buonaiuti (the leading figure of the Catholic modernism), Napoleone Colajanni (professor of Philosophy at the University of Palermo), Francesco Cosentini (philosophy and sociology, University of Turin), Guglielmo Ferrero (sociologist trained in Turin and son-in-law of Lombroso), Cesare Lombroso (professor of forensic medicine at the University of Turin), Vilfredo Pareto (sociologist), Giuseppe Rensi (socialist political activist, in 1908 he obtained the chair of Moral philosophy at the University of Genoa), and Giuseppe Sergi (professor of anthropology at the University of Bologna).

Let's now turn to Labanca's response.

> On one side, we see a significant dissolution in religion of the theological, dogmatic, liturgical, and ecclesiastical past. This is because science, criticism, philosophy, historical research, and politics are in opposition to theology, dogma, worship, and the Church. However, those who observe keenly and do not have a short-sighted view realize that theology, dogma, rituals, and the Church are not religion. They are rather its subsequent

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Pure Love, Pure Poetry, Pure Prayer. The Life and Work on Henri Bremond, Eugene 2018). Some information about him can be gleaned from publications dedicated to French regionalism, where religious interests intertwine with political ones. Cf. Julian Wright, The Regionalist Movement in France, 1890–1914. Jean Charles-Brun and French Political Thought, Oxford 2003, pp. 82, 119. Yet, even in this book, there is no mention of this investigation and its connection with Vallette.

explanations, determinations, and organizations, whether accepted or not, supported or attacked over the centuries[20].

According to Labanca, the *aut/aut* logic (dissolution or evolution of religion) is not appropriate here and often applied excessively in historical analysis. Now, he wrote »we are witnessing, in various aspects and simultaneously, both a dissolution and an evolution of religion«[21]. Expanding on this general premise, Labanca refers to a specific religion, Christianity, which, by the end of the nineteenth century, stands out as the most skeptical toward dogma while concurrently being the most committed to follow the commandments taught by Jesus:

> True religion, persisting amid theological, dogmatic, liturgical, and ecclesiastical conflicts, is that of charity, benevolence, justice, and holiness, founded by Jesus of Nazareth. Understood thus, religion revives the vanished past of the Christian religion […]. […] This will be the future of the Christian religion for centuries, the number of which is not easy to predict. […] The present century, which has extraordinarily studied and criticized religion – particularly the Christian one – has been the most skeptical toward Christian dogma in its various confessions, the most attentive to working for charity, goodness, justice […]. This means that alongside the dissolution of denominations, there exists in religion – especially in Christianity – a current of moral and social idealism that constitutes its marvelous intrinsic foundation and evolution[22].

20 Baldassarre Labanca, [response], in: Le Mercure de France 18/241 (1907), p. 47: »D' un coté, on voit se dissoudre en grande partie dans la religion le passé théologique, dogmatique, liturgique, ecclésiastique; parce que la science, la critique, la philosophie, la recherche historique et la politique combattent la théologie, le dogme, le culte et l' Eglise. Mais celui qui observe bien et qui n' a pas la vue courte s' aperçoit que la théologie, le dogme, les rites et l' Eglise ne sont pas la religion. Ils sont plutôt les successives explications, déterminations et organisations, acceptés ou non, soutenues ou attaquées an cours des siècles«. All translations from Labanca's works, both in French and Italian, are mine.

21 Ibid., p. 47: »On assiste, sous divers aspects et en même temps, à une dissolution et à une évolution de la religion«.

22 Ibid., pp. 47f.: »La véritable religion, qui persiste au milieu des conflits théologiques, dogmatiques, liturgiques et ecclésiastiques, est celle de la charité, de la bienfaisance, de la justice et de la sainteté, fondée par Jésus de Nazareth. Ainsi comprise, la religion fait renaître le passé disparu de la religion chrétienne […]. […] Ce sera encore l' avenir de la religion chrétienne, pendant des siècles dont il n' est pas facile de prévoir le nombre. […] Le siècle present, qui a étudié et critique d' une façon extraordinaire la religion en général, et la religion chrétienne en particulier, a été le plus sceptique pour la dogmatique chrétienne dans ses diverses confessions, le plus attentif à travailler pour la charité, la bonté, la justice, la pitié […]. Cela veut dire qu' à côté des parties qui se dissolvent existe dans la religion – surtout dans la religion chrétienne – un courant d' idéalisme moral et sociale qui en constitue l' admirable fonds intrinsèque et l' évolution«.

In other words, within the Christian religion, we observe a process that leads, on the one hand, to the dissolution of theological ideas and crystallized liturgical practices from past centuries, and on the other hand, to the consolidation of the ideal force directly aligned with the teachings of Jesus. The latter will never disappear and, thanks to the development of the scientific study of religion, will continually gain strength, becoming truly universal.

Compared to other responses, Labanca's reply is notably brief (just over a page). However, one aspect sets it apart: Labanca argues that religion will never dissolve; rather, it must evolve into something different from the Christian denominations still present in Europe. We do not know why the editorial team of *Le Mercure* included Labanca among the recipients of the circular letter. As Faitrop-Porta has shown, Labanca was certainly a well-known and respected figure within the French academic environment, primarily because he was the first Italian to hold a chair of History of Religions, thus ensuring the academic study of religions – particularly Christianity –, within the Italian university system[23].

However, upon reading his brief response, which was not intended for an academic audience, it is difficult to discern a »scientific« standpoint. Labanca places Christianity in a special position within the broader world of religions, suggesting that only Christianity can present itself as the true universal religion capable of meeting the requirements demanded of modernity. The response is brief and ends with a somewhat awkward reference to his own bibliography on the subject. Nevertheless, this did not lead to his exclusion from the survey, nor was there a request for further elaboration from the editorial team. In other words, his response must have satisfied Vallette and Charpin.

The likely explanation for this can be found in the introduction written by Charpin for the volume published in 1908, which compiled all the responses to the questions about the evolution or dissolution of religion in the new century. This volume was originally published serially in *Le Mercure*[24]. In the introduction, Charpin expresses regret over the absence of conservative responses, which could have offered a more comprehensive overview of the positions in the European intellectual landscape. However, the list of non-respondents is not disclosed[25], and the editor seems to believe that their absence would not have significantly altered

23 Since 1886, Labanca's works are regularly mentioned and reviewed in French journals devoted to history of philosophy and religions. His role as a professor of History of Religions, and later of early Christianity, at the University of Rome, arouses the keenest interest among French specialists, while his numerous publications garner constant attention. Cf. Faitrop-Porta, Baldassarre Labanca en France, p. 305.

24 Frédéric Charpin (ed.), La Question Religieuse. Enquête internationale, Paris 1908.

25 Charpin mentions that among those who never replied are French politicians, frequently journalists, and newspaper editors. Cf. ibid., p. 11.

the outcome of the survey. He finds the reason in a sentence attributed to Louis Pasteur during his admission speech to the Académie Française in 1881. According to Charpin, Pasteur allegedly said, »As long as the mystery of the infinite weighs upon human thought, temples will be built to worship the infinite, whether God be called Brahma, Jupiter, or Jesus. And in these temples, men will kneel and prostrated themselves«[26]. The quote is enclosed in quotation marks, but it does not exactly match Pasteur's words, which can be found in full in the collection of speeches published by the Académie in 1885. Where Pasteur referenced Jehovah, Charpin substitutes Jupiter (without explanation), and the final sentence is omitted. After stating that the weight of mystery compels humans to build temples and worship the infinite, Pasteur adds that everything we call metaphysics is the human way to render the notion of infinity, which dominates us, into something we can grasp[27]. Charpin may not have fully embraced this view, as he seems to believe that metaphysics could be progressively set aside and overcome without suppressing the human yearning for the infinite (a stance that appears quite Durkheimian). But this was precisely the issue Charpin sought to address in *Le Mercure*, a publication that was not an academic journal.

3. Two Additional Parallels

Labanca does not even hint at metaphysics, nor does he seem willing to equate all religions. This stance is evident in one of his most notable works, *Il cristianesimo primitivo (Early Christianity)*, published in 1886. This text stands out as an innovative contribution to the Italian academic scene, aligning with both the author's intentions and the assessments of contemporary critics. Notably, it is among the first studies on early Christianity conducted through historical-philological methods. It was with this very book that Labanca secured his professorship at the University of Rome.

Perhaps the highest praise for this work came in a letter sent to Labanca by Ernest Renan on March 14, 1886:

26 Ibid., p. 13: »Tant que le mystère pèsera sur la pensée humaine, écrivait Pasteur, des temples seront élevés au culte de l' Infini. Qui s' appelle Brahma, Allah, Jupiter ou Jésus, sur les dalles de ces temples nous verrons des hommes agenouillés et prosternés«.

27 For the complete quote see: Recueil des discours. Rapports et pieces diverses lus dans la séances publiques et particulières de l' Académie française, 1880–1889, Paris 1885, p. 345: »Tant que le mystère de l' infini pèsera sur la pensée humaine, des temples seront élevés au culte de l' infini, que le Dieu s' appelle Brahma, Allah, Jéhova ou Jésus. Et sur la dalle de ces temples vous verrez des hommes agenouillés, prosternés, abîmés dans la pensée de l' infini. La métaphysique ne fait que traduire au dedans de nous la notion dominatrice de l' infini«.

> You represent in the most honorable way in Italy these beautiful studies of history and criticism, without which there is no solid foundation for enlightened liberalism. I am very pleased to learn that you will have a chair in Rome where you can present your ideas. The sympathy you kindly show me touches my heart[28].

The book, dedicated to Giordano Bruno as a »martyr of free thought« is written with a clear and deliberate programmatic intent to address a gap that Labanca deemed intolerable: the absence of a history of Christianity free from legends and purely philosophical interpretations. Labanca observes that while historical research has gained a foothold in Italy, it has yet to adequately address religion, and Christianity in particular. The opening of the work is decidedly programmatic:

> To speak frankly, we are almost entirely strangers to the historical-critical movement in the study of religions. In a religious terrain, such as ours, either unprepared or prepared in a contrary manner, my book (which aims to provide a historical-critical study on primitive Christianity, not dogmatic; a critical-historical study, not philosophical) may be either neglected or disparaged. Perhaps the novelty, not of the subject matter, but of the way it is treated, could shake the indifference or mitigate the aversion of many[29].

Consistently with such a program, the book did not go unnoticed, attracting attention for its particularly innovative and unconventional perspectives within the Italian context. For example, Labanca posits that: »the religion [of Jesus] was Jewish, exclusively Jewish, being the physical environment in which [the Apostles] recommended it. Had it always remained in Jerusalem, it would have always been Jewish«[30]. However, the book contains conclusions that go beyond what might be expected from purely academic research. Indeed, it closes with the following statement:

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28 The letter, preserved in the Baldassarre Labanca Archive in Agnone, has been published in Faitrop-Porta, Baldassarre Labanca en France, p. 308: »Vous représentez de la manière la plus honorable en Italie ces belles études d' histoire et de critique, sans lesquelles il n' y a pas de base solide pour un libéralisme éclairé. Je suis très heureux d' apprendre que vous allez avoir à Rome une chaire où vous pourrez exposer vos idées«.

29 Baldassarre Labanca, Il cristianesimo primitivo. Studio storico-critico, Turin 1886, p. IX: »Noi siamo, a parlar chiaro, estranei quasi del tutto al movimento storico-critico delle religioni. In un terreno religioso, comè il nostro, o in nessun modo preparato, o preparato in modo contrario, può il mio libro (che si propone intorno al cristianesimo primitivo uno studio critico, e non dogmatico; studio critico storico, e non filosofico) venire o non curato, o vilipeso. Forse la novità, non dico dell'argomento, della maniera di trattarlo, potrebbe scuotere l'indifferenza, o mitigare l'avversione di molti«.

30 Ibid., p. 63: »La religione fu giudaica, esclusivamente giudaica; tale essendo l'ambiente fisico in cui la raccomandavano. Se fosse rimasta sempre in Gerusalemme, sempre sarebbe stata giudaica«.

> As for our entire work on early Christianity, what conclusion should we draw? If its distant past and present are to be considered reliable indicators of its future, we are compelled to articulate one final will: that Christianity will endure, if not as long as the distant motion, still for a very long time. In its inception, it gathered indestructible natural elements and possessed great moral idealism. […] Early Christianity, as founded by Jesus, the exemplar of man (*Ecce Homo*), was, in short, the Christianity of humanity, not of the Trinity. Let us return to that remote Christianity; let the new discoveries of science be adapted to it, as is already practiced in many countries. Let its ministers not persist in preserving and augmenting a dogmatic past that intelligent faith no longer cares about. […] Among us, numerous historical and contemporary issues stemming from the papacy have frequently resulted in impassioned judgments about the Christian religion[31].

We encounter an intriguing correlation: in order to decisively free Christianity from the entanglement of dogmas and philosophical speculations that suffocate it, it is beneficial for its ministers to shed the burden of their institutional history. Even twenty years later, when addressing Charpin, Labanca's position remains consistent: Christianity still requires a return to its foundational moral doctrine.

This unwavering belief of Labanca's is further underscored – if any additional proof is needed – by an autobiographical memoir published posthumously in 1914:

> Often in my publications, I have declared myself to be anti-Catholic and anti-dogmatic, but never anti-Christian, considering Christianity first and foremost in its most effective moralism […]. Apart from the dogmas of various Christian religions, I have freely and consistently accepted, after shedding my priestly garb, the Christianity of its classical age, of its golden era, constituted by the apostolic period, which was primarily a practical Gospel of love, charity, understanding, and extended benevolence[32].

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31 Ibid., pp. 433f.: »Circa poi a tutto il nostro lavoro sul cristianesimo primitivo che dobbiamo conchiudere? Se il passato remoto ed il presente di esso è da tenersi indizio certo del suo avvenire, siamo in debito di ripetere un'ultima volta, che il cristianesimo durerà, se non quanto il moto lontano, ancora per lunghissimo tempo. In quello, dal nascere, si raccolsero elementi naturali indistruttibili, e d'una grande idealità morale. […] Il cristianesimo primitivo, così come venne fondato da Gesù, esemplare dell'uomo (*ecce homo*), fu, a dir breve, il cristianesimo della umanità, non della trinità. Si ritorni a quel remoto cristianesimo: a questo si adattino le nuove scoperte della scienza, come già si pratica in molti paesi: non si ostinino i suoi ministri a conservare ed aumentare un passato dogmatico, che la fede intelligente non più cura; […] Fra noi, per molti mali passati e presenti prodotti dal papato, si è spesso passionati nel giudicare della religione cristiana«.

32 Labanca, Ricordi autobiografici, p. 35: »Spesso mi sono dichiarato nelle mie stampe anticattolico e antidogmatico, non mai anticristiano, consistendo per me il cristianesimo anzitutto e soprattutto nel moralismo più efficace […]. A parte i dogmi delle diverse religioni cristiane, io ho accettato liberamente e costantemente, dopo spogliatomi da prete, il cristianesimo della sua età classica,

These two quotations might indeed be sufficient to grasp the flattering assessment of Renan mentioned earlier. Remarkably, both statements, although separated by about twenty years, express nearly identical sentiments. For instance, Renan, by underscoring factors like climate and geography, suggests that these elements shaped Jesus's character. While acknowledging Jesus's Jewish roots, Renan argues that Nazareth's distance from the Pharisaic religion of Jerusalem allowed him to foster a non-dogmatic interpretation of Judaism and to present himself also as an »anti-hierarchical, individualistic, idealistic, and libertarian« preacher[33]. Labanca, in essence, concurs with this interpretation[34], but he places particular emphasis on a specific aspect: the unjustifiable and historically unfounded link between Jesus's teachings and the hierarchical Church.

Here, for both individuals, lies the second »rupture« concerning Jesus's original message, occurring after the charismatic leader's death. This rupture emerges as the Church solidifies and swiftly evolves into a scholastic and hierarchical institution, thereby deviating from the ethical essence of Jesus' teachings. The transformation culminates in the establishment of the papacy, which is deemed responsible for perpetuating a historically inaccurate and socially anachronistic tradition.

In 1905, Labanca published a book focused on the papacy[35]. This volume collects a series of studies penned since 1889, some of which were previously issued as articles. The central thesis challenges the historical underpinnings of the papacy, arguing that the authority of the popes, purportedly originating from early Christianity, lacks historical substantiation.

To reach this conclusion, Labanca traces the history of the institution chronologically from its presumed inception with Peter to 1903, concluding the book with a chapter titled *The Future of the Papacy*. Similar to his previous work, Labanca intertwines ancient history with the institution's social role in Italy at the time. However, Labanca argues that this role is fundamentally undermined by the uncertain chronology of the popes, especially during the first four centuries and particularly concerning the first pope. He asserts that only the most dogmatic

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della sua epoca d'oro, costituita dal periodo apostolico, che fu principalmente un Evangelo pratico di amore, di beneficenza e di intensa ed estesa carità«.

33 Robert D. Priest, The Gospel According to Renan. Reading, Writing, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century France, Oxford 2015, p. 102.

34 To be fair, it must be said that Labanca, despite these clear similarities, often tends to distance himself from Renan's position, which he believes does not always meet the criteria of historical-critical analysis. Labanca expresses these judgments repeatedly in his Gesù Cristo nella letteratura contemporanea straniera ed italiana. Studio storico-scientifico, Torino 1903. Cf. Cesare Preti, Le traversie di un apostata. Il »Gesù Cristo nella letteratura contemporanea« di Baldassarre Labanca e l'Indice, in: Studia Patavina 49 (2002), pp. 337–368.

35 Baldassarre Labanca, Il papato. Sua origine, sue lotte e vicende, suo avvenire. Studio storico-scientifico, Torino 1905.

Catholics today strive to legitimize an unbroken succession of bishops of Rome, ignoring the fact that if Peter did indeed reside in Rome, his tenure there was brief, and he never held a position comparable to that of the city's bishopric: »remove this head, and the entire papal chain falls apart!«[36]. The long notes at the end of each chapter reveal Labanca's thorough familiarity with contemporary scholarship on a topic that, during those years, was attracting growing interest from historians and archaeologists.

But there is something more here. The lengthy footnote that concludes this chapter is emblematic in this regard, as it reveals the dual purpose of the writing in question. Here, Labanca assumes the role of a polemicist and adopts an almost journalistic style, as if these sections serve as a counterpoint to the collection and commentary of the historical data contained in the chapter. For instance, in chapter 9, Luther's critical assessment of the papacy serves as an opportunity for Labanca to explore the diversity of perspectives within Catholicism regarding the dominant figure in the hierarchy. Here, Labanca's position becomes more evident as he appears to empathize with the Catholic modernists, labeled as »the critics«, who harbor the illusion that »a Reform – often requested but never achieved – can be accomplished with the pope«, and that ultimately »curialism and Jesuitism«, described as the »pillars of ecclesiastical authority« can be overthrown[37].

The conclusion, therefore, can only be like that of the book dedicated to early Christianity:

> A religion is more effective and beneficial when it has fewer dogmas and more moral sentiments, less external authority, and more inner authority of conscience. In the primitive times of Christianity, neither the multiplicity of dogmas nor absolute authority constituted Christian life. Anyone who lived to benefit others was recognized as a Christian […]. Today, there is a desire to return to this great ideal, from which the Christian churches, especially the Catholic Church, have strayed, becoming all about dogma and authority, with little or no fervent and ardent religious sentiment[38].

36 Ibid., p. 17: »Tolto, intanto, cotesto primo capo, tutta la catena papale si fa a pezzi!«.

37 Ibid., p. 407: »I cattolici riformisti si avvolgono, in generale, tra più equivoci. I principali sono questi: che possa conseguirsi una Riforma col Papa, domandata tante volte, non mai ottenuta; che possa abbattersi il curialismo e il gesuitismo, che sono i perni della autorità chiesastica, senza un'attiva e risoluta resistenza«.

38 Ibid., p. 420: »Una religione è maggiormente efficace e benefica, se avrà meno dogmi, e più sentimenti morali, meno autorità esteriore, e più autorità interiore della coscienza. Nei primitivi tempi del cristianesimo nè la molteplicità de'dogmi e nè l'assoluta autorità costituivano la vita cristiana. Veniva riconosciuto come cristiano chiunque viveva beneficando. […] Oggi si vuol ritornare a questo grande ideale, dal quale si sono dilungate le chiese cristiane, in ispecie la chiesa cattolica, tutta dogmi ed autorità, e poco o niente fervido ed ardente sentimento religioso«.

Labanca's argumentation is quite simple. The book on the papacy aims to be a historical reconstruction, intended to dispel the myths surrounding the topic, but it is also a continuation of his earlier work on ancient Christianity. Labanca starts from the same premise, namely that humans cannot fundamentally do without religion, even in the face of the majestic progress of science[39]. Therefore, it is important to explain what place Christianity can have in human religiosity in the twentieth century. The only possible path, according to Labanca, is the establishment of an apolitical papacy through the recovery of Jesus's genuine message.

The book's conclusion expresses this sentiment:

> As scientists and independent historians, we inquire whether Christianity can still contribute to the better moral and social life of nations, hoping – and I count myself among them – that Pius X truly wishes to restore all things in Christ for the future. This restoration primarily entails three things: that the pope relinquishes his boundless political and religious authority; that Catholicism ceases everything contrary to the Gospel of Christ; that it returns to being the spiritual father of the faithful of Christ. It has been demonstrated from the beginning of my study that such was the original meaning and usage[40].

In contrast to the previous book on Jesus and early Christianity, in this instance Labanca faced harsh criticism from his Italian readers. He was accused of essentially being a Protestant and a heretic. However, perhaps precisely because of this, a portion of the book was promptly translated into German and published in the same year by Mohr (Tübingen) with the decidedly more militant title *Die Zukunft des Papsttums (The Future of the Papacy)*[41]. As expected, the German translation achieved success mainly in non-academic circles and journals, but this also occurred in Italy[42].

39 Cf. ibid., p. 462 and Labanca, Il cristianesimo primitivo, p. XIV.

40 Labanca, Il papato, pp. 469f.: »Gli scienziati e storici independenti che stimano, potere ancora il cristianesimo concorrere alla miglio vita morale e sociale delle nazioni, augurano – e io sono tra loro – che Pio X voglia davvero, per l'avvenire, ristaurare tutte cose nel Cristo. La quale ristaurazione importa principalmente tre cose: che il Papa deponga la sua potestà sconfinata politica e religiosa; che il cattolicismo smetta tutto ciò che ripugna all'evangelo di Cristo; che torni di nuovo a fare il padre spirituale de' fedeli nel Cristo. Si è dimostrato da principio del mio studio che tale ne fu il significato e l'uso primitivo«.

41 Additionally, Paul Sabatier conveyed his congratulations to the author in a letter.

42 Cf. Proniewicz, Baldassarre Labanca e la »congiura del silenzio«, p. 187.

4. Conclusion

This small anthology could be further enriched, as could the reconstruction of the context and the relationships in which Labanca was both situated and shaped. To fully understand Labanca's position within the late nineteenth-century context, especially in relation to the strand of Christianity he focused on, several gaps still need to be addressed. In other words, it is necessary to describe both parts of what Bourdieu termed »the field of production and circulation of symbolic good«. Every field of production owes its structure to the opposition between the field of restricted production »as a system producing cultural goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods«, and the field of large-scale cultural production, »destined for non-producers of cultural goods«, i. e. the general public[43]. The key difference between these two domains is that they operate according to different laws. The field of large-scale cultural production is governed by competition to capture the largest possible market. In contrast, the field of restricted production tends to develop its own criteria for evaluating its products and can only become a system producing for producers by breaking with the public of non-producers.

It is within this dynamic that Labanca (and all the others mentioned thus far) operated – namely as a professor writing for academic journals and publishers –, while also serving as an intellectual authority responding to periodicals such as *Le Mercure*. Escaping this dual role seems difficult, at least during Labanca's time, when the restricted field of production (the university, where professors write for professors) did not enjoy the autonomy that might have allowed him to disregard – or disdain – what was happening in the field of mass production[44].

Professor Labanca could have scorned or ignored the request from *Le Mercure*, considering it beneath his position within the academic field. However, the allure of publicity, heightened by the fact that the request came from abroad, led him to promptly accept. The reason Labanca agreed to participate in »the media culture sabbath«[45] was that the restricted academic field of production did not have the

43 Pierre Bourdieu, The Market of Symbolic Goods, trans. Rupert Swyer, in: Poetics 14 (1985), pp. 13–44 (partial translation). Quotes are taken from the reprint in: Pierre Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature, ed. Randal Johnson, New York, NY 1993, p. 4.

44 Cf. ibid., pp. 15f.: »As the field of restricted production gains in autonomy, producers tend, as we have seen, to think of themselves as intellectuals or artists by divine right, as »creators«, that is as auctores »claiming authority by virtue of their charisma« and attempting to impose an auctoritas that recognizes no other principle of legitimation than itself (or, which amounts to the same thing, the authority of their peer group, which is often reduced, even in scientific activities, to a clique or a sect)«.

45 This vivid image is found in the untranslated part of Bourdieu's article. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, Le marché des biens symboliques, in: L' Année sociologique 22 (1971), pp. 49–126, at p. 103.

degree of autonomy that would have led him to disregard a product intended for an audience outside his academic peer group, such as responding to a journalistic inquiry. This dynamic is particularly evident when the subject – so to speak, the stakes – concerns religion, that is to say a symbolic good that, both in Labanca's time and today, is not confined to a restricted field of production.

But it is certainly not the circulation of knowledge outside the university quadrangles that enhances a professor's standing within the restricted field of production. On the contrary, crossing these boundaries often risks appearing as influence-peddling, an attempt to exert undue pressure on peer judgments. Only those who possess the most indisputable signs of cultural consecration can carry the group's voice outside, as they are more aligned with its norms. Others, by acting in this way, risk allowing the quality of their wide audience to dilute the quality of their work, adding little to their authority within the narrow field[46]. This is exactly what happened to Labanca. But it did not happen only to him – others, such as Sabatier and Renan, were also involved in this dynamic. However, this is not a matter of individual choice, but rather of the stake at play – namely religion – being at the center of two related but distinct fields of production.

Labanca serves as an exemplary case of this »double game«, reflecting the dynamics of the religious market in Europe during the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Almost all participants in defining religion as an object of scientific study were involved, albeit with varying degrees of intensity, depending on the level of autonomy enjoyed by the restricted field of religious studies. From this perspective, Charpin's inquiry is emblematic, not only because it helps us gauge the extent of consensus or dissension among participants regarding the supposed impending dissolution of religion, both in practice and belief, but also because it shows how such an inquiry was seen as entirely legitimate by scholars of religion within the universities of that time.

Le Mercure approached Labanca because he was the first professor of History of Religions in an Italian state university – even though he had not yet established himself as a prominent scholar within the transnational academic sphere. But perhaps it was also because he was a potential agent in the religious field, particularly within the transnational Christian religious arena. His conception of religion, which transcended denominational distinction, aligned with a vision starting from Catholicism but extending beyond it. Furthermore, Labanca's trajectory highlights that the history of religious studies requires more than a simple chronicle of institutions and academic appointments. It reveals how these elements are shaped by the dynamic interplay between the two distinct fields of production mentioned earlier.

46 Cf. Luc Boltanski/Pascal Maldidier, Carrière scientifique, morale scientifique et vulgarisation, in: Information sur les sciences sociales 9 (1970), pp. 99–118.

In conclusion, there is another crucial aspect that cannot be overlooked: the geographical dimension of religion. No discipline focusing on the study of religion can evade the influence of geographical perceptions of religion. Like many other academic disciplines, the study of religion is shaped by a spectrum of social, political, and legal discussions surrounding its public perception. These debates primarily unfold at the national level. However, this national perspective is not exhaustive. While local and national discussions undoubtedly shape the local and national perception of religion, the transnational dimension must not be overlooked or relegated to a secondary position. Fields can align with various geo-spatial scales simultaneously, each with differing degrees of importance for the field. Though nation-states played a role in establishing relatively independent fields across various sectors, including cultural production and organized professions, the geographic boundaries of these fields were not only unstable but also subject to occasional contestation. Simply having national authorities in place was insufficient to define these fields' limits[47]. Labanca and the others who wrote for *Le Mercure* did not do so solely based on their national and linguistic affiliations (though, of course, French served as the lingua franca of cultured Europe at the time). Rather, they acted as agents of a transnational intellectual field, where religion was, in fact, at stake in accordance both with the field of restricted production and the field of large-scale cultural production.

47 Cf. Gisèle Sapiro, Field Theory from a Transnational Perspective, in: Thomas Medvetz/Jeffrey J. Sallaz (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu, New York, NY 2018, pp. 161–182; Gisèle Sapiro et al., What is a Transnational Intellectual Field?, in: Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales 224 (2018), pp. 4–11.

IV. Individual Religious Entanglements with Nationalism

Fulvio Conti

From the Priesthood to Anticlericalism: Several Key Figures in Nineteenth-Century Italy

1. Secularism and Anticlericalism during the Risorgimento

In 1971, an important conference was held on the history of the Roman Catholic Church entitled *Church and religiosity in post-Unification Italy (1861–1878)*. At that conference, Pietro Scoppola, one of Italy's major Catholic historians, gave a lengthy lecture on *Secularism and Anticlericalism*, in which he defined anticlericalism as »a key feature of our history«, and stated that »no study of political or religious life in post-Unification Italy can overlook it«[1]. A similar observation was made by another Catholic historian, Guido Verucci, an expert on the relationship between Church and State in post-Unification Italy, and one of the first scholars to deal with nineteenth century secularist movements. In Verucci's view, anticlericalism »is a fundamental part of Italy's history, and as such needs to be studied – regardless of the occasionally unrefined nature of its expressions, which in any case is not so much different from those of opposing movements – for its indispensable contribution towards the advancement of the process of secularization«[2].

If this is true, as I believe it is, then we need to consider René Remond's invitation to see anticlericalism not as a quaint, heterogeneous mix of individuals and movements intent merely on opposing the Catholic Church and curbing its influence in the public sphere, but rather as a »positive political ideology« that was to inspire significant changes to the institutions, social life and traditions of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe[3]. In this sense, the concept of anticlericalism is synonymous with secularism, that is, the abandonment of forms of behaviour linked to religious faith, the renouncing of dogmatisms and *a priori* beliefs, and the end of traditionalism and superstition. Such negative beliefs and conducts are opposed by secularism's strong trust in reason and science, which by their very

1 Pietro Scoppola, Laicismo e anticlericalismo, in: Chiesa e religiosità in Italia dopo l'Unità (1861–1878), Proceedings of the Fourth Conference on Church History (La Mendola, 31 August – 5 September 1971), Relazioni, vol. 2, Milan 1973, p. 225.

2 Guido Verucci, Cattolicesimo e laicismo nell'Italia contemporanea, Milan 2001, p. 215. See also id., L'Italia laica prima e dopo l'Unità. Anticlericalismo, libero pensiero e ateismo nella società italiana, Rome et al. 1981.

3 See René Rémond, Anticlericalism. Some Reflections by Way of Introduction, in: Anticlericalism, European Studies Review, special issue 13, 2 April 1983, pp. 121–126.

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nature are based on experimentation and pragmatism, and also by relativism, that is, the condemnation of all absolute, immutable truths. However, it would also seem clear that anticlericalism, at least in the modern sense of the term (that is, as used from the nineteenth century onwards), represented a reaction to its direct opposite, clericalism. Rémond emphatically sustained as much when he stated that: »*sans cléricalisme avéré ou supposé, pas d' anticléricalisme*« [»without clericalism, be it known or suspected, there can be no anticlericalism«][4]. Thus anticlericalism has historically comprised those ideas and actions which, in the aftermath of the French Revolution and during the following decades, proclaimed the illegitimacy of any interference in public life by the established Church and by religion *tout court*. Going back to Verucci's definition, anticlericalism points to the »affirmation of the necessary separation of State and Church, with the Church being reduced to the common law sphere, and religion to that of a private concern, according to the principles of liberal individualism; anticlericalism constitutes a defence of the values of the freedom of conscience and of moral independence existing beyond the religious sphere«[5].

There can be little doubt that the nature of anticlericalism as a political and cultural movement displays a vocation for polemicizing and for the use of means of communication that have often tended towards satire, and indeed mockery. As Rémond has observed, anticlericalism can be identified with the guiding principles of secularism, but in addition it includes a »combative element«. In other words, it tends to simplify and take to the extreme the arguments of secularism, at times deforming them in a rather crude manner. In a certain sense, as one scholar noted, anticlericalism can be considered the »poor man's secularism«[6].

Nevertheless, the Italian anticlerical movement during the nineteenth century did not consist solely of its more uncouth, fiery members, the ones who towards the end of the century joined the Risorgimento-style democratic parties (of republican or radical persuasion), or the anarchist and socialist movements. In fact, there were

4 Id., L' Anticléricalisme en France de 1815 à nos jours, Paris [3]1999, p. 4.

5 Guido Verucci, Anticlericalismo, in: Norberto Bobbio et al. (eds.), Dizionario di politica, Torino 1983, p. 22.

6 Jean-Pierre Viallet, L' anticléricalisme en Italie (1867–1915). Historiographie et problématiques de recherche, in: Mélanges de l' École Française de Rome 122/1 (2010), pp. 137–159. This article constitutes the introduction to Viallet's unpublished PhD dissertation, written under the guidance of René Rémond and presented in 1992. See Jean-Pierre Viallet, L' anticléricalisme en Italie (1867–1915). Thèse pour le doctorat d' État, Paris X-Nanterre 1992, p. 2813. By the same author see also: Anatomie d' une obédience maçonnique. Le Grand-Orient d' Italie (1870–1890 circa), in: Mélanges de l' École Française de Rome 1 (1978), pp. 171–237; Anticléricalisme et laïcité. Bilan historiographique, in: Mélanges de l' École Française de Rome 2 (1986), pp. 837–862; L' anticléricalisme de Garibaldi, in: Hommes, idées, journaux. Mélanges en l' honneur de Pierre Guiral, Paris 1988, pp. 457–476.

other forms of anticlericalism of a more liberal persuasion, and indeed even one of a Catholic nature that was highly critical of the degeneration of the Church and of the clergy's role in society[7].

From this point of view, the first real signs of anticlericalism in Italy were already evident in the 1830s and '40s. These were the result of, among other things, the illiberal politics of Pope Gregory XVI who, from his investiture in 1831 onwards, proceeded to promulgate a series of measures designed to limit civil and political liberties, and to persecute followers of other religions such as Jews and Protestants. The initial anticlerical sentiments, which were shared by various different figures and groups representative of Italy's nascent liberalism, were characterised in particular by an anti-temporal or anti-institutional trait. In other words, their criticism was aimed not so much at religion or the Catholic Church as such, but rather at the exercise of political power by ecclesiastical organisations and at the moral degeneration this brought about. The anticlerical feelings of the time harked back to the religious anticlericalism of previous centuries, as expressed by Dante and Savonarola for example, in an attempt to remind the Church of the importance of those beliefs that had underpinned Christianity at its origins, and thus to save it from the spiral of corruption and ill-government brought about by temporalism. Furthermore, it naturally saw the existence of a Papal State as one of the major obstacles to the construction of national unity, as Machiavelli had already warned[8].

Traces of this secularism can also be found in certain exponents of liberal Catholicism, such as Alessandro Manzoni, Antonio Rosmini, Raffaello Lambruschini, Niccolò Tommaseo, Vincenzo Gioberti, Gino Capponi and Bettino Ricasoli. They all agreed that the Catholic Church had to be reformed, and that it needed to return to its evangelical roots and to witness the end to temporal power. These liberal Catholics represented above all an anticurialism (one only has to think of works such as Rosmini's *Cinque piaghe della Santa Chiesa* [Five Scourges of the Holy Church][9] or Gioberti's *Gesuita moderno* [The modern Jesuit][10]) that aimed to free the Church of its anachronistic features, to cleanse it of the residue left by political compromise, and to reconcile it with liberalism and the unitary aspirations of the

7 For a more general overview see Fulvio Conti, Breve storia dell'anticlericalismo, in: Alberto Melloni (ed.), Cristiani d'Italia. Chiese, società, Stato, 1861–2011, Rome 2011, URL: <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/breve-storia-dell-anticlericalismo_%28Cristiani-d%27Italia%29/> (2025-03-26) and Manuel Borutta, Antikatholizismus. Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe, Göttingen 2011.

8 See Giuliano Procacci, Machiavelli nella cultura europea dell'età moderna, Rome et al. 1995; Maurizio Viroli, Machiavelli, Oxford 1998; id., Machiavelli's God, Princeton, NJ 2010; id., As if God Existed. Religion and Liberty in the History of Italy, Princeton, NJ 2012.

9 [Antonio Rosmini], Delle cinque piaghe della Santa Chiesa. Trattato dedicato al clero cattolico, Lugano 1848.

10 Vincenzo Gioberti, Il Gesuita moderno, 5 vols., Losanna 1846–1847.

Italian patriots. However, this argument, whilst characterised by certain serious criticism and by what could undoubtedly be classified as anticlerical views, remained eminently religious: in other words, it did not purport to restrict the influence of the Church and religion on society, but rather to ensure that such influence was based once again on their original spiritual roots.

This form of secularism comprised certain legacies from eighteenth century enlightened Catholicism, Jansenism and anti-Jesuitism, and even echoed Savonarola's thoughts, as well as the pursuit of a return to a mythical primitive Christianity. It also had a lasting impact on late eighteenth century liberal Catholicism. Of course, it was very different from secular anticlericalism, and if anything shared certain features of the secularism of the Protestant minorities[11] and of representatives of moderate liberalism such as Massimo D'Azeglio and Terenzio Mamiani. The latter were highly critical of the Pope and the Papal State's anachronistic despotism and their aversion to all forms of freedom and progress.

During those years, the aforementioned heterogeneous group of writers critical of the Roman Catholic Church, drew significant inspiration from Sismondi's *Storia delle repubbliche italiane nel Medio Evo* [A History of the Italian Republics in the Middle Ages]. This work was highly influential in early nineteenth century Europe (it was published between 1807 and 1818), with the first Italian edition appearing in 1819[12]. Sismondi, a Calvinist writer from Geneva, argued that Catholicism had represented »the sickness of the Italian nation«, and together with foreign dominance had been one of the root causes of Italy's »demasculinization«, as symbolized by, among other things, the spread of the bizarre phenomenon of »ladies men« (gentlemen, also known as cavalier servants who during the eighteenth century accompanied ladies on social occasions and gallantly served them with regard to their every requirement)[13]. The Catholic hegemony witnessed in Italy from the Counter-Reformation onwards, was claimed to have weakened the character of the Italians, and to have generated moral laxity, a tendency towards dishonesty and a diminished sense of responsibility for an individual's own actions, all of which manifested itself in a propensity towards servility, particular in regard to political

11 See Giorgio Spini, Risorgimento e protestanti, Naples 1956, and id., L'Evangelo e il berretto frigio. Storia della Chiesa cristiana libera in Italia, 1870–1904, Turin 1971.

12 See Giuseppe Galasso, Le Repubbliche italiane del Sismondi e il Risorgimento, in: Antonio Coco (ed.), Le passioni dello storico. Studi in onore di Giuseppe Giarrizzo, Catania 1999, pp. 221–242; Jacques de Saint-Victor, Sismondi, entre républicanisme et Risorgimento, in: Revue Française d' Histoire des Idées Politiques 30/2 (2009), pp. 253–275; Adrian Lyttelton, Sismondi, the Republic and Liberty. Between Italy and England, the City and the Nation, in: Journal of Modern Italian Studies 17/2 (2012), pp. 168–182.

13 See Roberto Bizzocchi, Cicisbei. Morale privata e identità nazionale in Italia, Rome et al. 2008 and Silvana Patriarca, Italian Vices. Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic, Cambridge 2013.

power. These were all issues that were to be reiterated by anti-Catholic diatribes in the decades thereafter.

Some of these polemical issues were also embraced by that group of intellectuals and literary figures of a purportedly neo-Ghibelline persuasion who opposed the neo-Guelph arguments of Gioberti. Such figures included Giovambattista Niccolini (1782–1861), Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi (1804–1873), Giuseppe Giusti (1809–1850), Giuseppe Gioachino Belli (1791–1863), Michele Amari (1806–1889), Giuseppe Montanelli (1813–1862), Giuseppe Ferrari (1811–1876) and Carlo Pisacane (1818–1857). Their influence on political and cultural life in mid-nineteenth century Italy was anything but marginal. While Belli's biting dialectal satire was relatively little known, the same cannot be said of Giusti's collections of poetry, or of the works of Niccolini and Guerrazzi which were very popular with the public and contributed towards shaping an entire generation of patriots. Niccolini's *Arnaldo da Brescia* [Arnold of Brescia] (1843), and Guerrazzi's *L'assedio di Firenze* [The siege of Florence] (1836), in which the exaltation of ancient Italian heroism was accompanied by a series of republican ideas and condemnation of the Church's decadence, in fact proved key to the emergence of what Alberto Mario Banti has called »the Risorgimento canon«[14]. The historian Michele Amari reasoned similarly, in particular in one of his more well-known works, *La guerra del Vespro siciliano* [The war of the Sicilian Vespers] (1842), based on rationalistic materialism applied to contemporary political struggles, which led to the affirmation of a secular viewpoint and to the rejection of all neo-Guelph (neo-Catholic) »solutions« to the Italian problem.

2. Democratic Currents and the Secularist Turning-Point of 1848

The main promoter of anticlerical claims during those years was Giuseppe Ferrari, a follower of Gian Domenico Romagnosi (1761–1835) and one of the first people in Italy to propose the idea of a federalist, humanitarian socialism. His writings enjoyed a certain degree of popularity in various different European countries, thanks partly to the fact that he resided in France from the year 1838 onwards[15]. His criticism of the Church and religion was of a radical kind, and as such it resulted in his instinctive adoption of anti-Christian views. Ferrari even denounced the evangelical myth and the return of primitive Christianity as being purely illusionary; in other words, as what he believed to be an act of deception which had even deceived a sincere

14 See Alberto Mario Banti, The Nation of the Risorgimento. Kinship, Sanctity, and Honour in the Origins of Unified Italy, London et al. 2020.

15 See Silvia Rota Ghibaudi, Giuseppe Ferrari. L'evoluzione del suo pensiero (1838–1860), Florence 1969 and Clara M. Lovett, Giuseppe Ferrari and the Italian Revolution, Chapel Hill, NC 1979.

lay democrat like Giuseppe Montanelli. In 1851, Ferrari went as far as to write the following words:

> Wage war on Christ! That was the battle cry during the 18th century, the first cry of the revolution; afterwards no further steps were taken. With historical, learned quotes, it was shown that once upon a time Christianity was useful, beneficial and necessary. That may well be so; however, it is now of no use, but is detrimental and impossible. It is devastating Europe. […] The religion of the past is killing the present and suffocating the future[16].

Moreover, the following year in an essay he wrote on the consequences for Italy of Napoleon III's coup d' état, Ferrari claimed that: »Foreign conquest is not the exclusive preserve of Austria, but lies in Christianity as such, the enemy of Italy's liberty which for sixty years now has been trying to restore the dominion of the Papacy and the Empire. […] Christianity's political and religious system needs to be fought in order to free Rome and Milan«[17].

Similar ideas can be found in the writings of Carlo Pisacane, the Neapolitan patriot who was one of the first theorists of socialism in Italy. Pisacane died in 1857 during the »Sapri expedition«, a revolutionary action that he and Mazzini instigated in an attempt to get the southern Italian people to rise up against the Bourbon monarchy. In his *Saggio sulla rivoluzione* [Essay on Revolution], Pisacane explicitly declared his atheism (»of all theories, the most absurd is that of the existence of God and of Man created in God's image«), and he wrote that socialism was in marked contrast to the gospel »just like the healthy body of a young man clearly contrasts with the wheezing of a dying man«[18]. However, unlike Ferrari, Pisacane did not give much importance to the danger posed by the clergy, and did not encourage people to fight religion, as he believed that the revolution and the advent of socialism would destroy the Church's power. »The religious edifice – Pisacane observed – need not be demolished; simply removing the props holding it up will bring about its collapse«[19].

The position of Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872) was a peculiar one. He seemed to be stuck between an anti-papal, anti-Catholic, anti-Christian stance on the one hand, and a desire to build a new religion, the »religion of humanity«, which he pursued throughout his life, on the other. Mazzini's political-philosophical thought was heavily imbued with religiosity, to the point where his anticlericalism was perceived by some as the »means by which to impose a theistic, spiritualistic system

16 Gabriele Pepe/Mario Themelly (eds.), L'anticlericalismo nel Risorgimento (1830–1870), Manduria 1966, p. 256.

17 Ibid., p. 255.

18 Ibid., pp. CIIf.

19 Ibid., p. CIII.

that could also be considered democratic theocracy«[20]. He always believed that Italy's unification could only be achieved by bringing down the Papal State, and that Christianity itself could only be saved through the radical reform of the organisation of the Church. It came as no surprise to witness the abolition of temporal power among the first actions taken by the Roman Republic of 1849, of which Mazzini was the leader and principal source of inspiration[21].

It is interesting to recall what Mazzini wrote in 1833 in his *Pensieri ai preti italiani* [Thoughts for Italian priests], when commenting on the Encyclical *Mirari vos* of 15 August 1832, with which Pope Gregory XVI firmly condemned liberalism and, more specifically, the liberal Catholicism of Lamennais.

> The Papacy […] is dulled, irrevocably dulled – dulled because the Popes wanted it so – dulled because the whole of Humanity declared itself emancipated. […] Humanity asked the Popes: […] what have you done with that spirit of charity, of piety, of forgiveness that emanated from the words and actions of believers in the early centuries? You have forgotten your origins, misrepresented the moral norms established at the beginning, sacrificed Christianity's intentions for a hunger for power, the avidity of wealth, individual arbitrariness […]. You have gradually constructed your edifice of usurpation over the dead bodies of generations, invoked foreign invasion, pitted principles against other principles, families against other families, peoples against other peoples: you have fornicated with the civil tyranny of all countries, converted the cross, a symbol of sacrifice and wellbeing, into a sign of domination and ruin[22].

I shall return later to this significant contribution from Mazzini. During the years that followed, and even after 1860, he produced a number of essays on the question of religion in which he denounced the papacy as a permanent source of corruption and immorality, and accused the Roman Catholic Church of having erected a barrier against the development of civilisation. However, his later writings on religion were no longer characterised by the intense tones of his works from twenty or thirty years earlier. Indeed, when the rationalist and materialist movements emerged, Mazzini was quick to defend the principles of spirituality, and he clearly distanced himself from the more militant sections of the anticlerical front. In any case, Mazzini's political perception of the concept of nation, which he had developed during the 1830s, continued to be underpinned by religious considerations. His ideas, which were »of a strongly irrational, faith-based nature«, have been labelled as the »religion

20 Verucci, L'Italia laica prima e dopo l'Unità, p. 8.

21 See Giuseppe Monsagrati, Roma senza il Papa. La Repubblica romana del 1849, Rome et al. 2014.

22 This quote is taken from Pepe/Themelly (eds.), L'anticlericalismo nel Risorgimento, p. 10.

of the nation«, since in his thinking the nation »becomes the new divinity (albeit not one that completely replaces the old), as it constitutes the object of a new cult in a similar way that the French Revolution paid homage to Reason, and idolised the concepts of liberty, fraternity and equality«[23].

Anticlerical ideas and groups were given a strong boost following the events of 1848–49, which put paid to neo-Guelph deception and increased the widespread resentment of Pope Pius IX and the Catholic Church, who were accused of having betrayed the Italian cause and of once again embodying reactionary principles[24]. Liberal Catholicism's decline was accompanied by the increasingly confident development of moderate, secular liberalism, particularly in the Kingdom of Sardinia where the island's government launched a significant process of secularisation of society during the 1850s. Furthermore, the democratic movement was characterised by its increasingly lay, rationalist membership, which among other things gave rise to a number of interesting journalistic developments.

One of the most interesting aspects of the transformation witnessed after the revolutionary 1848–49 period, was the coming together of secular ideology and nationalistic demands. In other words, secularism and patriotism found themselves up against a common enemy: the Catholic Church. This was true from the geopolitical perspective, given that the Papal State represented an actual hindrance to the achievement of national unification; and it was also true from the political-cultural perspective, as religious power embodied obscurantism and traditionalism whilst opposing scientific progress and modernity. In other words, the political and moral renaissance of the Italian people (the Italian Risorgimento) could only be achieved if they were freed from the shackles of the Roman Catholic Church and all other religions. Such religions were to be replaced by a new rationalism firmly rooted in the principles of positivism, and permeated by a belief in humanity's advancement. Thus many representatives of the anticlerical undertaking were at the same time actively involved in the patriotic movement, and often chose to dedicate greater energy to the latter. Others, on the contrary, remained closer to the idealism of militant secularism, and as such were to play a more marginal role in the struggle for Italy's independence.

In any case, anticlerical ideology and numerous figures from that cultural movement were to play a significant part in the construction of the Italian nation-state. Moreover, following Italian unification in 1861, they helped establish the Kingdom of Italy as a secular State: a State that up until the establishment of the Fascist regime

23 Simon Levis Sullam, L'apostolo a brandelli. L'eredità di Mazzini tra Risorgimento e fascismo, Rome et al. 2010, p. 9. See also id., The Moses of Italian Unity. Mazzini and Nationalism as Political Religion, in: Christopher A. Bayly/Eugenio F. Biagini (eds.), Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, Oxford et al. 2008, pp. 107–124.

24 See Ignazio Veca, Il mito di Pio IX. Storia di un papa liberale e nazionale, Rome 2018.

in 1922, was characterised by, among other things, its liberal jurisdictionalism and the secular nature of its institutions[25]. The Catholic religion, professed by the majority of Italians, could no longer be used as a means with which to construct Italy's national identity. Indeed, for several decades it actually represented a divisive element, whereas secularism continued to be seen as a key component of the »Italian spirit«. Hence the relative success in Italy of the Freethinkers' Movement, and of the masonic lodges whose vast membership included various illustrious figures from the cultural and political worlds[26].

3. »A multitude of people who are citizens at heart«

One case that is particularly pertinent to an analysis of secularism in nineteenth century Italy is that of those priests, monks and nuns who at a certain point in their lives decided to abandon the Church. A detailed study of this phenomenon was conducted in 1958 by one such former priest, Carlo Falconi, resulting in the publication of his book entitled *Gli spretati, o del diritto all'apostasia* [Defrocked priests, or the right to apostasy][27]. Falconi, born in the northern Italian town of Cremona in 1915, had been ordained as a priest in 1938. During the Second World War, an event that produced the first symptoms of Falconi's malaise vis-à-vis the ambiguous positions adopted by Pope Pius XII at the time, he operated as a volunteer chaplain for Italian workers in Berlin. At the end of the war, he became interested in existentialist philosophy, and this interest further fed his spiritual malaise. He eventually decided to leave the Church, and had a theological work entitled *L'Umanità e il Cristo* [Humanity and Christ] published by Edizioni di Comunità di Adriano Olivetti (1901–1960), singular figure of Italian entrepreneur, intellectual and politician. His book on defrocked priests appeared in the series »Stato e Chiesa« [The State and the Church] edited by Ernesto Rossi (1897–1967), Italian politician, journalist and anti-fascist activist, and published by the Florentine publishers Parenti. This series included works by the most notable figures from the Italian anticlerical movement at the time. Many of them wrote for two important

25 For an overview, see Arturo Carlo Jemolo, Chiesa e Stato in Italia negli ultimi cento anni, Turin [2]1963; Francesco Traniello, Città dell'uomo. Cattolici, partito e Stato nella storia d'Italia, Bologna 1990; Daniele Menozzi, La Chiesa cattolica e la secolarizzazione, Turin 1993; Sara Alimenti/Francesca Chiarotto (eds.), Religione e politica. Dal Risorgimento al Concilio Vaticano II, Turin 2013; Giuseppe Battelli, Società, Stato e Chiesa in Italia. Dal tardo Settecento a oggi, Rome 2013.

26 See Fulvio Conti, Storia della massoneria italiana. Dal Risorgimento al fascismo, Bologna 2003; id., Massoneria e religioni civili. Cultura laica e liturgie politiche fra XVIII e XX secolo, Bologna 2008; id., I fratelli e i profani. Massoneria e sfera pubblica in Italia, Pisa 2020.

27 Carlo Falconi, Gli spretati, o del diritto all'apostasia, Florence 1958 (new ed. Milan 2003).

Italian magazines, »Il Mondo« and »L'Espresso«, which Falconi began to contribute on a regular basis.

There are numerous cases of defrocked priests in nineteenth century Italy, many of which are cited in the aforesaid volume. However, this should not mislead the observer into overestimating the entity of the phenomenon in question. A lot of young people from poor families were only able to gain a proper education by attending a seminary and taking their religious vows. In many cases, the decision to become a priest was thus taken not for religious reasons as such, but rather as a result of a series of cultural and political conditions leading in that direction. Priests were readily recognisable and relatively well esteemed in their local communities, and thus the priesthood was seen as a highly commendable life choice[28].

Consequently, many people chose to become priests not for strictly religious motives. Therefore, when their studies and their lives led them to develop cultural and political views of a different nature, it was relatively easy for them to abandon their existing experience without being traumatised by such a move. The return to a secular existence was a natural step to take for such individuals, and one that was not characterised by any clear ideological purpose. Or rather, from the present point of view of the historical reconstruction of events at the time, we ought to be careful not to ascribe any one specific meaning to this phenomenon by labelling it, *tout court*, as condemnation of the Catholic Church and the manifestation of a specific anticlerical purpose. Even though in the case of many defrocked priests, the cultural education they received when attending the seminary, together with their experience gained in the job, actually led them to make choices of a radically different kind[29]. We need to discern such cases from the many where the decision to leave the Church was simply an individual one based on various different personal grounds, rather than on any ideological considerations as such.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the aforementioned phenomenon was of a significant entity. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed many abandoning their Catholic faith. Such apostates included several important political and cultural figures in Italy, together with certain leading lights of the Risorgimento. Mazzini

28 See Mario Rosa, Clero e società nell'Italia contemporanea, Rome et al. 1992; Maurilio Guasco, Storia del clero in Italia dall'Ottocento a oggi, Rome et al. 1997; Maurilio Guasco, Uomo dei sacramenti, evangelizzatore, animatore sociale. Profilo del prete italiano, in: Antonio Acerbi (ed.), La Chiesa in Italia. Per una storia dei loro rapporti negli ultimi due secoli, Milan 2003, pp. 195–208; id., Il clero curato. Modelli e sviluppi, in: Melloni (ed.), Cristiani d'Italia, URL: <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/il-clero-curato-modelli-e-sviluppi_%28Cristiani-d%27Italia%29/> (2025-03-26).

29 See Paul Airiau, La formation sacerdotale, source d' anticléricalisme croyant au XIXe siècle?, in: Christian Sorrel (ed.), L' anticléricalisme croyant (1860–1914). Jalons pour une histoire, Proceedings of the Colloquium organized by the Institut d' études savoisiennes and the CNRS (Chambéry, January 22–23, 2003), Chambéry 2004, pp. 39–58.

and Garibaldi's followers included a significant number of priests who had left the Church or who, whilst continuing in the priesthood, shared the ideals of Italian patriotism and took up arms against the Papal State. Moreover, in the aforementioned work *Pensieri* from 1833, Mazzini had addressed Italy's priests using angry, heartfelt words calling on them to rebel:

> It is certainly a wonder, given all of the abominable deeds committed daily in God's name, given the shame and corruption, the hypocritical superstitions of the Roman court, that no priest blushes, as did the first fathers when they saw their religion tainted, the House of God turned into a brothel and a marketplace. It is a wonder how in the land of Arnaldo and Savonarola, no priest has the force, the energy, the spirit to present themselves with Christ's words on their lips, before the Pope and to ask him to account for the anarchical, wretched and ruinous situation in which, as a result of his hunger for global domination, the faith and unity of the Church find themselves in[30].

On another page, Mazzini targets the indolence of the clergy which »hinders progress« and »negates the gospel«. However, he tried to distinguish between the church hierarchy, which he believed had been irredeemably led astray, and the lower ranks of the clergy, that »multitude of people who are citizens at heart«. »Priests are men and citizens – he wrote –. The clergy, it should be remembered, are part of the homeland«. He concluded this work with a passionate final appeal:

> Priests of my native land! Do you wish to put an end to the slow, certain decline of the Christian Church? Do you want religion to be lastingly beautiful and venerated among men? Become leaders of peoples and move forwards along the road to progress. Help them gain their independence from foreign rule, from the German who keeps you servile like them. Do you not have a homeland? Do you not possess the hearts and souls of citizens? Do you not love your brothers? Free yourselves, and free them. […] Your voice influences the multitude: use it to restore your homeland to that splendour that foreign oppressors are now fighting over; use it to guide people to the full free exercise of their faculties, and to establish a new alliance between you and the people, between the Church and freedom[31].

Mazzini's appeal did not go unheeded given that the ranks of the patriotic movement had been bolstered by priests and other religious figures, some of whom had written memorable works during the epic events of the Risorgimento, and whose names were to be added to the list of national martyrs. Of these, one of the most famous was

30 Pepe/Themelly (eds.), L'anticlericalismo nel Risorgimento, p. 17.

31 Ibid., p. 18.

Ugo Bassi, a Barnabite born in Cento (Ferrara) in 1801 who was baptised Giuseppe, but then changed his name to Ugo in homage to the famous poet Ugo Foscolo: this decision in itself clearly revealed Bassi's patriotic ideals[32]. Ordained in 1825, Ugo Bassi preached in various different Italian towns and cities, and became known for the liberal nature of his sermons. In 1848 he accompanied those papal troops involved in the First War of Independence, and was wounded in battle. Following the speech given by Pope Pius IX on April 29, 1848 announcing the withdrawal of the papal army from the war being waged against Austria, Bassi moved towards the republican side and participated in the defence of Venice, and then in that of Rome. After joining Garibaldi's forces as they retreated through central Italy, he was captured by the Austrians in Comacchio and taken to Bologna where he was shot by a firing squad on August 8, 1849: he was executed with the consent of the ecclesiastical authorities, on a day of considerable symbolic importance. In fact, that day marked the first anniversary of the Bolognese people's successful popular uprising against the Austrian army (August 8, 1848). His martyrdom had an immediate effect, and his tomb quickly became a place of pilgrimage. Very soon the figure of Ugo Bassi had gained mythical status and had given rise to a great many writings of a patriotic nature. The poet Giosue Carducci (1835–1907), who more than anyone contributed towards this mythopoietic operation, dedicated a sonnet to Bassi in August 1869, when the city of Bologna, now part of the Kingdom of Italy, named a street after this priest and martyr. The anticlerical message of the sonnet was patent from the very first few lines:

Quando porge la man Cesare a Piero
Da quella stretta sangue umano stilla:
quando il bacio si dan Chiesa e Impero,
un astro di martirio in ciel sfavilla[33].

When Caesar shakes hands with Peter,
human blood flows;
when the Church and the empire embrace,
the star of a martyr is lit in the heavens.

32 See Maria Luisa Trebiliani, Bassi Ugo, in: Dizionario biografico degli italiani, vol. 7, Rome 1970. See also Paolo M. Rippa, Ugo Bassi nella storiografia domestica. Spunti e riflessioni, in: Filippo M. Lovison (ed.), I barnabiti nel Risorgimento, Barnabiti Studi 28 (2011), pp. 269–307.

33 I take the quote from Umberto Carpi, Via Ugo Bassi ovvero Intitolandosi dal nome di Ugo Bassi una via di Bologna nel ventunesimo anniversario dell'VIII Agosto MDCCCXLVIII (Carducci, Giambi ed Epodi, Libro I, IXX), in: Per leggere 19 (2010), pp. 159–168, at p. 166.

Other interesting examples of clergymen who converted to the ideals of the Risorgimento include Giovanni Verità and Giovanni Pantaleo. The former, a liberal-thinking priest born in 1807 in Modigliana, after being involved in various patriotic uprisings during the 1840s, between the Tuscany and Romagna regions, in 1849 offered hospitality to Garibaldi as the latter retreated from Rome, and subsequently he became Garibaldi's chaplain. In 1859 he was elected to the Tuscan Assembly that declared the end of the rule of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine[34]. Giovanni Pantaleo, born in 1831 in the Sicilian town of Castelvetrano, in 1849 was a member of the Order of the Friars Minor Reformed, and was ordained as a priest five years later in 1854. In 1860, during the »Expedition of the Thousand«, he joined up with Garibaldi and followed him in all of his subsequent military operations, taking up arms and also serving the patriotic movement in his capacity as a preacher. From 1861 on he was inhibited from performing church functions, and in 1864 he decided to renounce the priesthood and dedicate his energies to the renewal of the Church, which he believed to be only possible through a schism and the creation of a new national or people's Church. He moved in an increasingly radical, anticlerical direction, and eventually joined the freemasons; and in December 1869 he attended the Naples Anti-Council[35].

An even more interesting case is that of the Barnabite Alessandro Gavazzi (born Antonio Gavazzi in Bologna in 1809)[36]. He was a fellow brother of Ugo Bassi, and shared the latter's patriotic ideals and fame as a preacher. Noted for his criticism of the Catholic Church's reactionary attitude, he welcomed Pope Pius IX's reform efforts. However, following the address given on April 29, 1848, he began to attack the clergy and the Pope himself in an increasingly strong manner. He subsequently joined the Roman Republic, and after its fall he sought refuge in London, and then in the USA and Canada where he held an extensive series of conferences, gaining support among protestants in the process as a result of his strong criticism of Catholicism[37]. In around 1850 he split from the Catholic Church permanently, and while not subscribing to the protestant faith as such, he longed for a return to

34 See Enrico Croci, Don Giovanni Verità e il patriottismo religioso nel Risorgimento, Milan 1945; Piero Zama, Don Giovanni Verità presbitero garibaldino, Faenza 1967; Alfredo Oriani, Don Giovanni Verità e altri scritti sul 1848–49, ed. Ennio Dirani, Ravenna 1999.

35 See Ugo Dovere, Pantaleo Giovanni, in: Dizionario biografico degli italiani, vol. 81, Rome 2014.

36 See Luigi Santini, Alessandro Gavazzi. Aspetti del problema religioso del Risorgimento, Modena 1955; Robert Sylvain, Clerc, garibaldien, prédicant des deux mondes. Alessandro Gavazzi 1809–1889, 2 vols., Québec 1962; Filippo Maria Giordano, Alessandro Gavazzi tra politica antipapista, ideali risorgimentali e cultura evangelica, in: Bollettino della Società di studi valdesi 210–211 (2012), pp. 213–231; Giuseppe Monsagrati, Gavazzi Antonio, in: Dizionario biografico degli italiani, vol. 52, Roma 1999.

37 Father Gavazzi's Lectures, New York, NY 1853. See also Matteo Sanfilippo, Alessandro Gavazzi. Oltre l'Italia, l'America, in: Lovison (ed.), I barnabiti nel Risorgimento, pp. 245–267.

the Church as it used to be, that is, he developed the idea that only a radical renewal of the Church could form the basis for the nation's reawakening. Returning to Italy, in 1860 Gavazzi followed Garibaldi to Sicily, and subsequently in all of the latter's military actions aimed at liberating Rome and Venice. After founding the Free Church of Italy in Bologna, Gavazzi attempted to establish a United Evangelical Church, but this ultimately failed due to his differences with the Italian Baptists and Methodists, to the withdrawal of support from the Waldensians, and to the growing mistrust of the English Protestants. All of these factors led to the failure of the project that Gavazzi had promoted by various means, including the writing of newspaper articles in support of his ideas.

4. Atto Vannucci, Gaetano Trezza and Ausonio Franchi

There is a long list of former priests who abandoned religion to dedicate their energies to politics among the ranks of liberal or democratic groups averse to the temporal power of the Popes. Carlo Falconi estimates that in the period between 1861 and 1877 alone, »at least nine former priests were members of Parliament, and almost always for more than one legislature«[38]. In truth, this number was almost certainly higher. The individuals in question included such well-known figures as the Hegelian philosopher Bertrando Spaventa (1817–1883), a right-wing MP and strong critic of the Jesuits. They also comprised: Giuseppe Sirtori (1813–1874) who after leaving the Church in 1844, took part in the revolutionary uprisings of 1848, and followed a military career, first with Garibaldi's forces and then in the Savoy army; Filippo De Boni (1816–1870), a follower of Mazzini and one of the main supporters of the anticlerical cause in the Italian Parliament; the Sicilian scholar Paolo Emiliani Giudici (1812–1872), who left the Dominican Order in 1841; Filippo Abignente (1814–1887), a member of the anti-Bourbon clergy already a member of the Naples Parliament in 1848; the Sardinian Giorgio Asproni (1809–1876), who after serving as a canon in the town of Nuoro up until 1849, joined the ranks of the democratic left and became a leader of the Italian freemasons; Paolo Ercole (1821–1895) from the Piedmont region, who was an MP for many years and was very close to the left-wing leader Agostino Depretis; Apollo Sanguinetti (1823–1889), another former priest from Piedmont who graduated in philosophy from Turin University with a final year dissertation on the question of the freedom of conscience.

The last person named by Falconi was the Jesuit Carlo Passaglia (1812–1887), a key figure from the world of Italian liberal Catholicism in the nineteenth century.

38 Falconi, Gli spretati, p. 107.

Between 1854 and 1855 he had been an enthusiastic supporter of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, but after adopting an increasingly critical position vis-à-vis the Church, in 1859 Passaglia left the Jesuit Order and Pope Pius IX granted him the rank of secular priest. After fleeing to Turin, he set up a number of newspapers by means of which he proposed the conciliation between the papacy and the Kingdom of Italy, and promoted a collection of signatures among the clergy asking the Pope to spontaneously renounce his temporal power. 8,176 priests and 767 churchmen signed his appeal. He was subsequently unfrocked, and in 1863, after being elected to parliament, he tried to establish an Italian ecclesiastical society protecting those priests who were opposed to the concept of temporal power and had been condemned by the Catholic hierarchy[39].

Finally, the former churchmen who stood out in nineteenth century Italy for their commitment to the anticlerical cause included a number of intellectuals, some of whom held important political positions, who we shall now examine in more detail. The first of these was Atto Vannucci, who was born in 1810 in the village of Tobbiana situated between Prato and Pistoia in Tuscany. In 1834, Vannucci was ordained a priest, a role that he immediately interpreted in an extremely unregimented manner, whereby he revealed his strong aversion to the ecclesiastical hierarchy and tried to reconcile the Catholic faith with the ideas of liberty and modernity[40]. He was significantly influenced by the works of Félicité de La Mennais (1782–1854), whom he had met in person during the latter's visit to Prato in 1832, and whom he encountered once again in Paris in 1843. Whilst in Paris, Vannucci frequented a number of Italian patriots in exile, and he joined Mazzini's political organisation *Giovine Italia*. Following his stay in Paris, Vannucci shifted his thinking in a more republican direction and strengthened his patriotic convictions, which he now combined with increasingly strong secular, anticlerical views. He proudly opposed neo-Guelph philosophy, and thus was strongly critical of Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852) and his *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* [On the Moral and Civil Primacy of the Italians] published in Brussels in 1843.

In May 1847, when Grand Duke Leopold II granted press freedom in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Vannucci was already an established intellectual known for his democratic ideals. He was the co-founder of the newspaper *L'Alba* [The Dawn] first

39 See Agostino Giovagnoli, Dalla teologia alla politica. L'itinerario di Carlo Passaglia negli anni di Pio IX e di Cavour, Brescia 1984 and Luciano Malusa, Passaglia Carlo, in: Dizionario biografico degli italiani, vol. 81, Rome 2014.

40 See Andrea Bolognesi, Atto Vannucci e l'idea del prete cittadino e patriota, in: Andrea Giaconi/Giovanni Pestelli (eds.), La primavera della democrazia. Il 1849 a Prato e in Toscana, Florence 2020, pp. 91–98. See also Fulvio Conti, Vannucci Atto, in: Dizionario biografico degli italiani, vol. 98, Rome 2020.

published in June 1847, and he held extremely progressive political ideas; indeed, he hypothesised the advent of an Italian Republic.

Vannucci, who in January 1848 was nominated a member of the Academy of the Crusca, directed the aforementioned paper up to the outbreak of the First War of Independence in March 1848. During that period he gave up his teaching post to dedicate his energies to politics and journalism, and his ideas eventually led him to leave the Church. In 1848 he published one of his most famous works: *I martiri della libertà italiana dal 1794 al 1848* [The lives of Italian martyrs]. Said work, which took Vannucci most of his life to complete, as he constantly added to and amended it, proved highly successful and was reprinted numerous times thereafter[41].

Between late 1848 and 1849, Vannucci was an extremely active member of Tuscany's democratic government which had been established after the Grand Duke had fled, and he strove, in vain, for its declaration of a Republic and its joining with the government of Rome. After the restoration of the Grand Duchy, Vannucci was forced into exile, first in France, then in England and Belgium, and finally in Switzerland. During his years in exile, he went back to his studies and wrote his most important work of all, *Storia d'Italia dai tempi più antichi fino all'invasione dei Longobardi* [The history of Italy from ancient times to the Lombard invasion].

Following his return to Tuscany in late 1854, Vannucci stayed out of politics for a few years, before recommencing his political activity in 1859, by which time he had abandoned the ideas of Mazzini and shifted towards the liberal, Unitarian and monarchic positions adopted by Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour (1810–1861), Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia. In 1860 he was elected as the member for Florence to the Parliament of the Kingdom of Sardinia, and in 1865 he was nominated senator of the Kingdom of Italy. In 1859 he was appointed Professor of Latin Literature at Florence's Institute of Higher Studies – the precursor of the present University – and in 1861 he was made the first director of Florence's National Central Library. He then spent the latter part of his life absorbed in his studies. He often compared ancient Rome to the Rome of his own time, launching into a violent tirade against the world's tyrants and the »barbaric rule of the clergy«. He also acted in a public capacity as an interpreter of patriotic memoirs, and he was often invited to be a member of committees or to give speeches on Italy's history, both ancient and modern. One particularly significant example was the speech he gave in Florence in 1869, on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of Machiavelli's birth, when he was offered the chance to reiterate his unmoved anticlerical convictions. During said speech, Vannucci exalted the mythical figure of Machiavelli, the enemy of all tyrants, and he reiterated his accusation of the

41 See Fulvio Conti, The Religion of the Homeland. The Cult of »Martyrs of Freedom« in Nineteenth-Century Italy, in: Journal of Modern European History 13/3 (2014), pp. 398–417.

papacy's having destroyed the nation's ethics, subjecting it to foreign domination for centuries. Vannucci underscored the point that in Machiavelli's mind

> Italy's biggest enemy was the Pope: and he was the first to specifically and splendidly formulate an indictment of the Pope who, with his mean priests and sorry retinue, interpreted religion on the basis not of virtue but of laziness, and in making it an instrument of rule by disarming peoples and making them lazy, he has put an end to freedom, rendering those peoples cowardly slaves of corrupt oppressors[42].

However, what Vannucci wanted to underline first and foremost was the fact that in the Italy of 1869, with Pope Pius IX about to inaugurate the First Vatican Council, the enemies of the homeland and of freedom remained the very same as those of Machiavelli's days:

> everyone witnessed the same old crimes committed in our age, and foreign soldiers trampling and bloodying Italy's lands when beckoned by the Pope blessing the murderers and cursing the slaughtered or hung Italians; and this very day we see him conspiring against you and doing all within his powers to kill off that new life that cost us centuries of suffering and bloodshed[43].

Atto Vannucci died in Florence in 1883. A similar approach to his when it came to the study of antiquity was adopted by the very person who was to take his place as Professor of Latin Literature at Florence University: Gaetano Trezza. Trezza was born in Verona in 1827, and in 1850 was ordained into the priesthood. He was appointed as a teacher of Italian language and literature at the grammar school in his hometown, but in 1856 he was removed from his post due to a speech he had given in public which was adjudged to have been excessively patriotic. In 1859 he was arrested on similar political grounds, and he subsequently spent several months in Venice prison. During that time he came to the decision to leave the priesthood. Following the liberation of Italy, Trezza taught in various towns before being given a teaching post at Florence's Institute of Higher Studies upon the suggestion of the historian and politician Pasquale Villari (1827–1917). In his teaching and studies of Latin literature, Trezza displayed a marked positivist, materialist approach. He applied Darwin's theories to the history of grammar, at times with rather questionable

42 Atto Vannucci, Quarto centenario di Niccolò Machiavelli. Con una relazione di Efisio Contini, Florence 1869, pp. 15f.

43 Ibid., pp. 16f. See Laura Fournier-Finocchiaro, Machiavel et la tradition anticléricale italienne au XIXe siècle. Le discours d'Atto Vannucci pour le quatrième centenaire de 1869, in: Laboratoire italien 7 (2007), pp. 199–216 and Maurizio Tarantino, Atto Vannucci, in: Enciclopedia machiavelliana, Rome 2014.

results; however, he had the merit of having attempted »to modernise the teaching of Latin by introducing philology and comparative grammar, by analysing language from the perspective of civilisations, and by relating literature to the psychology of the people and to social life«[44].

With certain publicly successful works Trezza contributed significantly to the fortunes of Lucretius and Epicurus in late nineteenth century Italy: these were two writers who he believed had guessed, indeed almost predicted, several of the greatest discoveries of modern science. By enhancing the value of Epicureanism as the »heir to the scientific progress and political consciousness of all antiquity«[45], he targeted those social institutions that at the time opposed progress and modernity: first and foremost, the Catholic Church and the papacy, against which, just like Atto Vannucci, Trezza repeatedly launched »strong tirades«[46].

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the influential Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce said the following about Trezza: »Gaetano Trezza, after having had a great many fervent readers and admirers, has now been almost totally forgotten. Wrongly so, in my opinion: because Trezza was no ordinary talent or soul. The historian Gaetano Salvemini, who attended his university lectures, remembers him as a ›maestro‹ who literally made him ›buzz‹«[47].

The last person I would like to mention is Ausonio Franchi (the pseudonym of Cristoforo Bonavino), who for at least twenty years (between 1848–49 and 1869) was perhaps the most influential of all Italian secularists[48]. Born in Pegli in the Liguria region in the year 1821, Franchi was ordained as a priest in 1843. Three years later, in 1846, he set up a primary school which proved highly successful, and published a number of popular school textbooks. He was fascinated by neo-Guelph ideas and by the liberal Catholicism of Gioberti, and in 1848 he remained disappointed by the conservative direction taken by Pope Pius IX. He published two pamphlets criticising the Jesuits, and in 1849 he anonymously translated the pamphlet *Jésus-Christ devant les conseils de guerre* by the French socialist Victor-Amedée Meunier (1817–1894), which beseeched people to return to primitive Christianity and criticised the Church for having betrayed Christ's authentic mes-

44 Giovanni Landucci, Darwinismo a Firenze. Tra scienza e ideologia (1860–1900), Florence 1977, p. 75.

45 Ibid., p. 175.

46 Antonio La Penna, L'editoria fiorentina della seconda metà dell'Ottocento e la cultura classica in Italia, in: Ilaria Porciani (ed.), Editori a Firenze nel secondo Ottocento, Florence 1983, p. 141.

47 Gaetano Salvemini, Che cosè la coltura, Parma 1954, p. 40.

48 See Roberto Pertici, Alle origini del secolarismo italiano: il caso Ausonio Franchi, in: Mario Allegri (ed.), Pensare gli italiani, 1849–1890, vol. 1: 1849–1859, Rovereto 2021, pp. 43–97. See also Fiorenza Taricone, Ausonio Franchi. Democrazia e libero pensiero nel XIX secolo, Genoa 2000.

sage. Franchi was defrocked in January 1850, and he became close to the democratic groups operating in Genoa at the time. Under his pseudonym Ausonio Franchi, he started to work with several democratic left-wing papers such as »Italia« edited by Mauro Macchi (1818–1880), »Italia e Popolo« and »Il Diritto«.

Bonavino/Franchi avidly imbibed the French rationalist and anticlerical culture that was regaining momentum after the delusions of 1848 and following the *coup d' état* of December 2, 1851. French translations enabled them to acquire considerable knowledge of German biblical criticism and post-Hegelian philosophy, in particular those works of an atheistic, materialist character. Together with Mauro Macchi, he formed a political-intellectual coterie that for several years included a certain number of Italian and French exiles. Among them was the French historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874), who described Bonavino as »Italy's number one polemical writer« and »the first logician of the period«[49].

In 1852 he published his first major successful work: *Filosofia delle scuole italiane* [Philosophy in Italy's schools][50]. In that work he strongly criticised the dogmatic Catholic philosophy that prevailed in Italian schools, and indicated the »religion of humanity« as being tasked with educating the new generations of Italians. In Ausonio Franchi's view, scepticism was »one of the finest forms of rationalism, and the best possible expression of freedom of thought and of conscience«[51]. Convinced that »the ultimate criterion of any truth resides in reason«, he consequently theorised the »negation of any supernatural order, of any positive theology, of any theocratic authority, and of any divine revelation«[52].

The aforesaid work was widely popular among Italian democrats, and resulted in its author becoming known and gaining prestige also abroad. It was followed by two other very successful works, namely: *La religione del secolo XIX. Lettere al conte di Montalembert* [nineteenth century religion. Letters to the Count of Montalembert] published in Lausanne in 1853; and *Studi filosofici e religiosi* [Philosophical and religious studies], published in Turin in 1854. During the period from 1854 to 1858, Ausonio Franchi founded and directed the journal »La Ragione« in Turin, a publication concerned with »religious, political and social philosophy«. »La Ragione« was of a democratic nature and focused in particular on social questions, and combined with an anti-Catholic rationalism this not infrequently resulted in open anticlericalism. The journal's contributors included Mauro Macchi and Giuseppe Ricciardi (1808–1882), two self-professed atheists, together with David

49 Jules Michelet, Le banquet. Papiers intimes, Paris 1879, p. 15.

50 Ausonio Franchi, La filosofia delle scuole italiane. Lettere al professore G.M. Bertini, Capolago 1852. It is no coincidence that Gaetano Trezza entitled one of his autobiographical works: Confessioni di uno scettico (Verona et al. 1878).

51 Franchi, La filosofia delle scuole italiane, p. LXXXIII.

52 Ibid., p. XCI.

Levi (1816–1898) and Giuseppe Montanelli who, on the other hand, published articles conveying the religious sentiments of Saint-Simonianism.

As the historian Roberto Pertici has observed, Ausonio Franchi was »the first intellectually prestigious priest to publicly reveal the reasons for his own crisis, and became the most forceful antireligious polemicist in the Italy of the 1850s«[53]. In 1860 he was appointed Professor of Philosophy at Pavia University, and in 1863 he moved to the Scientific-Literary Academy of Milan to teach the same subject. During that period, many of the contributors to »Ragione«, in keeping with their ideals and beliefs, became members of the freemasons' lodges that were established in several Italian towns and cities. Rationalism and anticlericalism offered a number of the principle founding values of such lodges. Together with Macchi, Levi and Montanelli, said freemasons also included Ausonio Franchi of course, who in 1864 led a breakaway from the Grand Orient of Italy on the part of a number of dissident lodges that met in Milan to form a new grouping headed by Ausonio Franchi himself[54].

Nevertheless, during the latter half of the 1860s and in the 1870s he critically revised those theories he had previously sustained. In the 1880s his own personal crisis culminated in his making public his new philosophical orientation in a pamphlet about Saint Thomas Aquinas[55], and in particular in the three volumes of his work *Ultima critica* [The final critique] published between 1889 and 1893[56]. In this latter work, he distanced himself from his earlier writings, as he moved back into line with the official positions of the Catholic Church. Following his abjuration of his previous »errors« in 1889, he was received by Pope Leon XIII in 1890, and in 1893 he returned to the priesthood. He died in 1895 in Genoa's Monastery of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, a place that had been his retreat from the world since 1892.

All those who had eagerly read his writings from the 1850s and '60s, and had seen him as a benchmark of rationalist and materialist thinking, condemned what the most generous referred to as a »second apostasy«[57] and the most critical labelled a »kick back«[58] towards the Catholic fold. In the eyes of the many free thinkers previously inspired by his writings, his return to that fold through his abjuration in 1889 constituted an act of betrayal. It certainly did not help his reputation after his death. In an obituary published in 1895, the republican, anticlerical intellectual and

53 Pertici, Alle origini del secolarismo italiano, p. 54.

54 See Carlo Montalbetti/Luigi Polo Friz, Ausonio Franchi e la massoneria. Il Rito simbolico di Milano, in: Il Risorgimento 36/2 (1984), pp. 160–194.

55 Ausonio Franchi, San Tommaso d'Aquino e la sua filosofia, Genoa 1888.

56 Id., Ultima critica, 3 vols., Milan 1889–1893.

57 Saverio Fausto De Domenicis, La seconda apostasia di Ausonio Franchi, Bergamo 1890.

58 Arcangelo Ghisleri, La rinculata di Ausonio Franchi, in: Cuore e critica 3, 20 April 1889, p. 77.

freemason Arcangelo Ghisleri (1855–1938), wrote the following of him: »For those who know Franchi well and who had already noticed in his work the lack of any ideal reconstruction, his return to the religious fold appeared a natural consequence of the age and of his purely negative rationalism. […] He died virtually a forgotten man«[59].

59 Id., Ausonio Franchi, in: Emporium 1 (1895), pp. 237f., at p. 238.

Marta Baranowska

Roman Dmowski's Concept of National Ethics: Nationalism and Religion

1. Introduction

Nationalism is one of the currents of political thought that have greatly influenced socio-political reality since the nineteenth century. An analysis of nationalism shows that apart from the recognition of the nation as the supreme social group and political entity, all other issues concerning the political system, law, economy, state-church relations, and religion come to be presented very differently. In fact, there is no single nationalism, but rather many nationalisms that have their own specificities[1]. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the Polish national movement emerged as an opposition to those political currents that either sought to »morally bind parts of a divided Poland to foreign countries«[2], or, like the international socialist movement, negated the importance of the homeland[3]. Undoubtedly, the emergence of the nationalist movement was also a reaction to the escalating activities of the partitioners, whose aim was to destroy the national identity of Poles (Russification, Kulturkampf)[4]. From the moment the Polish national movement was founded, its activities were concentrated in various organizations[5]. All these organizations of Polish nationalists are collectively referred to as the *Endecja* (from the abbreviation ND – *Narodowa Demokracja*, i. e. *National Democracy*).

1 One can point out, for example, the different views of nationalists, such as Giuseppe Mazzini, a democrat with liberal views, unlike Charles Maurras or Enrico Corradini, see: David G. Rowley, Giuseppe Mazzini and the democratic logic of nationalism, in: Nations and Nationalism 18 (2012), pp. 39–56; Olivier Daard, Charles Maurras. Le nationaliste intégral: Le nationaliste integral, Paris 2019; Mauro Marsella, Enrico Corradini's Italian Nationalism. The »Right Wing« of the Fascist Synthesis, in: Journal of Political Ideologies 9 (2004), pp. 203–224.

2 Roman Dmowski, Przedmowa do wydania czwartego (1933), in: Id., Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka, Wrocław 2012, p. 14. [Unless otherwise noted, all translations from English Marta Baranowska: »Części podzielonej Polski związać moralnie z państwami obcymi«].

3 Within the Polish socialist movement the Polish Socialist Party was also founded, which combined the struggle for Polish independence with social revolution, a point also made by Dmowski.

4 Zob. Danuta Waniek, Endecja, socjaliści i kościół hierarchiczny na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. Wybrane problemy, in: Studia z Dziejów Państwa i Prawa Polskiego XX (2017), pp. 223.

5 In 1887, the Polish League was established, and in 1893, on Dmowski's initiative, it was dissolved and replaced by the National League.

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One of the leaders of *Endecja* was Roman Dmowski (1864–1939), who remains to this day, next to Józef Piłsudski and Wincenty Witos, the main symbol of Poland's regaining independence in 1918. He joined the national movement as early as in 1889, and was active in it throughout his life, as part of these successive organizations: the National League, the National Democratic Party and, in the Second Republic of Poland, the People's National Union, the Camp of Great Poland, and the People's Party[6]. Dmowski's views continued to evolve, which translated into changes in *Endecja*'s programme. Polish historian Andrzej Micewski put forward the right thesis that it is in this evolution of views that the causes of the later »cracks« in the national movement can be found, and named the three phases of Dmowski's work: democratic-parliamentary, fascist, and national-Catholic[7].

The research focus of this paper will be Dmowski's views on morality, religion, and the relationship between the state and the Church at the time of the formation of the Polish national movement, i. e. at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was then that Dmowski's aspiration to treat nationalism as a narrative of political reality began to emerge. This narrative would be the only one to determine the goals of state and civic activity, pushing religion and the Church out of this sphere. Dmowski's central concept was national ethics, and this is the starting point for understanding his stance on the place and role of religion and the Church in nationalist politics. Dmowski presented his views on these issues in the pages of *Przegląd Wszechpolski* [*The All-Polish Review*], the main ideological magazine of the National League, where he was editor from 1895[8], and in one of his most prominent publications, *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka* [*Thoughts of a Modern Pole*], published in 1903[9]. From 1907 onwards, successive editions of his *Thoughts* were accompanied by a treatise entitled *Podstawy polityki polskiej* [*The Foundations of Polish Politics*][10], in which he presented a continuation of his deliberations, with some changes to his worldview. *Thoughts of a Modern Pole* had a fundamental impact on shaping the views of Polish nationalists, but as Dmowski himself emphasized, it was not a programme manifesto of the national movement, but his private thoughts,

6 More on Dmowski's biography and history of National Democracy (Endecja), see Stanisław Kozicki, Historia Ligi Narodowej 1887–1907, London 1964; Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, Narodowa Demokracja 1887–1918. Fakty i dokumenty, Warszawa 1933; Jerzy Janusz Terej, Idee, mity, realia. Szkice do dziejów Narodowej Demokracji, Warszawa 1971; Roman Wapiński, Roman Dmowski, Lublin 1988; Roman Wapiński, Narodowa Demokracja 1893–1939. Ze studiów nad dziejami myśli nacjonalistycznej, Wrocław 1980.

7 Andrzej Micewski, Z geografii politycznej II Rzeczpospolitej. Szkice, Warszawa 1964, p. 16.

8 See Klaudiusz Hrabyk, Ideologia »Przeglądu Wszechpolskiego« (1895–1905), Poznań 1937.

9 This book was largely published earlier in the form of articles on the pages of *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, signed by Dmowski under the pseudonym R. Skrzycki.

10 *The Foundations of Polish Politics* was first published in »Przegląd Wszechpolski« in 1905.

described by him as a confession[11]. At the end of the 1920s, he changed his views on the place of the Church in politics, and in time the idea of creating a Catholic State of the Polish Nation took root among nationalists. The research objective of this article is to answer the questions of whether Dmowski's concept of national ethics was a manifestation of secularization, and how the role of religion and the Church changed in Polish nationalist political thought. Nationalism was a political movement which redefined the place of religion and the Church in politics.

2. National Ethics

Every organized social group exists on the basis of normative systems legitimized by them, such as customs, morality, religion, and law. In the case of the Poles, deprived of a state, the law imposed by the three partitioning states failed to perform a community-building function and was perceived as an instrument of repression. For this reason, religion, morality, and customs were decisive in shaping the sense of community. The founders of the national movement did not want religion, whose message they had no influence on, to be considered decisive in this respect. For this reason, Dmowski stressed morality as the basic normative system binding people into a nation. It was in *Thoughts* that he formulated a sentence crucial to understanding his views on the subject: »The nation is the necessary moral content of the state, while the state is the necessary political form of the nation«[12]. The essence of a nation is an indissoluble moral bond linking individuals into a national whole. Morality was the main subject of Dmowski's considerations, as the science of the nation was, for him, the science of morality, i. e. national ethics. It should be stressed that the notion of patriotism, or love of the homeland, acquires yet another meaning in Dmowski's writings. From the sphere of emotions he moved it also to the sphere of morality, and defined it as »the moral attitude of the individual towards society«[13]. He stressed that patriotism could not be treated as philosophical views, which could be freely chosen and altered, but that it was a moral duty resulting from a close relationship between an individual and the nation.

Dmowski was perfectly aware that among Poles, who were mostly Catholics and believed that moral norms were given by God, it was the Church that had the decisive influence on the interpretation of moral principles and determination of the highest good, that is salvation. Meanwhile, the author of *Thoughts* wanted

11 Roman Dmowski, Przedmowa do wydania drugiego, in: Id., Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka, Wrocław 2012, p. 10.

12 »Naród jest niezbędną treścią moralną państwa, państwo zaś jest niezbędną formą polityczną narodu«. Id., Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka, p. 112.

13 »Stosunek moralny jednostki do społeczeństwa«. Ibid., p. 23.

Endecja, and not the Church, to have a dominant role in the political sphere and to determine the courses of action for citizens. At the same time, he realized that secularization of such a religious society was not possible. Therefore, he proposed a clear distinction between two spheres of life: individual and political[14]. In relations between individuals, he considered Christian ethics, i. e. the ethics of love for one's neighbour, to be binding, while relations between individuals and the nation, and between the nation and the nation, were to be shaped by national ethics. He justified this concept with the thesis that Christianity was formed in an environment that was not a nation and was always concerned with individual morality.

> In relation to a foreigner […], Christian ethics is only obligatory for me insofar as private relations, the relation of man to man, are concerned, but where we both act as representatives and defenders of the affairs of our nations, I am bound only by national ethics. In personal relations I am not allowed to harm him any more than if he were my own countryman, because in these relations our ethics, the Christian ethics, does not recognize national differences. But then I am duty-bound to kill him in the fight for the fatherland[15].

Dmowski wanted nationalism to become the source of a new normative system, in which the nation was the highest moral good. According to the national ethics, morally good acts were those that realized the highest good, which he defined as activity for the material and spiritual development of the nation. The main principle of national ethics was national egoism. He formulated this principle as early as in the brochure *Nasz patriotyzm* [*Our Patriotism*] of 1893: »every political act of a Pole, no matter where it is done and against whom it is directed, must have the interests of the whole nation at heart«[16]. Another founder of the national movement, Zygmunt Balicki, also wrote more extensively on this subject in his

14 This was not an original idea, as it had already been used by political thinkers in the past. Although Dmowski criticized liberalism, one can see the influence of his idea concerning the division of life into a public and a private sphere.

15 »W stosunku do cudzoziemca […], etyka chrześcijańska tyle mnie obowiązuje, ile idzie o stosunek prywatny, o stosunek człowieka do człowieka, tam wszakże, gdzie obaj występujemy jako przedstawiciele i obrońcy spraw swych narodów, jedynie mnie obowiązuje etyka narodowa. W stosunkach osobistych nie wolno mi go krzywdzić równie dobrze, jak gdyby był moim rodakiem, bo w tych stosunkach etyka nasza, etyka chrześcijańska, nie uznaje różnic narodowych. Ale nawet zabić go mam obowiązek w walce za ojczyznę«. Roman Dmowski, Podstawy polityki polskiej, in: Id., Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka, p. 108.

16 »Każdy czyn polityczny Polaka bez względu na to, gdzie jest dokonywany i przeciw komu skierowany musi mieć na widoku interesy całego narodu«. Id., Nasz patriotyzm. Podstawy programu współczesnej polityki narodowej, Berlin 1893, p. 3.

work *Egoizm narodowy wobec etyki* [*National Egoism and Ethics*] of 1902[17], but this publication played a lesser role owing to its rather convoluted argumentation and lack of wider dissemination among the members of the nationalist movement[18]. Dmowski claimed that the moral strength of a nation is »the lust for a broad life, the will to multiply national achievements of influence and to realize national goals«[19]. Thus, he identified morality with an attitude of activity, constant effort and struggle to realize the good of one's nation. He put forward a clear thesis: »Nations that stop fighting, degenerate morally and decay«[20]. Bohdan Cywiński described this part of national ethics as »a theory of justified possessiveness«[21].

In this context, the question must be asked whether all actions, including war and violence, which are aimed at the welfare of the nation are in keeping with the national ethics? Does the end justify the means? The first impression from reading his writings may lead to a positive answer to this question. In his *Thoughts* one finds the quote: »History demonstrates with increasing clarity that, for instance, in the vigorously ruthless policy of Prussia, using deceit and faithlessness, not recoiling from the most brutal violence, this policy gave vital power to Prussia and was nevertheless the source of Germany's rebirth«[22]. However, later in this argument he explicitly concluded: »Prussia, built on injustice to others, has poisoned the German spirit, demoralized it, killed great thought and noble feeling in the German people, and augurs that all this will become the source of the doom of the whole of Germany«[23]. In the *Foreword* to the second edition of *Thoughts* he wrote:

> It is possible, after all, to acknowledge the fact that in relations between nations there is no right and wrong, only strength and weakness, that Germany has benefited well from Prussia's violence and faithlessness – at the same time, while exhorting its society

17 Zygmunt Balicki, Egoizm narodowy wobec etyki, Lwów 1902, p. 35. More about Balicki's ethical views see Aneta Dawidowicz, System etyczny w myśli politycznej Zygmunta Balickiego, in: Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin – Polonia XI (2004), pp. 177–191.

18 See Wapiński, Narodowa Demokracja, p. 39.

19 »Żądza szerokiego życia, chęć pomnożenia narodowego dorobku wpływu oraz urzeczywistnienia narodowych celów«. Dmowski, Myśli, p. 24.

20 »Narody, które przestają walczyć, wyrodnieją moralnie i rozkładają się«. Ibid., p. 83.

21 »Teorię zaborczości usprawiedliwionej«. Bohdan Cywiński, Rodowody niepokornych, Warszawa 2010, p. 313.

22 »Historia coraz wyraźniej udowadnia, że np. energicznie bezwzględna polityka Prus, posługująca się fałszem i wiarołomstwem, nie cofająca się przed najbrutalniejszym gwałtem, że polityka ta dała potęgę istotną Prusom i stała się pomimo wszystko źródłem odrodzenia Niemiec«. Dmowski, Myśli, p. 28.

23 »Zbudowane na cudzej krzywdzie Prusy zatruły ducha niemieckiego, zdemoralizowały go, zabiły w narodzie niemieckim wielką myśl i szlachetne uczucie, i wróżyć, że wszystko to stanie się źródłem zguby całych Niemiec«. Ibid.

> to a strong and resolute policy of national interest, not recommending to it either brutal violence or faithlessness (or deception), which in a truly civilized and morally developed man must arouse deep repulsion[24].

Dmowski believed that the good of the nation might require a fight, which he described as an »honest national struggle« and clearly distinguished from ordinary crime, the abuse of violence, which could lead to the moral degeneration of citizens and the nation[25]. He expressed his view on this issue in an article published in 1901:

> For me the measure is the usefulness of Polishness: everything that leads to its elevation, to the enrichment of its content, to the extension of its influence, is good, and the only restraint is my moral instincts as a civilized man, my respect for myself and my nation, which does not allow me to use low means on its behalf[26].

National ethics also encompassed nation-state and citizen-state relations. Dmowski regarded the nation as superior to the state, which is why he wrote in his *Thoughts* that striving to create the Polish state is a means to an end, which is the good of the nation[27]. At the same time, he inseparably linked the state and the nation, claiming that nations only form within states, and thus political institutions are primary. His final thesis was that the idea of the state is synonymous with the idea of the nation. It is worth noting that at the very beginning Dmowski considered obtaining autonomy for Poland as realistic[28], but later he began to advocate independence. While striving for the creation of a Polish state, he emphasized that the borders should not be defined according to linguistic or historical criteria, but according to the inhabitants'

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24 »Można przecież uznać fakt, że w stosunkach między narodami nie ma słuszności i krzywdy, jest tylko siła i słabość, że Niemcy dobrze wyszły na gwałtach i wiarołomstwie Prus – a jednocześnie, nawołując swe społeczeństwo do silnej i stanowczej polityki narodowego interesu, nie zalecać mu ani brutalnych gwałtów, ani wiarołomstwa (lub oszustwa), które w człowieku prawdziwie cywilizowanym i moralnie rozwiniętym głęboki wstręt budzić muszą«. Id., Przedmowa do wydania drugiego (1904), in: Id., Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka, Wrocław 2012, p. 11.

25 Id., Myśli, p. 95.

26 »Dla mnie miarą jest pożytek polskości: wszystko, co prowadzi do jej podniesienia, zbogacenia jej treści, rozszerzenia jej wpływu, jest dobrym, a jedynym hamulcem są moje instynkty moralne cywilizowanego człowieka, poszanowanie samego siebie i swego narodu, które mi nie pozwala, w jego nadto imieniu niskich używać środków«. Narodowiec, W naszym obozie, in: Przegląd Wszechpolski 1 (1901), p. 27.

27 See Dmowski, Myśli, p. 78.

28 »Dmowski pinned his hopes on diplomatic manoeuvring to secure his more limited goal of autonomy from Russia, which meant, at least initially, supporting Russia and the western Powers against Germany and the Habsburgs«. Peter Stachura, Poland 1918–1945. An Interpretive and Documentary History of the Second Republic, London 2004, p. 14.

sense of national belonging, based on the fact that they felt part of the collective life of the nation and treated the interest of Poland as the highest good[29]. This position seems understandable in a situation where the Polish lands had been under the rule of three different states for over 100 years, which contributed to the consolidation of cultural and linguistic particularisms. The cultural diversity of the population of the Polish lands was also a result of historical divisions between states. The culture served as a means of highlighting the differences between the states, and only the nobility considered themselves Poles, while patriotism denoted attachment and loyalty to the ruler[30]. Dmowski stressed that this had changed with the process of democratization of both the political sphere as well as culture in the broad sense, and therefore a nation limited only to the nobility would not be able to recreate itself. Moreover, it should be noted that he conceived of the nation as an exclusive group. Although he wrote that the Polish nation is composed of various elements: Slavic, Germanic, Scandinavian, or Mongolian, belonging to it is a matter of full assimilation and development of a uniform national character[31].

> A national organism should strive to absorb only that which it can assimilate and translate into growth and strength of the collective body. Jews are not such an element. […] in the character of this race, which has never lived the life of societies of our type, so many distinctive qualities have accumulated and established themselves, alien to our moral

29 »The territory of the future state cannot be defined either on a strictly historical or purely linguistic basis. A re-creation of Poland in its historical frontiers of 1772 would hardly be possible today, and would not produce a very strong state. The basis of the strength of Poland is the territory where the mass of the population speaks Polish, is conscious of its Polish nationality, and is attached to the Polish cause. This territory is not restricted to the limits of the Poland of 1772. There are Polish provinces in Germany and Austria which did not belong to Poland at the time of the Partition, but where the mass of the population not only speaks Polish but is Polish in its ideas and feelings. These are: Upper Silesia, the southern part of East Prussia […] and part of Austrian Silesia (Principality of Teschen)«. From Roman Dmowski's »Memorandum on the Territory of the Polish State«, 26 March 1917, source: Public Record Office, Kew: FO371/3000–63741, quote for Stachura, Poland 1918–1945, p. 23.

30 See Dmowski, Myśli, p. 76. It is worth mentioning the similarity between Dmowski's observations and the theory developed by Ernest Gellner concerning the emergence of nationalism and nations (see Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, Oxford 1983). Gellner based his theory on the distinction between two types of societies: a pre-modern society and a modern society created as a result of industrialization and urbanization processes. A feature of pre-modern society was a culture, the aim of which was to emphasize and perpetuate differences between states, and therefore a national community embracing all inhabitants of a given country, even those speaking the same language, could not exist at that time.

31 See Dmowski, Myśli, p. 38. Endecja »adopted a hardline attitude towards Poland's other ethnic minorities in keeping with its intrinsic belief in a ›Poland for the Poles‹, and rejected the Piłsudski notion of federalism as both undesirable and impracticable«. Stachura, Poland 1918–1945, p. 60.

> system, and finally harmful to our life, that to fuse with more of this element would doom us […]. A certain, small amount of the Jewish element we must and can absorb and transform without great harm to ourselves[32].

In order to understand Dmowski's views on national ethics, it is necessary to note how he perceived the nature of the relationship between the individual and the nation, which constitutes the space for the formation of the nation and national ethics. In his early works, which include the time when he wrote his *Thoughts*, he held that the relationship between the individual and the nation was based on egoism. He argued that, although Poles acknowledge Christian ethics, this is not synonymous with the fact that they act according to its principles. Beliefs do not coincide with actual behaviour. In it, egoism plays the greatest role, the source of which is the primal instinct of self-preservation. He wrote that morality as a social fact is atavistic egoism, while the condition for the love of nation is self-love.

> Civilized man does not behave in a despicable manner because he has too much self-respect. This self-respect also generates an appropriate attitude to one's own nation. […] And self-love alone, independently of any attachment to the fatherland, will make him acknowledge his national duties, work for his fatherland, fight for it, give it as much as he can in return for what he takes from it[33].

Thus, he regarded as the fundamental nation-forming factor the conscious sense of duty arising from self-love, and not objective factors such as political institutions, culture, language, or religion. Only three years later, in 1905, he wrote that he nevertheless rejected basing national ethics on individualistic ethics, on self-love. He changed his views after his trip to Tokyo, and in *The Foundations of Polish Politics*, which he appended to the third edition of *Thoughts*, he wrote: »I did not suppose that a single trip to the Far East would tell me more than the greatest

32 »Organizm narodowy powinien dążyć do wchłaniania tylko tego, co może przyswoić i obrócić na powiększenie wzrostu i siły zbiorowego ciała. Takim żywiołem nie są Żydzi. W charakterze tej rasy, która nigdy nie żyła życiem społeczeństw naszego typu, tyle się nagromadziło i ustaliło właściwości odrębnych, obcych naszemu ustrojowi moralnemu, wreszcie w naszym życiu szkodliwych, że zlanie się z większą ilością tego żywiołu zgubiłoby nas. Pewną, niewielką ilość żywiołu żydowskiego musimy i możemy wchłonąć i przerobić bez wielkiej szkody dla siebie«. Dmowski, Myśli, p. 98.

33 »Człowiek cywilizowany nie postępuje nikczemnie dlatego przede wszystkim, że zanadto siebie samego szanuje. To poszanowanie samego siebie wytwarza też odpowiedni stosunek do własnego narodu. I sama miłość własna, niezależnie od przywiązanie do ojczyzny, nakaże mu uznać obowiązki narodowe, pracować dla ojczyzny, walczyć za nią, dawać jej jak najwięcej w zamian, za to co od niej bierze«. Ibid., p. 22.

thinkers in Europe today«[34]. This was how he redefined the moral relationship between the individual and the nation:

> Its [patriotism's] principal basis is the moral connection with the nation, independent of the individual's will, a connection which makes the individual, who has been inextricably tied to his nation for generations, in a certain, broad sphere of actions, have no free will, but have to obey the collective will of the nation, of all its generations, expressed in inherited instincts. These instincts, stronger than any reasoning and often ruling over the personal instinct of self-preservation, when they are not corrupted or uprooted, force man to act not only against the Decalogue, but against himself, because he is forced to give his life, to sacrifice things dearer than himself when the good of the national whole is at stake. […] It is on these instincts above all that the national ethic is based[35].

Thus, it was instinct that Dmowski considered the source of the moral connection with the nation, which is the essence of the nation. When living within a state, an ever greater part of the soul of the individual becomes oriented towards the whole, and thus the strongest moral bond in history is created, that is, the soul of the nation, the breaking of which does not depend on the will of the individual. That one is of a given nationality does not depend on the individual will and one cannot tear the soul from this feeling, the national conscience. Also rooted in the depths of the soul is the national ethic, which can only be understood by representatives of a given nation who are strongly connected with it. These inherited instincts are stronger than all reasoning and the instinct of self-preservation, hence it is possible to sacrifice even one's own life for the fatherland.

In analysing the national ethic, one should ask whether Dmowski actually created a new concept of ethics. It is important to note that in his views, in a certain measure man is not free, because his actions are determined by instincts independent of his free will. Thus, Dmowski negated human subjectivity, that is, the idea that man, through his consciousness, directs himself. He wrote: »We are lost in our own soul,

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34 »Nie przypuszczałem, że jedna wycieczka na Wschód Daleki więcej mi powie, niż najwięksi myśliciele dzisiejszej Europy«. Id., Podstawy polityki, p. 106. See Michiro Yasui, Ex oriente lux. Roman Dmowski w Japonii, in: Nowa Polityka Wschodnia 1 (2014), pp. 241–254.

35 »Jego [patriotyzmu] główną podstawą jest niezależny od woli jednostki związek moralny z narodem, związek sprawiający, że jednostka zrośnięta przez pokolenia ze swym narodem, w pewnej, szerokiej sferze czynów, nie ma wolnej woli, ale musi być posłuszna zbiorowej woli narodu, wszystkich jego pokoleń, wyrażających się w oddziedziczonych instynktach. Instynkty te silniejsze nad wszelkie rozumowania i panujące częstokroć nad osobistym instynktem samozachowawczym, gdy nie są znieprawione lub wyrwane z korzeniami, zmuszają człowieka do działania nie tylko wbrew dekalogowi, ale wbrew sobie samemu, bo do oddania życia, do poświęcenia droższych od niego rzeczy, gdy idzie o dobro narodowej całości. Na tych przede wszystkim instynktach opiera się właśnie etyka narodowa«. Dmowski, Podstawy polityki, p. 107.

unable to find either a definition or a name for its various components, not knowing that in its depths lie instincts which at the right moment are capable of controlling our being«[36]. At the same time, he considered actions determined by instincts to be moral, while actions have moral value only when they are performed by free beings, who are responsible for their conduct. Thus, an internal contradiction is revealed here: morality is the essence of the national bond, the essence of the nation, while the concept of the lack of freedom in deciding about actions in this sphere does not create any space for the existence of moral choices. I would also like to point out that, although in his *Thoughts* he founded national morality on subjective egoism, simultaneously he wrote that public opinion is an expression of moral compulsion in the area of civic duties, and »the future of a nation lies in the strong development of moral compulsion, in sound and unshaken public opinion, imposing civic duties on those who have not yet attained a sense of them«[37]. Meanwhile, if actions are performed under duress, there is no room for moral actions either, which are, after all, the result of free decisions by individuals. This analysis leads to the conclusion that indeed we are not dealing here with ethics[38]. Although Dmowski consistently referred to his views as ethics, in reality he developed a moralistic ideology, which he sought to impose on others. It should also be stressed that the idea of a man subordinated in his actions to collective instincts provided scope for the development of concepts that negated the importance of individuals and moulded them into a mass to be governed. Micewski rightly remarked: »I am afraid that these formulations of Dmowski's constituted the germ of a dangerous direction in the development of his thought, which may not have been present in the first definition of the national bond. By this I mean a totalistic inclination«[39].

It is worth noting another element that may justify the thesis that Dmowski devised an ideology of power rather than a new normative system, i. e. a national ethic. In his *Thoughts* he argued that, although every member of a nation is of equal value, power should be exercised by nationalists, who, in his opinion, had

36 »Gubimy się w swej własnej duszy, nie umiejąc ani określenia, ani nazwy znaleźć dla rozmaitych jej składników, nie wiedząc, że w jej głębi drzemią instynkty zdolne w odpowiedniej chwili naszym jestestwem zapanować«. Ibid., p. 106.

37 »Przyszłość narodu leży w silnym rozwoju przymusu moralnego, w zdrowej i niewzruszonej opinii publicznej, narzucającej obowiązki obywatelskie tym, którzy do poczucia ich nie dorośli«. Id., Myśli, p. 84.

38 Bohdan Cywiński also noticed that: »Patriotism based on human instincts is a kind of determinism, like any other determinism, suspending all ethical evaluations«. [»Patriotyzm opierający się na instynktach człowieka – to swoisty determinizm, jak każdy inny determinizm zawieszający działanie wszystkich ocen etycznych«.] Cywiński, Rodowody, p. 312.

39 »Obawiam się, że te sformułowania Dmowskiego stanowiły właśnie zarodek niebezpiecznego kierunku rozwoju jego myśli, którego nie było może jeszcze w pierwszej definicji więzi narodowej. Myślę tu o skłonności totalistycznej«. Micewski, Z geografii politycznej, p. 18.

stronger »national instincts«[40]. He wrote: »I am a Pole – and so I have Polish duties: these are all the greater, and the stronger I feel about them, the better type of person I represent«[41]. The greater part of the nation is »morally sound«, and its participation in politics consists in the ability to distinguish between good and evil in the context of the country's needs, while only the national elite is to actually lead the country. Apart from these, there is a »third category of citizens – those who are conscious, but reject the national ethic. They are deprived of a healthy national instinct, they are ›misguided‹, and therefore harmful«[42]. He added that ethics does not offer everyone an equal right in national affairs, because its first aim is not to satisfy those who are alive today, but to pass on to future generations the intact and reinforced foundations of national existence. Dmowski wrote that such ethics makes it possible to destroy the happiness of the present generation in order to sustain national existence, to save what the past has left for the development of the nation in the future. In addition, although this ethics derives from a close relationship with preceding generations, it does not oblige one to blindly follow in the footsteps of the ancestors, but to think and act in such a way as is necessary to maintain and develop the nation and to pass on the national heritage to future generations. This argument shows that, in principle, he was attributing full power to the nationalist elite, who were not constrained by the opinions of members of the nation or the traditions of their ancestors, as they themselves decided what actions to take for the good of the nation. Thus, the national ethic was in fact intended to legitimize the power of the elite, i. e. the *Endecja*.

Dmowski had a very good intuition that promoting the thesis of the nation as the highest moral good would ensure the adherence of people to the idea of the nation, and obligations towards it would be treated as a priority. People should be addressed with simple and clear messages, and the inclusion of the categories of good and evil in the language of politics is precisely such. In the cases of the national ethic he created, it is not the Church, but nationalist politicians who judge what is right and wrong and can reinforce attitudes favourable to their political interest. In this way, he minimized the influence of the Church on shaping the attitudes and actions of citizens. Although Dmowski wrote about national ethics, he did not actually create a new ethics, but his nationalism was a moralistic ideology of a total nature intended to shape the modern Pole, the Pole-nationalist, who would implement the national policy created by *Endecja* politicians.

40 Dmowski, Podstawy polityki, p. 107.

41 »Jestem Polakiem – więc mam obowiązki polskie: są one tym większe i tym silniej się do nich poczuwam, im wyższy przedstawiam typ człowieka«. Id., Myśli, p. 22.

42 »Trzecia kategoria obywateli – świadomych, ale odrzucających etykę narodową. Są oni pozbawieni zdrowego instynktu narodowego, ›znieprawieni‹, a więc szkodliwi«. Cywiński, Rodowody, p. 318.

3. Religion and the Church in Dmowski's Views

Dmowski appreciated the strength and importance of religion in maintaining Polish identity at a time when there was no Polish state, and he realized that a group aiming to represent national interests and take over power in a future independent state could not be anti-Catholic. At the same time, he also realized that leaving the entire sphere of human moral life to the Church would result in citizens being primarily loyal to that institution, rather than to the nation. All the more so because the idea that the source of legitimacy for secular authority was the Church was very much alive. Dmowski, wishing to mould the »modern Pole« all of whose actions would be directed towards the good of the nation defined by nationalist politicians, also had to redefine the role of religion and the Church. Hence the division between a private sphere with a Christian ethic and a political sphere in which nationalists would determine the proper ways to act. In fact, the concept of a national ethic was a direct strike against the political influence of the Church.

Dmowski was aware of the accusations that his views were non-Christian, but he disagreed with them, arguing that they resulted only from a misunderstanding of his ideas and a lack of a sense of national belonging[43].

> Not only is the national ethics not opposed to the Christian ethics or the ethics of altruism, […] but in the long run it is a necessary condition for the lasting morality of human communities. Enthusiasm for particular principles, the religious fervour of the masses, sectarian fervour, have made people for a time capable of a highly moral life, […] but such a state of a given collectivity has never been capable of lasting for long. Only a strong national organization, based on deep respect for tradition, is capable of ensuring the moral health of a community for a long series of centuries. […] This is how national ethics is the basis of interpersonal ethics[44].

Thus he argued that only a strong state and nation can create a sphere for moral action, as the alternative is the breaking of all moral bonds and mutual hostility between people, which can only be controlled by violence. By disavowing na-

43 Dmowski, Podstawy polityki, p. 108.

44 »Etyka narodowa nie tylko nie sprzeciwia się etyce chrześcijańskiej czy etyce altruizmu, ale na dłuższe okresy stanowi niezbędny warunek trwałej moralności zbiorowisk ludzkich. Entuzjazm dla danych zasad, zapał religijny mas, zaciętość sekciarska czyniła ludzi na pewien czas zdolnymi do wysoce moralnego życia, ale taki stan danego zbiorowiska nigdy nie był zdolny trwać przez długie czasy. Tylko silna organizacja narodowa, na głębokim poszanowaniu tradycji oparta, zdolna jest społeczności ludzkiej zapewnić zdrowie moralne na długo szereg stuleci. Tak etyka narodowa jest podstawą etyki międzyludzkiej«. Ibid., p. 108.

tional ethics, the Church effectively weakens morality, because a nation state is the strongest basis for moral organization. With these arguments Dmowski actually struck at the Christian hierarchy of values. Bogumił Grott, a scholar of Polish nationalism, also pointed out that although Dmowski supported the thesis of two independent ethics, the national ethics had to override the Christian ethics at certain levels, thereby becoming in fact superior[45].

This aspiration to secularize the political sphere was in keeping with the views of the national camp at its inception. Christian universalism in particular did not fit in with nationalist politics. On the pages of the *All-Polish Review*, Jan Ludwik Popławski phrased it in these words: »We are a Catholic society – but we are not a church society – only a national society. Catholicism is only one of the values of our national character and the defense of the interests of the Catholic Church is only one of the tasks of national policy, and this in so far as the Church is Polish«[46]. The nationalists called for all institutions to be subordinated to the interests of the nation state; the Church too was to be a »national institution«[47]. They clearly expected the Church to be »faithful to Poland«. Despite their different interests, they realized that »a break with Rome would amount to national suicide in the present day conditions«[48]. The *Endecja* appreciated that thanks to Rome, the Polish cause had an international character, and was not reduced only to the internal politics of the partitioning states, but at no time did they put themselves in a position of subordination to the Church[49].

This attitude towards the Church was prompted by several motives. Nationalism was a new political current that was seeking its place on the political scene, and for this it had to define its attitude and mark its separation from other parties, ideologies, and institutions such as the Church. Secondly, the attitude of the clergy was far from what the nationalists would have expected, thus broad cooperation at that time was

45 Bogumił Grott, Nacjonalizm chrześcijański. Narodowo-katolicka formacja ideowa w II Rzeczpospolitej na tle porównawczym, Krzeszowice 1999, p. 15.

46 »Jesteśmy społeczeństwem katolickim – ale nie jesteśmy społeczeństwem kościelnym – tylko społeczeństwem narodowym. Katolicyzm jest tylko jedną z wartości naszego charakteru narodowego i obrona interesów Kościoła katolickiego stanowi zaledwie jedno z zadań polityki narodowej i to o tyle, o ile Kościół jest polskim«. Jan Ludwik Popławski (under the pseudonym J.L. Jastrzębiec), Z całej Polski, in: Przegląd Wszechpolski 24 (1898), p. 381.

47 Program Stronnictwa Demokratyczno-Narodowego w zaborze rosyjskim, Kraków 1903, pp. 17f.; Polityka narodowa w stosunku do religii i Kościoła, in: Przegląd Wszechpolski 5 (1903), pp. 321–400.

48 »Zerwanie z Rzymem równałoby się w warunkach dzisiejszych samobójstwu narodowemu«. Jan Ludwik Popławski (under the pseudonym J.L. Jastrzębiec), Z całej Polski, in: Przegląd Wszechpolski 1 (1897), p. 7. More on this topic see Karol Wilk, Stosunek Ruchu Narodowego do katolicyzmu w okresie od XIX do XXI w., in: Acta Erasimana VIII (2015), pp. 81f.

49 Grott, Nacjonalizm chrześcijański, p. 13.

not possible. For the clergy, the views proclaimed by *Endecja* about national ethics, based on national egoism, being superior in the political sphere and the concept of the Church as a »national institution« were unacceptable and met with criticism[50]. Above all, »the Church felt loyalty to the authorities, even where they represented non-Catholic elements«[51]. Such was the official position of the Vatican expressed by Leo XIII in an 1894 encyclical *Charitatis Providentiaeque* addressed to the Polish bishops, in which he obliged the bishops to be loyal and obedient to the partitioning authorities. In the literature on the subject, this document received the name of the »encyclical on triple loyalty«[52]. This political line of the Vatican is also evidenced by Dmowski's account of his audience with the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Gasparri in 1916, who, upon hearing that Poland aspired to independence, burst out laughing and stated: »An independent Poland? But that is a dream, an unrealizable goal! Your future is with Austria«[53]. It should be emphasized that the situation of the Church, the attitude of the clergy and their rootedness in the life of Polish society was different in each of the partitioned territories[54]. Especially in the territory of the Russian partition, a large part of the clergy did not want the political situation to change, and they were comfortable with being subordinate to the Tsar. Only a few criticized this state of affairs and undertook cooperation with the national camp[55]. The political attitude of the clergy is also confirmed by what Piłsudski, who did belong to the oppositional political camp, said in 1895:

> The higher Catholic clergy take part in a dinner given by Hurko [Russian Governor of Warsaw]. […] the Archbishop [Wincenty] Popiel [of Warsaw] confirms in Russian the oath of fidelity to the new tsar, and Father Dudkiewicz in Dąbrowa [a major industrial

50 See Ignacy Geppert, Stronnictwo Demokratyczno-Narodowe w świetle nauki katolickiej, Poznań 1913; Władysław Hozakowski, O katolickie podstawy Narodowej Demokracji, Poznań 1913.

51 »Kościół poczuwał się do lojalności wobec władz, nawet tam, gdzie reprezentowały one żywioły niekatolickie«. Paweł Stachowiak, Ołtarz, tron i naród. Kościoła problemy z polskością 1914–1918, in: Robert Traba (ed.), Niedokończona wojna? »Polskość« jako zadanie pokoleniowe, Warszawa 2020, p. 229.

52 See Danuta Waniek, Orzeł czy krucyfiks. Eseje o podziałach politycznych w Polsce, Toruń 2011.

53 »Polska niepodległa? Ależ to marzenie, to cel nieziszczalny! Wasza przyszłość jest z Austrią«. Roman Dmowski, Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa, vol. 1, Warszawa 1988, p. 248.

54 The Church had widespread public support in the Russian and German partitions, as it integrated Polish society against the policies of countries where Catholicism was not the dominant religion. »In both these areas favourable conditions existed for the formation of the stereotype of the ›Polish Catholic‹«. Stachowiak, Ołtarz, tron i naród, p. 226. The situation was different on the territory of the Austrian partition, where Catholicism was the ruling religion, but due to the great cooperation of the clergy with the state, the Church in Galicia had the weakest authority among society. See ibid., pp. 225–231.

55 Grott, Nacjonalizm chrześcijański, p. 13.

> district] implores his parishioners from the pulpit not to learn to read, because they would then be able to get to know the contents of socialist pamphlets […]. This is the Polish clergy, the ally of tsarist rule in our country, and the loyal defender of our exploiters. It might have been thought that a despotic government, especially a foreign one, would have been met with decisive opposition […]. But where[56]?

The third reason determining *Endecja*'s attitude towards the Church was the fact that most nationalists, who came from the intelligentsia, were either religiously indifferent or atheist[57]. There was nothing unusual in this, because after the fall of the January Uprising of 1863 religiousness among the intelligentsia declined, a decline which was connected to the dominant influence of positivism[58]. Jędrzej Giertych even wrote that in those days a student was almost synonymous with an atheist[59], and according to the results of a survey conducted before the Great War at the Jagiellonian University, only 79.9% of the students from the Russian annexation declared themselves to be believers (atheists 16.1%, partially believers 4%) and the number of those participating in religious practices was even smaller[60]. This was connected not only with the attitude of the intelligentsia, but also with the attitude of the Church itself, which was anachronistic, distanced itself from any changes taking place and promoted »authoritarian Catholicism«[61]. These three premises show that Dmowski's concept of national ethics was not something surprising or culturally alien in the circles of intelligentsia in the period in which it emerged.

The regaining of independence by Poland in 1918 radically changed the political reality, including the situation of the nationalist movement, which had an impact on the modification of some of their views. Although the subject of this article is the first period of the formation of Dmowski's views on religion and the Church, it is necessary to refer to later changes. The ideological breakthrough came again with Dmowski's 1927 publication *Kościół, naród i państwo* [*The Church, Nation, and State*], in which he wrote:

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56 Józef Piłsudski on the Catholic Church's attitude to Polish independence, May 1895, source: From the socialist paper Robotnik, May 1895, trans. Paweł Stachura, quote for Stachura, Poland 1918–1945, p. 15.

57 Paweł Stachowiak, U źródeł katolicyzmu endeckiego. Obóz narodowy wobec religii i Kościoła w latach 1887–1927, Poznań 1999, p. 36.

58 See Karol Górski, Dzieje życia wewnętrznego w Polsce. Wiek XIX i początek XX w., in: Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne 4 (1964), p. 21.

59 Jędrzej Giertych, My nowe pokolenie, Poznań 1936, p. 6.

60 Młodzież a religia, in: Awangarda. Dwutygodnik młodzieży 1 (1927), p. 5.

61 Stachowiak, Ołtarz, tron i naród, p. 238; Karol Górski, Zarys dziejów duchowości w Polsce, Kraków 1986, pp. 272f.

> The political aspirations of the past period have set themselves the goal […] of separating Church and State. […] The goal of the time we are now entering must be a profound, fundamental change in this relationship, leading to sincere cooperation, duly understood and valued by both sides, which is necessary both for the revival of religious life and for the healthy development of the nation and the permanence and power of the state. […] The Polish state is a Catholic state[62].

Moreover, he stressed that the process of secularization, which intensified in the nineteenth century, would be interrupted by society's return to religion, which, however, would have a national and not a universal character. In his opinion, this process had already taken place in England or Prussia thanks to the Reformation, which consisted in nationalizing religion, i. e. making the Church dependent on secular power. He believed that this was the reason why these states were strong, as liberation from the Vatican gave these nations freedom of action in their choice of political means. Above all, national egoism became the basic political principle there and they gained an advantage over the Catholic countries. This caused a rise in nationalism in Catholic countries, such as France, Italy, and Poland, at the end of the nineteenth century, to stand up to the Protestant countries in struggle. Dmowski emphasized that at the beginning, Catholic societies were not prepared to accept the principle of national egoism, but with time the Church accepted this political principle and started to support nationalists. This reveals why Dmowski changed his approach to the role of the Church in politics, as he believed that it could be a national church that would effectively support the nationalist policy of the state. Roman Wapiński pointed out that: »Even when statements which are supposed to show National Democracy's concern for the Church are brought to the fore, still evident is the tendency to treat the Church to some extent as an instrument in the

62 »Dążenia polityczne ubiegłego okresu postawiły sobie za cel […] oddzielenie Kościoła od państwa. […] Zadaniem okresu, w który wstępujemy, musi być głęboka, zasadnicza zmiana tego stosunku, doprowadzenie do szczerej, przez obie strony należycie rozumianej i cenionej współpracy, koniecznej zarówno dla odrodzenia życia religijnego, jak dla zdrowego rozwoju narodu oraz trwałości i potęgo państwa. […] Państwo polskie jest państwem katolickim«. Roman Dmowski, Kościół, naród i państwo, Wrocław 1993, pp. 29–32. This publication »can be conventionally regarded as the caesura which marks the beginning of the process, noticed by many researchers, of the fusion of Polish nationalism with Catholicism, and thus the formation of an ideological formation described as national-Catholic«. Rafał Łętocha, Katolicyzm a idea narodowa. Miejsce religii w myśli obozu narodowego lat okupacji, Lublin 2002, p. 301; Roman Wapiński, Niektóre problemy ewolucji ideowo-politycznej endecji w latach 1919–1939, in: Kwartalnik Historyczny 4 (1966), p. 876; Bogumił Grott, Religia, Kościół, etyka w ideach i koncepcjach prawicy polskiej. Narodowa Demokracja, Kraków 1993, pp. 93–95.

struggle for influence«[63]. The role of Catholicism was to restrain individualistic, liberal, and materialistic tendencies, as well as to develop »moral instincts« that fostered discipline, hierarchy, and a sense of duty towards the community, which the author of *Thoughts* regarded as the essence of national ethics and the basis for building a strong nation state[64].

Dmowski is regarded as the politician who in the interwar period proclaimed the principle that Catholicism was the essence of Polish national identity. Andrzej Walicki called this type of nationalism integral nationalism, based on authoritarian criticism of individualism and human rights, and reducing national ethics to the rule of a national elite[65]. According to Bogumił Grott this new nationalism was not in opposition to early nationalism, but instead a »symbiosis« of early nationalism and the newly formed integral nationalism occurred[66]. This »symbiosis« is perfectly visible in Dmowski's views. He treated *Church, Nation and State* as a certain change, but not as a revolution in his views. He never shied away from the first period of his work, and in 1933 he reissued *Thoughts*, supplemented, but not amended, in line with his new outlook on several issues. In the *Preface* to this fourth edition, he wrote that he wanted readers to see how, at the turn of the century, »the foundations of the thought and politics of the Polish national movement crystallized«[67]. It is worth noting that while he had previously emphasized the individual dimension of this book, years later he considered it to be representative of the entire national movement. He never gave up his concept of national ethics, because from the very beginning he believed that it was not contrary to Christian ethics. Nor did he ever venture to say that God was the highest value, and the nation an intermediate good[68]. The greatest changes can be seen in his approach to the Church, which he no longer wished to subordinate to the State as a national institution, but believed that at this moment in history the conditions for full cooperation had arisen.

In the first period of his work, Dmowski created a model of an active Pole-nationalist ready to fight for the nation, guided by national ethics, which was different from the model of a Catholic Pole he criticized for passivity and martyrdom, which

63 »Nawet wówczas, gdy na czoło wysuwa się stwierdzenia, które mają wykazać troskę endecji o sprawy Kościoła, to i tak daje o sobie znać tendencja do traktowania Kościoła jako w pewnej mierze instrumentu w walce o wpływy«. Roman Wapiński, Wstęp, in: Roman Dmowski, Wybór pism. Wybrał, wstępem opatrzył i opracował R. Wapiński, Warszawa 1990, p. 38.

64 See Dariusz Grzybek, Od modernizacyjnego optymizmu ku antymodernizacyjnej utopii – zwrot w myśli politycznej Romana Dmowskiego, in: Studia Historyczne 4 (2016), pp. 455f.

65 Andrzej Walicki, Narodziny i rozwój integralnego nacjonalizmu przed rokiem 1918, in: Id., Naród – Nacjonalizm – Patriotyzm, Kraków 2009, pp. 299, 318, 322.

66 Grott, Nacjonalizm chrześcijański, pp. 143f.

67 »Krystalizowały się podstawy myśli i polityki polskiego ruchu narodowego«. Dmowski, Przedmowa do wydania czwartego, p. 13.

68 See Cywiński, Rodowody, p. 453.

had dominated public consciousness since the seventeenth century[69]. According to Cywiński, the type of aggressive Polish nationalist never emerged on a large scale in Polish society, and

> the »Catholicization« of Polish nationalism also changed its ideological content, inhibited its aggressiveness. […] The union of the Pole-nationalist with the Pole-Catholic, while expanding immeasurably the area of influence of nationalist ideas, at the same time »softened« their substantive content[70].

Here we can also see the »symbiosis« that occurred between early nationalism and integral nationalism.

Among the reasons which caused such an evolution in Dmowski's and *Endecja*'s views were changes in Church policy and a religious revival among the intelligentsia. As early as in 1918, the Church officially recognized the national unity of Poles and supported the restoration of the Polish state[71]. Gradually a change in the assessment of nationalism itself also took place. It is a fact that there existed varying opinions on the relationship between nationalism and Catholicism among both the clergy and politicians: from those rejecting the possibility of their coexistence on account of the different hierarchy of basic values and aims, to those proclaiming their compatibility. There were also those who saw the diversity of nationalism, the different currents, some of which could be accepted and some of which had to be considered heresy[72]. Among the supporters of the fusion of nationalism and Catholicism was, for example, Father Józef Maria Bocheński, who wrote that »Catholicism is not an anti-nationalist ideology, but it does place certain limits on nationalism […] Catholicism can provide nationalism with a universalist base, in the name of which a nationalist who demands rights for his own nation acts in accordance with the needs of all human culture«[73]. It needs to be emphasized

69 See ibid., pp. 223–254.

70 »›Katolicyzacja‹ polskiego nacjonalizmu zmieniła także jego ideową zawartość, hamowała agresywność. […] unia Polaka-narodowca z Polakiem-katolikiem rozszerzyła wprawdzie niepomiernie teren oddziaływania idei nacjonalistycznych, ale jednocześnie ›rozmiękczyła‹ ich treść«. Ibid., pp. 326f.

71 See Stachowiak, Ołtarz, tron i naród, p. 238.

72 See Nacjonalizm a katolicyzm – opinie biskupów, uczonych, polityków i publicystów współczesnych, Poznań 1927.

73 »Katolicyzm nie jest ideologią antynacjonalistyczną, ale stawia nacjonalizmowi pewne granice […] katolicyzm potrafi dać nacjonalizmowi bazę uniwersalistyczną, w imię której nacjonalista domagający się praw dla własnego narodu postępuje zgodnie z potrzebami kultury wszechludzkiej«. Józef Maria Bocheński, Szkice o nacjonalizmie i katolicyzmie polskim, Komorów [no date], pp. 86f. It is also worth mentioning Father Jacek Woroniecki, who wrote directly about »Christian nationalism«. Nacjonalizm a katolicyzm – opinie biskupów, p. 146.

that Dmowski's publication *Church, Nation and State* was positively received by Catholic circles, and Father Antoni Szymański decided to include the People's National Union among Catholic parties[74].

The Church's activity in the socio-political life of the Second Republic was one of the reasons for the changes in religious attitudes among the intelligentsia, which had previously been predominantly indifferent to religion, but this was not a »militant atheism«[75]. In 1927, Dmowski already termed himself a »secular Catholic«. It should be added that the change of his views was certainly influenced by the fact that, in 1926, the nationalist magazine *Action Française* and the publications of Charles Maurras were condemned and placed on the index of prohibited books[76]. Dmowski, in order to maintain public support, could not confront the Church, all the more so as the significance of the national movement weakened considerably after the May Coup of 1926 by Piłsudski's political camp. The *Church, Nation and State* brochure

> brought tangible benefits in the form of Church journalism that was more favourable to the National Democrats. Although it did not ease the efforts of the People's National Alliance to gain Church support in the parliamentary elections of 1928, it did make it possible to use socio-technical tricks of already proven political effectiveness during the election campaign. Amongst them was the appeal to the Catholic image of the party[77].

Wapiński emphasized that Dmowski tried to formulate his position towards Catholicism in such a way as to convince his followers of the usefulness of emphasizing

74 Antonii Szymański, Religia a polityka, Warszawa 1927, p. 72; Jan Urban, Ku uzdrowieniu polskiego nacjonalizmu, in: Przegląd Powszechny 175 (1927), pp. 221f. Archbishop E. Ropp remained distrustful of the content of the brochure and presented the accusations against its author. He reminded Dmowski of his silence on the supernatural source of the Catholic religion, which, in Ropp's opinion, made it impossible for the National Democracy to understand the special relationship between religion and nation. More on this topic, see Szymon Rudnicki, Obóz Narodowo Radykalny. Geneza i działalność, Warszawa 1985, p. 26 and p. 337.

75 See Wojciech Wasiutyński, Dynamizm katolicki młodego pokolenia, in: Przegląd Powszechny 5/214 (1937), p. 137; Czesław Strzeszewski, Religijność polska w 20-leciu międzywojennym, in: Roczniki Nauk Społecznych 5 (1977), pp. 19–23.

76 See Antonii Szymański, Nauki wynikające z potępienia »Action Française«, Lublin 1928.

77 »Dała wymierne korzyści w postaci przychylniejszej dla endeków publicystyki kościelnej. Wprawdzie nie ułatwiła Związkowi Ludowo-Narodowemu wysiłków o uzyskanie poparcia Kościoła w wyborach parlamentarnych w 1928 r., ale umożliwiła stosowanie w trakcie kampanii wyborczej zabiegów socjotechnicznych o sprawdzonej już wcześniej skuteczności politycznej. Wśród tych zabiegów znalazło się odwołanie do katolickiego wizerunku partii«. Ewa Maj, Romana Dmowskiego broszura »Kościół, naród i państwo«, in: Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Politologia 5 (1998), p. 74.

cooperation with the Church on the one hand, and to present *Endecja* as the only defender of its interests on the other[78].

The idea of the Catholic State of the Polish Nation began to dominate among Polish nationalists. It was in religion that they sought to see the driving force leading the nation to greatness. Admittedly, unlike Dmowski, some nationalists considered it necessary to reject the idea of national egoism. Doboszyński wrote that

> the 19th century Italian doctrine of »*sacro egoismo nazionale*« found its resonance in Poland in Balicki's *Egoizm narodowy [National Egoism]*. But this slogan is now obsolete. Our generation has come to understand that national feeling, if it is to be a force that builds up the world and not tear it apart, must be supplemented by a universalistic feeling[79].

Catholicism was seen as a safeguard against nationalism veering towards paganism[80]. The integrist character of the idea of the Catholic State of the Polish Nation was expressed in the postulate of creating the »new Middle Ages«. »New Middle Ages: was to mean a return to a type of life guided by the principles of Catholicism and based on the so-called Roman civilization, i. e. immutable values«[81].

4. Conclusions

Roman Dmowski created the ideological foundations of Polish nationalism, defined as a political movement whose goal is to achieve the highest good, i. e. the prosperity of the nation. He absolutized the idea of the nation, although his understanding

78 Wapiński, Narodowa Demokracja, p. 271.

79 »Dziewiętnastowieczna doktryna włoska o ›sacro egoismo nazionale‹ znalazła u nas swój oddźwięk w Egoizmie narodowym Balickiego. Ale hasło to dziś przebrzmiałe. Pokolenie nasze dojrzało do zrozumienia, że uczucia narodowe, o ile ma być siłą budującą, a nie rozsadzającą świat, należy uzupełnić uczuciem uniwersalistycznym«. Adam Doboszyński, Teoria narodu, Warszawa 1993, pp. 119f. Łętocha noted that during this period there were still some nationalist voices supporting the thesis of national egoism, but these were scarce. Łętocha, Katolicyzm a idea narodowa, p. 63.

80 It should be added that in Poland during the interwar period, Jan Stachniuk founded the nationalist movement Zadruga, which had a neo-pagan character and criticized Christianity for its destructive effect on the Polish nation. The movement was marginal in character. See Jan Stachniuk, Heroiczna wspólnota narodu. Kapitalizm epoki imperializmu a Polska, Warszawa 1935; Igor Górewicz, Od indyferentyzmu do neopogaństwa. Oceny »warunków zastanych« w Polsce Przez Romana Dmowskiego i Jana Stachniuka w świetle ich stosunku do religii katolickiej, in: Państwo i Społeczeństwo 4 (2008), pp. 141–165.

81 »Nowe średniowiecze: miało oznaczać powrót do typu życia kierującego się zasadami katolicyzmu i opartego na tzw. cywilizacji rzymskiej, a więc wartościach niezmiennych«. Grott, Nacjonalizm chrześcijański, p. 147.

of the idea evolved over the years[82]. It is an apt observation that: »Nation is a concept that does not belong to the description of the world, but to the hierarchy of values, and values within this worldview are not learned, but lived. The nation is the highest value and requires no justification«[83]. It is precisely the status of the highest moral good that the nation has in Dmowski's views. Around this idea he built his concept of national ethics, which was to guide the attitudes of Poles. An analysis of his views made it possible to pose the thesis that it was not a new ethical concept, as it is unconscious instincts that direct human actions in the sphere of national community, and determinism excludes morality. In fact, Dmowski created an ideology that he strove to impose on society. Defining a nation as a moral community, he stated that this »moral sense of belonging« was not a matter of decision on the part of its members. This gave an essentially unlimited power to the nationalist elite over the members of the nation, who could not break their bond with the nation. Furthermore, the elite, distinguished on the basis of an unspecified stronger connection with the nation, had complete freedom in defining what exactly the good of the nation was and by what means it should be pursued. They consolidated their power by imposing a dichotomous vision of the world: everything that is national is good and valuable, and everything else that is non-national is hostile and worthy of condemnation. Thus, Dmowski had in fact created an ideology that legitimized the power of the nationalist elite. He did not even define nationalism as a political doctrine, because then he would have to place it alongside other doctrines as a competing system of thought. Meanwhile, according to him, there is no other, equal alternative to nationalism.

Why did Dmowski call the ideology he created, the doctrine of power, an ethics? There are two reasons: firstly, it is easier to steer society using simple communications. Clear dichotomous divisions of nation – good, everything else bad, recourse to the categories of own – foreign, creating enemies of the nation, worked perfectly for this purpose. Dmowski was aware of the democratization processes taking place and intended to include the people in the national community, hence the need for a broader palette of means to manipulate the governed. The second reason was the desire to force the Church out of the political sphere. Notably, nationalism was a new political and ideological movement that denied the religious legitimacy of state power and the dominant role of the Church in politics. »Many of the classic

82 More on the concept of nation in Dmowski's views and their evolution see Marta Baranowska, Pojęcie narodu w poglądach Romana Dmowskiego. Pomiędzy moralnością, instynktami, duszą narodową a politycznym pragmatyzmem, in: Prawo i Więź 2 (2024), pp. 361–394.

83 »Naród jest to pojęcie nie należące do opisu świata, lecz do hierarchii wartości, wartości zaś w ramach tego światopoglądu nie poznaje się, lecz przeżywa. Naród jest to wartość najwyższa i nie wymagająca uzasadnień«. Roman Zimand, Uwagi o teorii narodu na marginesie analizy nacjonalistycznej teorii narodu, in: Studia Filozoficzne 4 (1967), p. 13.

histories of nationalism see it as an essentially secular ideology – even as a ›political religion‹, a substitute for a declining Christianity«[84]. As religion was firmly rooted in Polish society, Dmowski's postulates tended towards soft secularization, i. e. pushing religion to the private sphere only. I refer here to David Martin, who distinguished between hard secularization, which assumed the death of religion, and soft secularization, which aimed at its marginalization[85]. Therefore, Dmowski also outlined the concept of national ethics, which was to replace Christian ethics in the political sphere. A Pole was to have first and foremost duties towards the nation and not towards the Church. In Dmowski's views at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, one can see the influence of western trends, including secularization, which strove to separate public life from the Church.

The 1920s saw a change in Dmowski's understanding of the place of the Church on the political scene. From that time on, he postulated full cooperation, arguing that Catholicism was the basis of Polish identity. Of course, Dmowski did not reject his concept of national ethics, but argued that it did not contradict Christian ethics. Additionally, he stressed that the Church was to be loyal to Poland. In my opinion, the analysis of Dmowski's views also illustrates how Christianity was redefined from a universal religion to one serving national politics. For him, the Church was a means of stimulating national feeling, whether he wanted to make it into a »national institution« or to work closely with it in a later period. He saw Catholicism as a means of expanding his influence, which had to be used above all because of its social significance. Dmowski's views perfectly illustrate the complicated relationship between nationalism and religion.

84 Hugh McLeod, Christianity and nationalism in nineteenth century Europe, in: International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church 15 (2015), pp. 7–22, at p. 10. Among »the classic histories of nationalism« McLeod pointed out: Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, London 1983. Gellner, Nations and Nationalism; Eric Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780, Cambridge 1990. On this topic see also: Klaus-Jürgen Nagel/Ferran Requejo, Nationalism and Religion. Friends or Foes?, pp. 1–11, in: Id. (ed.), Politics of Religion and Nationalism. Federalism, Consociationalism and Seccession, London 2014.

85 David Martin, The Secularization Issue. Prospect and Retrospect, in: British Journal of Sociology 42 (1991), pp. 465–474.

V. Epilogue

Giuseppe Veltri

The Age of Technology and Minority Systems of Thought: On Jacob Taubes's *Four Ages of Reason*

The concept of combining religion and technical or scientific discoveries has been around for a while. Moreover, the need to unite the world evoked by religiosity and the actual empiric domain goes as far back as mankind's beginnings, when religion made its entrance, even if it was not named as such. Religion's twin sister, magic, is fundamentally based on technology, which is what has given magic its great success. In the first century of the Common European Era, Diodorus Siculus had already stated that astrology's success was based on the achievements of astronomy. In this discipline, science and technology worked together. I have already mentioned this in some publications on the history of magic in general and on Jewish magic in particular[1]. Magical practice requires social commitment, human psychology (belief), and the knowledge of scientific and technical discoveries that prove the magician's superiority. Both rabbis and their Christian colleagues knew how to unmask tricks[2], but resistance against magic was not always successful. In the case of the *homunculus*, we know that history climbed the paths between technology on the one hand and high magic culture on the other, creating a Golem between the lines of both horizons. The modern robot is undoubtedly new and is based on scientific and technical achievements. However, it has as its ancestor the creation of a *homunculus*, going back to the Golem of Prague[3]. The history of the Golem is not an earlier chapter of »intelligent« technology or science, but rather an attempt to use technology as a mirror of religion and vice versa. Both entities are entirely different, yet they have common vectors of human life. That is especially the case with artificial intelligence (AI), which has a greater influence on every aspect of human life than religion does.

AI has brought new horizons; it has envisaged a world where the man who creates it often becomes a slave to his addiction to it. Thus, if we listen to the apocalyptic modernists, AI will completely enslave us. The reason for this is its high speed of computation and its mastery of massive amounts of data in a universe of billions of billions of items. In the meantime, AI can »handle large amounts of data, extracting

1 See also Giuseppe Veltri, A Mirror of Rabbinic Hermeneutics. Studies in Religion, Magic, and Language Theory in Ancient Judaism, Berlin 2015, pp. 11–112.

2 See id., Magie und Halakha, Tübingen 1997, pp. 54f.

3 See id., Il Rinascimento nel pensiero ebraico, Turin 2020, pp. 131–139.

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relevant information and creating profiles or predictive models in many fields«[4]. Will it replace human intelligence[5]?

This article will not attempt by any means to answer the question of how to combine religion and technology, nor the hodiern question of how to master and domesticate AI technology. Many books and articles have been written on this subject, and it is the object of vivid discussions on political, philosophical, religious, sociological, and other themes on the world stage. My contribution will only be to emphasize the role of technology as the philosopher Jacob Taubes saw it during the 1950s.

1. Taubes's Criticism of Universal Reason

The aim of what follows is to reread, reinterpret, and to some extent correct what I wrote about Jacob Taubes some years ago[6]. In his essay *Four Ages of Reason*, which was published in 1957, twelve years after the end of the Shoah, and dedicated to Max Horkheimer on his sixtieth birthday, Taubes balances accounts with the entire system of the philosophical »think tank« that has constituted the approach to the world since the time of Aristotle. His essay is mainly based on his PhD thesis, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, which was published by A. Francke Verlag in Bern in the *Beitrage zur Soziologie und Sozialphilosophie* series in the same year that he submitted his dissertation (1947)[7].

The really intriguing aspect of this article is that in it, Taubes approaches fundamental themes of the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium; that is, the alleged universality of philosophy, violence between individuals, and technology as a universalization of knowledge. I will follow his argument by attempting to enrich his essay, which was born from the history and

4 This is a common definition of its capabilities found on the internet, meaning no citation is necessary.

5 Studies of the connection and cooperation between AI and neuropsychology are not new: see, e. g., Christian R. Huyck/Hina Ghalib, A Neuropsychological Framework for Advancing Artificial Intelligence, published by the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, URL: <https://cdn.aaai.org/Symposia/Fall/2008/FS-08-04/FS08-04-023.pdf> (2025-03-26).

6 Giuseppe Veltri, Language of Conformity and Dissent. The Imaginative Grammar of Jewish Intellectuals in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Boston, MA 2013, pp. 228–239; see also Jerry Z. Muller, Professor of Apocalypse. The Many Lives of Jacob Taubes, Princeton, NJ/Oxford 2022, pp. 221–223.

7 I use the following edition: Jacob Taubes, Abendländische Eschatologie, mit einem Abhang, Munich 1991, with a »Notiz« by Margherita von Brentano, who was married to Taubes from 1967 to 1975.

rage of the apocalyptic, offering decidedly new perspectives on research on various fields of modern knowledge.

Taubes begins with the dilemma of how to understand »the contradiction between the claim of philosophy to the universality of reason, [and] the actual split of society into antagonistic groups«, which also responds to and provokes violence[8]. The universality of reason, social groups, and violence are thus the triad struggling for world power. However, Taubes rebukes the philosophical undertaking for not taking into account the incongruity between the claim to a universal frame of reference and divided social structure, terming it chimerical.

But is it possible to »pollute« the search for universal reason with a factual, particular history? Taubes explicitly asks: »Do we not invite chaos if we approach a ›systematic‹ problem of philosophy like an inquiry into the concept of reason by analyzing reason in its historical context?«[9]. His conclusion ends with a probably intentional *petitio principii*: »A historical analysis of reason […] would endanger the purity of the scientific pursuit«[10]. Or, in other words: history is existentially necessary for being a (rational, human) philosopher – unless we are in metahistory or in a dream – but research into it threatens the scientific pursuit. The petition is clear: assuming an approach to or an analysis of the historical context of reason as an invitation to scientific chaos cannot but conclude on the purity of scientific pursuit without it. But the history of reason itself should show that there is no unambiguous general and universal concept of this idea and that the quest for purity in scientific research has not led to clear and unambiguous results. And this is the core of Taubes's criticism.

That is, of course, the general question that has moved philosophical scholarship since Aristotle: *Opiniones et/sive veritas*, *historia et/sive axioma?* (Opinion and/or truth, history and/or axiom?) However, Taubes, the son of a rabbi, is not interested in how a *haskama* (the consensus of a decision) is reached; i. e., how controversial hypotheses might be integrated into a conduct of life that is principally capable of reaching an agreement. Taubes is more interested in how the conflict between reason as an instrument for finding truth and violence as an instrument for pushing through what is considered truth must be understood. He is also more interested in reconciling the belief in the ever-expanding progress of technology – which was a certain belief at that time – with the retreat from social rationality. Thus, do we have progress that promises reason and yet actually produces barbarism? The most

8 Jacob Taubes, Four Ages of Reason, in: Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie 42 (1956), pp. 1–14. I will refer to the following version: id., From Cult to Culture. Fragments Towards a Critique of Historical Reason, ed. Charlotte Fonrobert/Amir Engel, Stanford, CA 2010, here p. 268.

9 Ibid., pp. 268f.

10 Ibid., p. 269.

urgent question present in Taubes's *Four Ages of Reason* is, of course, entirely posed in the pragmatic formulation of the Frankfurt School: *unde malum barbaricum*, »How did it come about that a society that staked its future on the progress of reason ended up in barbarianism?«[11].

This question takes us to the core of exile studies *per se*. It takes us to the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research, which was housed at Columbia University, where Taubes later taught religious philosophy. Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) had returned to Goethe University in Frankfurt seven years earlier. Taubes's essay stands in the full tradition of critical dialectic. Throughout the 1950s, critical dialectic pursued the question of the failure of reason in the age of Nazism. In 1966, Theodor Adorno wrote that »philosophy, which was once believed to have been defeated, remains alive because the moment of its realization was omitted«[12], a sentence that sounded somewhat apocalyptic.

Taubes continues the discussion and refers to the essence of philosophical frustration: the search for the methodology of philosophy *more arithmetico*. Through abstraction, philosophy seeks to achieve the »security of pure operation«. In philosophy – in contrast to mathematics – this boils down to »eclipsing the foundations on which all operations are built: man«[13]. Taubes states that »the price for a pure field of operation is ignorance about the genesis of judgment«[14]. He concludes that an operation »that is established in a purely self-subsistent realm without recourse to its genesis in human consciousness only testifies to the alienation of man from the products of his own making, from the products of his own reasoning«[15]. What Hegel charged man with, Taubes applies to philosophical discourse in general[16]. Alienation does not originate in man, but rather in the moment that philosophy becomes estranged from man. Here too, he attacks the unproven thesis that philosophy is a valid tool for everyone whose estrangement led to the denial of humanity as such brought about by Nazism, thematizing the idea that the western conception of pure philosophy can lead to its own negation.

Taubes moves through his criticism of the history of philosophy by recalling the epistemological moment according to which the truthfulness of a statement

11 Ibid., p. 268.

12 Theodor Adorno, Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik. Fragmente zur Vorlesung 1965/66, ed. Rolf Tidermann, Frankfurt am Main 2003.

13 Taubes, From Cult to Culture, p. 269.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Hegel wrote: »What the spirit aspires for, is to reach its own conception (the place in which it is in theoretical and practical harmony with the universe); but the spirit covers the same, is proud and full of indulgence in this alienation from itself«. Quoted in Reinhart K. Maurer, Revolution und »Kehre«. Studien zum Problem gesellschaftlicher Naturbeherrschung, Frankfurt am Main 1975, p. 107.

be scrutinized according to an individual's state. The truthfulness of a statement must be distanced from its particularity. Taubes's answer to this is that such an anthropological idea has to be based on an abstraction of a human being as if he or she were a *tabula rasa*. This is clearly not the case if man is seen sociologically: individuals are born and integrated into a social system of language and signs[17]. This observation, which seems very simplistic and naïve, actually eradicates the foundations of any abstract enlightenment that colonialistically forms beyond man *hic* and *nunc* and that disregards the essential contribution of the socio-historical in context.

Yet here is the turning point: completely in contradiction with the conception of the »purity of scientific pursuit«, Taubes suggests that reason has a more robust social component than is commonly agreed upon as it can only be communicated through language and its logical rules can only be represented through language. Without directly addressing it – also because this will be the topic of the age between our millennia – Taubes »prophetically« embodies the approach of non-European cultures to independence in philosophical discourse because all communication has to be rooted in one's own native language. What holds true for mathematical operations cannot automatically hold true for all human knowledge systems. Yet in mathematics too, the scholar is aware that everything depends on the system and that particular operations only retain their validity within the limits of that system. The universal validity achieved and required cannot be hypostatized – i. e., made concrete – in a more precise realm, as philosophy is abstracted from it and thus loses the insight into the source of all meaning: man in his historical existence[18]. This is the reason why I would speak of »minority systems of thought«, which operate in and are an expression of the historical existence (see below).

An utterly abstract sentence is valid and yet is not a »verdict«, not a form of judgment, because philosophy distinguishes between the genesis and the validity of a judgment. Every form of philosophy that isolates the subjective pole of reference in a logical or existential manner, Taubes concludes, leads to the antinomy of psychologism. Yet equally problematic is a philosophy that is too abstract and free from all subjective elements in its reason analysis. The same holds true for a philosophy that postulates a distinctive realm of validity[19].

The contribution of the conception of reason to the developmental process and its critical function, according to Taubes, was the »progressing stages of the development of enlightenment«. Its function is the de-mystification of the universe in terms of the categories of Max Weber. Thus, the reader wonders where the evil

17 Taubes, From Cult to Culture, p. 270.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., p. 271.

tooth is threatening to bite into philosophy's flesh. Where is Taubes's cynical sting? Philosophy is a critical science that descends from the Ivory Tower of abstraction and de-mystifies the myths. But note that here is the turning point: Taubes states that the process of enlightenment and the progress of rationalization seemed identical for the generation as late as that of the French Revolution. It is not a case of »for us«. Rationalized reason is a tool that might be used for enlightenment as well as for the eclipse of reason or the idealization of it.

Thus reason, according to Taubes's philosophy, is not a system, not an *intellectus agens* or *patiens*. Is it logical deduction, pure logic? Not necessarily, I would say. When Taubes begins analyzing the history of philosophy, he understands the process of rationalization in the Middle Ages as identical to the theological conception of reason, and as contrasting with the juridical conception of reason. The first, the theological conception of reason, is supposed to be the divine conception, its hierarchical order. The juridical belief, however, which has been developing since the twelfth century, understands itself as struggling against theology. I have to say that I question this concept, historically speaking, as there was no juridical conception of reason in the twelfth century. I am also in doubt because professors of law at the University of Bologna, including Irnerius and, above all, the Glossar Lothair, had indeed written statements in support of the Holy Roman Emperor Barbarossa (Frederick I, 1122–1190) and against the pope[20]. Yet it might be difficult to construe a juridical conception from this, as it was purely a political struggle. Taubes, however, wishes to present the *Corpus Iuris* as a source of the conception of reason that later served the Enlightenment. He also wishes to present this *Corpus Iuris* as a secular science fighting theology. He writes: »A new elite propagates the cult of justice. Its priests are the lawyers and judges. Their profession becomes a sacred *officium* […]. Lawyers and judges are the hierophants of the mystery of justice (*iusticiae mystericum*)«[21]. Further, and with an even more problematic understanding of the Latin language, »the ›cult of iustitia‹ (a term we find in Frederick's *Liber Augustalis* as a chapter heading: *de cultu iustitiae*) challenged the sacramental cult of the medieval hierarchical church«[22].

I do not wish to correct mistakes here, as Taubes could not have lived without apocalyptic contrasts. It might be agreed that there was a struggle. This struggle, however, was of a political nature and between the pope and the emperor for their respective powers. Both referred to the same texts and to the same contradictions in the gospel. »Giving to the emperor the things that are the emperor's« is not a

20 I am using here a summary by Quentin Skinner, Political Philosophy, in: Charles B. Schmitt/Quentin Skinner (eds.), The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy, Cambridge 1988, pp. 387–452, at pp. 390f.

21 Taubes, From Cult to Culture, p. 272. Emphasis in original.

22 Ibid.

new concept, but the application of Roman jurisdiction. It did not become a cult in any stage of history – if we are, necessarily, to exclude the *Kronjurist* of the Third Reich, Carl Schmitt (»Give to Hitler …«).

On the other hand, it is true that it is precisely the antinomy between *theologia* as divine science and *lex* as practical pragmatical science that will bring the first cracks to the totality of theological conviction. Justice in this context is not obtaining the truth, but reaching an agreement based on negotiation. At the end, what the individuum hopes to obtain and the judge hopes to decide is an equal judgment, not the truth. I will refer here to what I wrote some years ago on skepticism and law[23], and will quote it in what follows.

The idea of negotiation is a typical attitude of general jurisprudence and of rabbinic Halakhah, which is similar to every legal system. Also, on the *yom ha-din* (Day of Judgment) according to the Tosefta, *Sanhedrin* 13:3, the dead will be judged on every act of their lives: there will be the fully righteous, the fully evil, and those in-between, the *benonim* or *shequlim* (equivalent or equipollent). Hence, at the Last Judgement, a situation of equipollence of evil/good and true/false can also exist and its result, if any, will be negotiated.

Yet the idea of a negotiation of the truth is also present in Islamic philosophy, according to Dominique Raynaud's 2013 study[24]. He writes: »During the course of a controversy, truth is temporarily suspended and replaced by an exchange of arguments of uncertain statute«[25]. His point of departure is the Persian savant Shams al-Dīn Al-Samarqandī (c. 1250 to c. 1302), who wrote some books on logic, mathematics, and astronomy and four treatises on the rules to be followed in the conduct of a scholarly controversy, of which only three are extant: *Risāla fī adāb al-baḥth* (*Epistle on the Rules and Etiquettes of Debate*), *Qustās al-afkār* (*The Weighing of Ideas*), and *al-Muʿtaqadāt* (*The Convictions*), all of which were composed between 1291 and 1302. This is not the right place to explain the rules of rhetoric and dialectic debate that Al-Samarqandī established and developed using his knowledge of law and jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh* and *furūʿ*). Yet his contribution to the dialectic and rhetoric of the debate is the careful analysis of the settlement of controversies, introducing the innovation of the »signs of defeat« (*dalāʾil al-inqitāʿ*), the indication of the moment when one »of the parties to the debate has […] emerged as the victor or the vanquished«[26]. The signs are inconsistency (the conclusion is

23 Giuseppe Veltri, Alienated Wisdom. Enquiry into Jewish Philosophy and Scepticism, Berlin 2018, p. 272.

24 Dominique Raynaud, Al-Samarqandī. Un précurseur de l' analyse des controversies scientifiques, in: Al-Mukhatabat 7 (2013), pp. 8–25, now in id., Scientific Controversies. A Socio-Historical Perspective on the Advancement of Science, New Brunswick 2015, pp. 163–182.

25 Raynaud, Scientific Controversies, p. 164.

26 Ibid., pp. 175f.

not proportional to the premises or is self-contradictory); *reductio ad absurdum*; silence; distinction (necessary for the chain of reasoning); incapacity (to respond to a question); digression (a break in the continuity of reasoning); commensurability (non-conformity to the case); deviation (a response to a different question); appeal to the crowd (appealing to the listeners signifying a lack of arguments); or stubbornness (a refutation of objections).

The attentive reader will have already understood that the law itself destroys the idea of a truth that is valid for all precisely because it is *based on* the rules of logic and rhetoric. The judgment is not valid for everyone, but only because it is involved with the particular case. The case of Jewish law, so contested in the medieval Latin world, also brings the same conclusions. There is not a general law, valid for everyone. The law is particular, »national« (the concept of *'am Israel*), made up of commandments, statutes, and customs, to be observed whenever possible. The dual nature of the written and oral Torah clearly attacks the uniqueness of an abstract juridical complex, but it is concretized in reality. The divinity of the law is precisely the multiplicity of man and his history.

Having attended a rabbinical school, Taubes was well aware of Jewish law's casuistic (and even pilpulistic) capacity, its need to be fulfilled, and its necessary knowledge, which does not produce the truth, but seeks a solution for real life. Taubes, however, needs the contrast to move from the world of theology to the world of a non-theological order, from »Divine Providence« to secular necessity (*necessitas rerum*[27] – one might see a Machiavellian term in this), in order to form the »immanent order of justice«. This »immanent order of justice« is a term that Taubes borrows from the works of Spinoza (1632–1677), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), and Isaac Newton (1642–1726). He concludes that »the authority of law was secularized authority, but it was not yet an authority based on naked force«[28]. Consequently, in his annotations, he quotes items from *Ex Capivitate Salus: Erfahrungen der Zeit 1945/47* by a certain C. Schmitt, something that his reader might have expected earlier.

The discussion of the immanent order of justice follows the economic conception of reason, the impetus for profit, which »eclipses the ›objective‹ element of justice«[29]. Just prices and just wages, according to Taubes, sounded archaic, and were viewed as such. The subjective element is thus integrated into the economic conception of reason, which hence becomes the domination of nature. It becomes the judge, as Emmanuel Kant wrote in *Critique of Pure Reason*[30].

27 Taubes, From Cult to Culture, p. 273.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., p. 274.

The technological conception of reason, following the economic one, de-mystifies nature and leads to a »mathematization« of the universe. Taubes states that »man pays a price for this knowledge in the horizon of power [as well]. In exercising reason as power over nature and society, man is alienated from the elements he dominates. He knows only insofar as he can manipulate«[31]. There is Hegel, again, standing in the background: knowledge as liberation and alienation at the same time, as Max Weber and Georg Simmel described the tensions in the functioning of human reason.

Jacob Taubes considers this point like a nostalgic who is looking upon the Old Country while leaving it for good on his ship:

> Scepticism has purged the idea of reason of so much of its content, of the element of freedom, of the element of happiness, of the element of justice, that at the end the very idea of reason appears like a ghost that has emerged from the cloudy linguistic usage […]. The »philosophy« of technical reason is occupied in exposing the bankruptcy of all ideas that go beyond the brute and naked realm of facts[32].

This passage brings us to a characteristic and peculiar element of Judaism: its view of philosophy as skepticism that destroys universalistic reason. I will not entertain this subject here, as it is discussed in my book *Alienated Wisdom*. It should be noted, however, that it is not rabbinic skepticism (the eternal validity of questioning) that attracts Taubes, but the post-war vision of the ruin of universal reason. In this context, technology would be the answer to the desire for unity. But this too is problematic.

This takes us to the core of Taubes's assertion: technology has mastered the world, but not religion, which has created an »overarching« world that we cannot escape. He writes that »the Asiatic and African nations were not converted to western religion, but they have become convinced by the methods of western technological reasoning«[33]. Taubes died in 1987. Had he lived only a few more years, he would have experienced the return of religions, or better, religiosity which sought to defy technology, a technological alienation that is also an economic one. Yet this could be a false contrast, for religions do not succeed without technology, and religions that do exercise power require technology to uphold the faith.

Is the return of the gods connected to the dominance of technology? I do not think so. Rather, it is connected to the identity of human beings, who are unwilling to do without their tradition of truth. The abandonment of man's universality is

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 277.

33 Ibid., p. 278.

the subject that exile studies ought to take to heart, for the reason that especially in exile, elements of being oneself break through the surface. In one's »own« world, or the one understood as such, they are rarely reflected. Technological reasoning has proven that the meeting of basic needs (food, well-being, communication, and globalization) is insufficient for man's satisfaction. Human beings want more than they actually are, more than they eat, and this hope for more rules human society in a positive way as well as in a negative one. And thus, we have returned to the Aristotelian search for happiness – through, with, or despite Taubes's philosophical speculations.

2. An Eclipse of Technological Reason? A few Thoughts

Taubes certainly interpreted the signs of the times well, seeing that technology (and the sciences) would be the main vectors of culture and life towards the end of the twentieth century and at the turn of the twenty-first. He rightly denied religions the coagulative, expressive, and, above all, rapidly expansive power that technology had held back in the 1950s. And indeed, the concept of religion that is generally used is misleading. Religion is spoken of as though it were a word that could describe any phenomenon linked to practices of faith, sentiment, or beliefs and related customs, practices, and so on. Religion as formulated by the living religions is not universal unless they have an imperialistic conversion program and goal. In this case, it is a claim to truth and as such cannot be a plan of unity, but one of violence and oppression (like the Nazi period).

This is certainly not a case of addressing the problem of the victory of technology, which now seems to be the only practical ideology that unifies the whole of humanity. This is not the case because there are many problems to be touched upon, all of which are connected with the relationship between those who plan and those who then benefit from or are (dis)advantaged by them. Artificial intelligence, which is mentioned above, certainly brings exceptional advantages, and it will envelop us in its network in the near future far more than it does now.

However, using the same paradigms of interpretation proposed by Taubes, it will be necessary to be extremely skeptical about the universality of digital technology because it too, like philosophical reason, is made by men who use mathematical procedures and databases that have been made and collected by men. The questions that arise are not only of a moral order, something now dealt with by many scholars and in several publications, but above all of the structure of artificial intelligence, which, as we read, also offers us an imitation of or substitute for the human brain. Are we sure that all of humanity possesses the same neurological systems? Are we sure that the data offered by AI are read in a way that is in keeping with the ideal of freedom that every minority seeks to attain? The question is whether the unity of

practical reason, which Horkheimer suggested and Taubes interpreted, does not repeat that eclipse of reason that we wanted to avoid.

Technology is clearly intended to homogenize humanity and to present itself as a valid answer to everything, but to questions and needs that it itself has sometimes provoked. Humanity, as Taubes said, does not have a unity that goes beyond historical and cultural particularities and forms an ideologically transcendent man. This is also to be applied to technology, which seeks universalizing structures. Perhaps we have to base our research primarily on minority systems of thought, because also the majority in essence is a minority. The neurosciences have already referenced the fact that men's and women's minds are different[34]. Perhaps it is not only a question of gender and sex (as is well known, there is more than a binary conception of sexual identity) and the differences between humans should be the rule, while unity is a pragmatic conditional exigence and necessity.

34 Bruce Goldman, Two Minds. The Cognitive Differences between Men and Women, in: Stanford Medicine Magazine, published by Stanford University, URL: <https://stanmed.stanford.edu/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different/> (2025-03-26).

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Figure 3: Swami Vivekananda at the World's Parliament, Chicago (1893). On the left Vivekananda wrote in his own handwriting: »One infinite pure and holy – beyond thought beyond qualities I bow down to thee«. Source: Dziewa, Higher detail image of Swami Vivekananda (1893), Wikimedia Commons, URL: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swami_Vivekananda-1893-09-signed.jpg> (2025-03-26).

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Figure 5: Sri Sarada Devi was the wife and spiritual consort of Ramakrishna. Source: Swami Gitananda/Swami Smaranananda, Vivekananda – A Biography in Pictures, Kolkata 1966.

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