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Sepharadi Thought in the Presence of the European Enlightenment*

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1.- The Torá as a Political-Spiritual System

The ”Torá” (which includes the “Written Law” or text of the Hebrew Bible, and the tradition or the “Oral Law”),¹ just as understood by Sepharadi Jewry, is a bi-dimensional system.

One dimension corresponds to the “political” sphere: the public, legislative, administrative and judicial institutions of the Hebrew Nation. The other dimension is “spiritual:”² the Hebrew Bible’s theological and humanistic rites and values, just as they were transmitted by Rabbinic and post-Rabbinic tradition. Both dimensions become conditioned and are mutually defined.³ To ignore one of these dimensions results in an atrophic and dysfunctional “Torá.”⁴

Elie Benamozegh (1823-1900), a rabbi from Liorna and the most important Sephardic thinker of the modern age, points that the rupture that exists among Judaism, Christianity and Islam, proceeds precisely because the two latter systems ignore the structural logic of the Torá. Christianity and Islam consider only one of these dimensions. While Christianity focuses in the ”spiritual” dimension, thus relegating to giving “Caesar what belongs to Caesar,”⁵ Islam accentuates ”the other half of Judaism,” - the political dimension - the one ”half that Jesus abandoned, and which Muhammad establishes as a supreme principle and foundational rock of his

* Translation by David Ramírez.

¹ Jewish thinkers of the Hellenistic Period define the text of the Pentateuch or “Written Law,” as the Constitution of the People of Israel, see José Faur’s “One-Dimensional Jew, Zero-Dimensional Judaism,” *Annual of Rabbinic Judaism*, II (1999), p. 34 note 17. On the other side, Maimónides, *Mishne Torá, Mamrim I, 1* define the “Oral Law,” as the interpretations of the “Written Law” and the Legal Traditions transmitted by the *Sanhedrin* or the Supreme Court of Israel.

² I prefer this term over “theology,” thus avoiding the link with this dimension with philosophic or metaphysical systems. See next note.

³ From here el título Spinoza obtains the title for his famous work, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

⁴ “One-Dimensional Jew, pgs. 31-50. Cf. José Faur, “David Nassy: On Prejudice and Related Matters,” in eds. Lea Dasberg y Joanathan N. Cohen, *Neveh Ya’akov: Jubilee Volume Presented to Dr. Jaap Meijer* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1982), p. 92.

⁵ Elie Benamozegh, *Morale Juive et Morale Chretienne* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1867), pgs. 330-331. All translation in the present study are mine.

system.”⁶ In this last case, the ethical and humanist aspects of the Torá are completely ignored.”⁷

{324} Once dislodging the spiritual dimension from the political one, the Bible becomes a structurally dysfunctional system. From this, a “Barbarism” – whether political or spiritual – is born, one that stamps the sister religions of the Torá.

Once having abandoned the spiritual aspects of Judaism, one allows its politics to degenerate into barbarism; when the other dislodges the social life of Judaism, it transforms its religion into ascetical norms. From both sides, the result is always the same, a mutilated Judaism, disfigured by one of its parts.⁸

Once the coordinates of the Torá have been abandoned, religion is a system whose ultimate basis depends on violent force, whether physical or spiritual.⁹ In this way, the sister religions of Judaism choose intolerance and violence as common grounds. With respect to Christianity, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) observed:

In this manner we find this to be a curious fact, the more intense is the religion in any period and more profound its dogmatic credo, the greater is its cruelty and the worse its own conditions become. Those times were known as the “Age of Faith,” when people truly believed the Christian religion in its entirety, we at the same time find the Inquisition with its tortures; million of unfortunate women burned as witches; and all types of cruelty were enacted on all sorts of people in the name of religion.¹⁰

2. - Limited Sovereignty and Absolute Sovereignty

Iberian Jews were not just members of another “religion” (concept that enters late in Sepharadi vocabulary, around the 19th c., and due to French influence) but of the Jewish “Nation”. The *juderías* – the Jewish commune in the Mediterranean (pron. “hoo-deh-ree-ah) – had internal autonomy, not only in matters of worship and faith but also in what formally belongs the political sphere. The *judería* designates its leaders and administrative officials, regulates taxes, promulgates all sorts of economic and legal decrees, and it establishes the Judicial Courts with the purpose to interpret and apply the laws of the Jewish “Nation”. Thanks to this internal autonomy, the Jews of Spain were able to develop its language and literature, regulate its commerce and economic life, and administer the political and legal institutions of the “Nation.”

{325} No other group enjoyed similar liberties and rights, nor in the economic, social, and intellectual levels if compared to the “Nation.” Thus, the *judería* offers a model for organization that could provoke some questions not easy to answer. Far more worrisome, the existence of the *judería* constitutes a defiance to Absolute Sovereignty.¹¹

⁶ Ibid., pgs. 331-332.

⁷ Ibid., pgs. 333-334.

⁸ Ibid., p. 334.

⁹ Cf. José Faur, *Homo Mysticus: A Guide to Maimonides's Guide for the Perplexed* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), pgs. 98-101.

¹⁰ Bertrand Russell, *Why I am not a Christian* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), p. 20.

¹¹ Over this key concept, see “One-Dimensional Jew,” pgs. 34-38.

This is the thesis suggested by the Sevillian rabbi Salomón ibn Verga (dies ca. 1520), author of his celebrated opus *Shebet Yehudá* (“The Staff of Yehudá”). This work circulated in Latin translation during his lifetime and was read by Christian sages. The author of these lines knows of two Latin editions published in Amsterdam (1651, 1680).¹² One of the theses that this work suggests is the one of religious plurality – thesis intimately tied to the concept of Limited Sovereignty. One of the central characters, “king Alfonso” (Alfonso VIII, the most liberal monarch in Christian Spain), proposes a revolutionary idea, and that is that the source of political authority proceeds from the people – not the monarch! “The king is in fact,” the monarch declares, “the people’s [representative], and he is only a nominal king.”¹³ Therefore, the monarch must represent the people in its *totality*, and not impose on them a faith that is supposed to save their lives. This does not mean that the monarch must conceive his own religion in “relative” terms; quite the contrary. Referring to the Christian religion, the king declares:

In this (religion) I live and with this I shall die, and with this I shall be buried; this one shall save me and will give me a seat in Paradise with the kings before me. I have not told you this in order to speak on behalf of them [the Jews], but to declare that we have no right [in other words, authority] to make them transgress their religion.¹⁴

This obliges the king, as a sovereign of the state, to maintain a pluralistic position as it concerns the religion of his subjects.

When the king answered the arguments the Jew represented, in defense of his faith he declares:

I think that your words are indeed excellent, however these do not obligate anyone, and since it is so, we as Christians shall remain in what we have received as truth and you shall remain in what you think is truth, and you shall obtain your reward because your will is directed to the heavens; if with one evidence you knew the contrary to your beliefs, you would turn to our [beliefs].¹⁵

{326} In a subtle voice, this implies that the monarch must make a distinction between the faith that he professes as an individual, and his responsibility as a sovereign, which is to *represent* and *protect* all his citizens, (the source of his *authority*). In the case of the Jews (or any other religious minority), it is the responsibility of the State to protect them from other segments of society who try to transgress the basic right of others to practice their own faith without any form of

¹²Over the intellectual character and strategies of this work, see José Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (Albany: SUNY, 1992), pgs. 176-189. in an unpublished conference, we have tried to demonstrate among the readers if this work we have the very famous Machiaveli.

¹³I have used the excellent Spanish translation of María José Cano *La Vara de Yehudah* (Barcelona: Riopiedras Ediciones, 1991), VII, p. 63.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, p. 58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* XXXII, p. 159.

coercion.¹⁶ In this manner, the king asserts, “I shall dedicate all my soul to protect them [that is, to defend the Jews] because they are my subjects.”¹⁷

Deciphering the latter in terms of political philosophy, the existence of the *judería* entails limited sovereignty of the State. From this point, the Jewish presence creates a “problem” when applied to kings who exert Absolute Sovereignty on their Christian subjects. The Expulsion is the “final solution” to the “problem” that the *judería* represented to absolutist rulers. Instead of choosing a pluralistic system, as ibn Verga suggests, the Catholic monarchs decided to exert Absolute Sovereignty on *all* the members of the State.

In the space of Absolute Sovereignty individuals do not exist, instead we have “*castas*” (castes) or “*colegios*” (colleges), i. e. Corporations.¹⁸ The legal base for the Expulsion is that the *judería*, as a legal corporation (“*colegio*”), is responsible in its *totality* for all of the alleged crimes of its individuals.

In this manner, the Catholic Kings declare the edict of Expulsion:

Because when any grave or detestable (act) is committed by any in the *colegio* (college) and *unibersidad* (university) it is reason enough for the said *colegio* and *unibersidad* to be dissolved and terminated, young or old, one for the other punished.¹⁹

The monarch, as an absolute sovereign, has the right to expel them of *his* territory. He has even the power to impose capital punishment on them, without the right of a legal process. Henceforth, the Edict of Expulsion puts it in the following words:

[. . .] whereby we command all the Jews and Jewess of any age who live and reside in our mentioned kingdoms and lordships, it is thus that the natural (citizens) and foreigners among them, who in any manner of case have come or live with them . . . they all should leave all of the mentioned kingdoms and lordships . . . and should not dare to return in anyway, and if they do not comply, {327} and they were to be found in the mentioned kingdoms and lordships, they are liable of capital punishment (death) and confiscation of all his possessions for our Local and State Treasuries, in whatever grievances they make for their doing and without the right of *due process*, *sentence* or *declaration*. [our italics]²⁰

The monarch has absolute power over any property and goods belonging to his subjects. From this they obtain the authority to forbid the to-be-expelled Jews from taking anything with them

¹⁶See José Faur, “Imagination and Religious Humanism: Maimonides, ibn Verga, and Vico,” *New Vico Studies* X (1992), pgs. 43-47.

¹⁷*La Vara de Yehudah*, VII, p. 36.

¹⁸Over this fundamental concept in Catholic religion and its legal theory, see *In the Shadow of History*, pgs. 32-37.

¹⁹Luis Suárez Fernández, ed. *Documentos Acerca de la Expulsión de los judíos* (Villadolid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1964), p. 393.

²⁰*Ibid.* pgs. 393-394.

[...] gold nor silver nor minted coin or anything forbidden by the laws of our kingdoms, save for merchandise that are not forbidden or to be exchanged.²¹

We must remember, as one has pointed out in another study, that in ultimate instance the Expulsion and the edicts of Clean Blood [*pureza de sangre*] result in the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Western Europe. Spain was the only country in Europe that did not participate in the culture of the Renaissance and European modernity.²²

3. - The Political Dimension of Anti-Semitism

The anomaly of the Jew and the *judería* during antiquity and the Middle Ages (and which continues into relatively modern times), is due to the judicial autonomy that the Torá provides. This cardinal point has been pointed out by the great thinker Giambattista Vico (1668-1714). The Torá – in the specific sense of “law” with all the legal and political connotations of this term – differentiates the Jew. This difference is exposed as following:

[...] a peculiar law [for his own nation] which was the celebrated basis for the separation of Jews and Gentiles. This separation lasted for the Jews of recent times, and whom Tacitus refers as “unsociable men” and, since their destruction by the Romans, it has been exceptional that they have lived mixed with [other] nations without forming part of them.²³

The purpose of Anti-Semitism (religious, racist, or both) is political – in no way “religious.” The demonizing of Jewry has as its end to {328} turn the *judería* in an illegitimate model, forbidden to circulate within the intellectual and political space of “humanity.” Likewise, racist Anti-Semitism pretends to dehumanize the *converso*. In this manner, the participation of Christians with Hebrew lineage is drastically limited in the political and spiritual life of the State, and to avoid the possible circulation of ideas that could clash with the concept of Absolute Sovereignty (e. g. Bartolomé de las Casas).²⁴ Examined from this point of view, the establishment of the Inquisition (1481) represents a more refined development of Absolute Sovereignty. The authority of the State extends to the foremost intimacy of his subjects. As noted

²¹ Ibid. p. 394, cf. Ibid. p. 424. For a legal analysis of the text of Expulsion, see *In the Shadow of History*, pgs. 37-39.

²² See José Faur, “Jews, *Conversos* and Native Americans: the Iberian Experience,” *Annual of Rabbinic Judaism* III (2000), p. 96.

²³ This quote comes from the work of Giambattista Vico, *The First New Science*, en *Vico: Selected Writings*, ed. and English trans. by León Pompa (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pgs. 86-87. One must notice that Vico does not share the negative aspect of TÁCITUS. Quite the contrary, Vico always treated Hebrew and Rabbinic tradition with equanimity and respect, and he maintained cordial relationships with Jews, among them Joseph Attias. On this subject, see José Faur, “Vico, el Humanismo Religioso y la Tradición Sefardita,” *Cuadernos sobre Vico* 7 (1997), pgs. 255-263.

²⁴ See “Jews, *Conversos* and Native Americans: the Iberian Experience,” pgs. 114-116.

by Samuel de Usque (16th c.), the Spanish Inquisition (a branch of the State, *not* of the Catholic Church) is established, “because external signs are not enough so they can be recognized as Christians, but one has to examine their entrails with fire.”²⁵

The political aspect of Anti-Semitism is one of the subject matters examined by David de Isaac Cohen Nassy (1747-1806), native of Surinam. Nassy was the celebrated physician who discovered the cure for Yellow Fever. He is also the first Jewish historian and thinker of the New World. Thanks to the discovery of the treatment for Yellow Fever in Philadelphia, Fall of 1793, Benjamin Franklin invited him to be part of the prestigious *American Philosophical Society*. Nassy was one of the most active members of the Surinam community, and he became its president. A letter sent by the Viceroy of Portugal to the Surinam community is still kept, addressed to “Doctor David Nassy and the leaders of the Portuguese Jewish Nation resident in Surinam.” Nassy was the author of several works; among them are *Lettre politico-theologico-morale sur les Juifs* (Paramaribo, ca. 1798). The key thesis that he proposes is that Anti-Semitism is the effect of “prejudice” – more than the clash of two spiritual systems, one Jewish, the other Christian. “Prejudice” is a characteristic attitude of European societies – a society essentially hierarchical, structured in social castes that are imposed on the *individual* from the outside. In this precise sense, “prejudice” is a political and legal concept. In first place, as all absolute sovereign regimes, the individual does not exist as such, but as a *member* of a certain caste. Consequently, its political and legal status is determined once and for all by the position that the caste occupies within the hierarchical structure of the State. The antidote to “prejudice” is equality: equality before the law, rights and privileges of the State. As Nassy notes, this equality does not propose to eliminate moral, intellectual, {329} etc., differences that each individual reaches, but it accentuates his basic rights before political and legal institutions of the State.

Consequently, every human being must be equal in his rights, and equal in his privileges; his birth, worship, goods, and rank cannot justify his inequality; virtue, talent, a beneficial or detrimental character to society, are only vices and faults that should serve as the basis for inequality among the members of the group: the opposite to this principle is an absurd revolt, a fire that lies underneath the ashes and that soon or later will ignite all the parts of the universe, where ever it penetrates.

Nassy was opposed to the utopist “freedom” that circulated in the enlightened world as the result of the French Revolution. In the mind of Nassy, the freedom that the State must guarantee “is the right to follow reason and law without incurring the risk to be tyrannized by the strongest party.” Just as focused by Nassy, the Jewish “problem” rises when the state demands Absolute Sovereignty. In this manner, to fight against Anti-Semitism is not to defend the Jew or Judaism, but “to defend the cause of the oppressed Man against prejudice.”²⁶

The proverbial Jewish “unsociability” that Tacitus and other Anti-Semites denounce is the result of certain political philosophies. In simple words: The Jews are

²⁵Samuel Usque, *Consolaçam as Tribulaçoens de Ysrael* (Ferrara, 1553), fol. 202b.

²⁶For a study on the life and philosophy of Nassy, and the sources that we quote, see my article “David Nassy: On Prejudice and Related Matters,” pgs. 87-116.

those individuals who refuse to submit to Absolute Sovereignty, or tie their destiny to a sleepwalking society, so self-absorbed that it cannot apprehend the Jewish governing political and spiritual structure. The said “unsociability” vanishes in the pluralistic arena. This is precisely what happened in what is properly designated “the New Sepharad.”

In 1655, as a consequence of Recife’s (Brazil) Portuguese conquest, a small group of twenty-three Sephardim are compelled to abandon their homes and seek refuge in far away lands. When they arrive to Nieuw Amsterdam (today’s New York), they ask permission to the governor Peter Stuyvesant in order to settle there, not as individuals who profess a different *religion* to Christianity, but as members of the “Jewish Nation.”²⁷ In this manner begins what would become in three centuries the biggest and most important Jewish community in the world. We must point out that the Jews establish a presence in Nieuw Amsterdam *before* the Catholics. Consequently, the “Jewish Nation” sows the first seeds for religious and plural freedoms in what would become the United States.²⁸ This is {330} contrary to Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the New World, which had all manner of Inquisitions, *pureza de sangre* (Clean Blood) statues and persecutions.²⁹

4. - The French Enlightenment and the Two Dimensions of Israel

The French Enlightenment clashes with the two dimensions of the Torá. In the political sphere it proposes the *absolute omnipotence* of the State. Therefore, they should reject the possibility of an entity (the *judería*), which is not subjected *in toto* to the absolute authority of the State. The problem of the Jewish “Nation” rises as a consequence of the Enlightenment. In France (as in other countries and continents), the Sephardim identify themselves as members of the “Jewish Nation”³⁰ The “emancipation” that the Enlightenment promises postulates as *sine qua non* condition, the *dissolution* of the Jewish Nation in its political dimension. Concerning its political dimension it was reasoned that giving citizenship to Jewish subjects would be as absurd as to give French citizenship to English or Danish peoples.³¹ Napoleon, as the

²⁷See editor Irving J. Sloan, “Selected Documents,” *The Jews in America, 1621-1970* (New York: Ocean Publications, 1971), pgs. 51, 53.

²⁸On this first group, its evolution and development until modern times, see David and Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955). For a description of these first Sephardim and the analysis of their efforts which culminate in the establishment of the first synagogue in Nieuw Amsterdam, see *ibid.* pgs. 3-36.

²⁹Over this subject, see “Jews, *Conversos* and Native Americans: the Iberian Experience,” pgs. 95-121.

³⁰Particularly in the Southwest of France. The most important documents of the Jewish “nations” in this region, have been excellently edited and annotated by Gerard Nahon, *Les ‘Nations’ Juives Portugaises du Sud-Ouest de la France* (Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1981).

³¹About some very important details on this debate, see Zoza Swajkowski, “Jewish Autonomy Debated and Attacked during the French Revolution,” *Historia Judaica* 20 (1958), pgs. 31-46. The conceptual confusion that dominates this study is due to not having captured the *political-legal* aspect of the Jewish “Nation”.

well-informed Christian that he was, knew very well that the Jews constituted a separate “Nation”.³² One of the ends intended by the famous “Sanhedrin,” which he convokes in Paris, May 30 of 1806, is for the formal dissolution of Israel’s political dimension.³³ We must note, that Ismael Cohen (1723-1811), the most renowned figure of Sephardi rabbinage in Europe, refuses to participate in the said “Sanhedrin.”

As a Christian thinker has indicated, Jewish participation in the said Sanhedrin, and having recognized France as the only political sovereign,

[...] is a monstrous abandonment of the credos of Moses; given to its consequence, they [those Jews] renounce all hope to the Messiah [who in Jewish tradition has the function of political redeemer] and the eternal ownership of the land of Canaan who they consider as part of the sacred pact between God and his chosen people.³⁴

{331} The Sepharadim did not want to abdicate the political autonomy of the “Jewish Nation.” This is why they did not share the enthusiasm demonstrated by their Ashkenazim coreligionist when they heard of the alleged political “emancipation” that the Enlightenment promised.³⁵ If “history explains the past for the future,” as the distinguished linguist Cosieriu asserted in a conference, then we must conclude that the “emancipation” never estimated its severe consequences and historical unfoldings. Once the Jewish political dimension was abdicated, and recognizing the State as the only and absolute sovereign, what can be the legitimate basis to demand political rights in another country, i.e. the Holy Land? More than being “second class” citizens, as repeatedly insinuated by modern books of Jewish history, the Sepharadim were those individuals who did not lose their sight on the problematic points that the said “emancipation” enclosed within itself.

There was far more Sephardi participation in the political life of France under the old regime than after the Revolution.³⁶ In Holland, the Sephardim fully reject the “emancipation” offered to them in 1796.³⁷ David Nassy severely criticizes the benefits that these Revolutions promise. Instead of “freedom” those revolutions will end in libertinism,³⁸ contributing to the dissolution of the fundamental institutions of

³²See Robert Anchel, *Napoléon et les Juifs* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1928), p. 42 nota 2; cf. *ibid.*, pgs. 62-74.

³³See José Faur, “Early Zionist Ideals Among Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century,” *Judaism* 25 (1976), pgs. 54-56.

³⁴S. F. D. Kirwan, in his “Introducción” to the English version of Diogene Tama, *Transactions of the Parisian Sanhedrin* (London: Charles Taylor, 1807), p. xv. Cf. “Early Zionist Ideals Among Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century,” pgs. 55-56.

³⁵See José Faur, “Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century: New Directions and Old Values,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 44 (1977), pgs. 29-52; “Early Zionist Ideals Among Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century,” pgs. 53-64.

³⁶See Laurent Carmona-Benveniste, “Les Sephardins ou ‘Juifs Portugaise’ en France sur L’Ancien Régime,” *La Revue Hebdomadaire* 25 de Marzo 1939.

³⁷See Herbert I. Bloom, *The Economic Activities of the Jews in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Williamsport, Pen. : Bayard Press, 1937), p. 83, note 18.

³⁸See *Lettre*, pgs. XVIII-XX.

society.³⁹ These are utopias that will not come to realization. The “democracy” that these revolutions promise never existed other than in “Plato’s head.”⁴⁰ This “freedom” will erupt in chaos, political anarchy and despotism.⁴¹

In what concerns the general population, Nassy warns:

All the people of France and Holland before and after the Revolution have been, are, and will be eternally subordinated to their magistrates; they will be forced to pay taxes; to defend their homes and make the sacrifices that their legislators demand of them; they are and will be slaves of the opinions of those they trusted for government and maybe more than what has been in the past.⁴²

Sephardim thinkers denounced the *violence* provoked by these Revolutions. In the opinion of Nassy

{332} The French Revolution . . . due to the unstoppable ambition, infamy and vanity of a great number of obscure men, who control the spirit of the Nation, it seems it did not engender more than Demagogues, Cannibals, Anthropogites [cannibals who devour other cannibals] and many more ills.⁴³

In an imaginary dialogue between Voltaire and Moses, Joseph Salvador (1796-1873), one of the most important Jewish thinkers of France, denounced the “carnage of the French Revolution.”⁴⁴ Israel Moises Hazan (1807-1863) who was the Chief Rabbi of Rome in 1847, attacks the revolutionary movements, and instead he gave his support to the autocratic government of Pope Pius IX (1792-1878).⁴⁵ Liorna, the most important Sephardi community in Italy, if it participates in the Italian “risorgimento”, it is only limited to a few individuals, and did not count with the support of the community.⁴⁶

The Sephardim also reject the secular culture that the Enlightenment produces. As pointed out by Mantua’s Rabbi Marco Mortara (1815-1894), the model of this new culture is nature. Consequently, he assumes that

The world is ruled by unalterable uniform laws, which cannot be conceived [in any other way], be interrupted, or can be changed momentarily.⁴⁷

³⁹See *Lettre*, p. XXII.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. XXVIII.

⁴¹See *ibid.*, pgs. XXII-XXVIII.

⁴²Ibid. p. XX. For an analysis on this sources, see “David Nassy: On Prejudice and Related Matters,” pgs. 92-94.

⁴³*Lettre*, pgs. XXXII-XXXIV.

⁴⁴See Joseph Salvador, *Paris, Rome et Jérusalem*, vol. 1 (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1860), pgs. 253-258.

⁴⁵See “Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century,” pgs. 30-31.

⁴⁶See José Faur, *Rabbi Yisrael Moshe Hazzan: The Man and his Works* (heb.) (Haifa: Academic Publishers, 5738/1978), pgs. 84-85; Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1946), pgs. 436 ff.

⁴⁷Marco Mortara, *Dell’Autenticita del Pentateuco* (Padova, 1843), p. 7.

Within this intellectual context, this idea represents an absolute truth governed by universal thinking categories, independent of any particular language. From this we do not only obtain a monolinguist mode peculiar to Greek culture and thought -- only one language reflects the total, pure and absolute *truth* — but also that it must *impose* this “truth” as unique and categorical.⁴⁸ The preeminence of this “truth” reduces the study of humanities to a marginal and inconsequential sphere. With this emerges a frame of values that allows the evaluation of *all* cultures and *all* societies, in *all* of its historic epochs and phases. According to this frame, religions in general, and Judaism in particular, are “expired relics of a barbarous past.”⁴⁹ From here we obtain the notion that adopting this new culture would equal the total repudiation of the spiritual side of Israel.

{333} One of the points that Sephardim critics show are the seeds of violence enclosed by Enlightenment ideologies. In first place, it is very important to recognize the “prejudice” that Holy Scripture obtains as well as all matters belonging to the religious domain.⁵⁰ Enlightenment’s criticism “obsessed with the total or partial falsity” of Holy Scripture arrives “to a result . . . which does not fit with good logic nor with social responsibility.”⁵¹ It is very important to note, that despite this rhetoric, Voltaire was very far from being a thinker free of any prejudices. Better yet, as Nassy precisely underlined, he is a fanatic filled with hate towards religion in general and with Judaism in particular. His treatise “*About Tolerance*,” Nassy writes, “must be considered as a complete treatise on Fanatical Philosophy.”⁵² The Enlightened “progress” assumes a total pessimism of the past and the institutions of ancient humanity. One of the primordial functions of “progress” is the *destruction* of values that serve as basis for traditional institutions. Reflecting Maimonidean thinking, instead of killing off pagan civilization, the Holy Scripture utilizes many of its institutions (political or religious) and it incorporates them into the Torá,⁵³ Mortara maintains that progress must be reinforced with the past, not destroy it. In this manner, instead of the necessary violence (cultural or military) that the Enlightened “Revolution” provokes, true progress must be reinforced with the old, solidifying the past with the future, and fortifying both.⁵⁴

⁴⁸We have widened this subject in the article, “La ruptura de logos,” *Cuadernos sobre Vico* 7-8 (1997), pgs. 267-268. Over the cultural and linguistic aspects of monolingualism, see José Faur, *Golden Doves with Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pgs. 7-8, 155-156; idem “Monolingualism and Judaism,” *Cardozo Law Review* 14 (1993), pgs. 1713-1744

⁴⁹Isaiah Berlin, “The Divorce Between the Sciences and the Humanities,” *Salmagundi* 27 (1974), p. 29; over this subject see *ibid.*, pgs. 17-22.

⁵⁰*Dell'Autenticità del Pentateuco*, p. 11, cf. *ibid.* p. 17. The ideological basis of prejudice del is monolingualism as indicated above, note 48.

⁵¹*Dell'Autenticità del Pentateuco*, p. 12.

⁵²David Nassy, *Essay Historique sur la Colonie de Surinam*, vol. 1 (Paramaribo, 1788), p. XXV nota 1; cf. *Lettre*, p. LXIV, y parte 2, p. 46 note 30.

⁵³Over this aspect on Maimonides thinking, see José Faur, *Homo Mysticus: A Guide to Maimonides' Gide for the Perplexed* (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1999), pgs. 150-155.

⁵⁴Ver *Dell'Autenticità del Pentateuco*, pgs. 17-18. Cf. *Golden Doves with Silver Dots*, pgs. 146-147.

5. – Conclusions

Jewish participation in the Enlightenment must have two *sine qua non* conditions: abdication of its political dimension and a repudiation of the spiritual dimension of Israel. From here we obtain the Sephardi opposition to political and cultural emancipation that the Enlightenment promotes. This explains why Sephardi Jewry refuses to participate in the cultural movement that its German coreligionists call *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (*Haskala* when written in Hebrew). Far from being the effect of a certain “intellectual stupidity,” as postulated by modern historians, Sephardi postures underline a correct vision of the political and cultural {334 & 335} consequences of the Enlightenment. In particular, Sephardi thinkers point out the fanatical aspects that characterizes the “emancipated” Jew. As the idolaters of old, they kneel blindly to the new gods. Paraphrasing *Hosea* the prophet (4:12), Hazan describes the superstitious veneration of the “emancipated” Jew: “To the staff of Voltaire and Mirabeau he asks for advice, and the Staff of Diderot answers.”⁵⁵

Sephardim educators note the superficiality characterized by the Enlightened Jew. Rabbi Abraham Hamwi, who visited Europe during the second half of the 19th c., points out how superficial knowledge marks these “intellectuals.” They pretend to “make philosophy, because they can babble something in French. Let’s hope that they learn a good French!”⁵⁶ Hazan accuses them of “intellectual laziness,” and of confusing critical thinking with a superficial reading of some encyclopedic articles.⁵⁷ Instead of instructing, they take advantage of the classroom to indoctrinate.⁵⁸ They are more ideologist than men of culture. In their hands, Hazan declares, “reason” and “religion” are managed as if they were an ax. Everything that does not conform to what they imagine to be “modern civilization”, they propose to destroy it.⁵⁹ If they wished to introduce modern European thinking to their coreligionist — Mortara asks, why not study the works of Niebuhr. Instead of rejecting the literary and historic monuments of Israel, why not apply the methodology that Vico used on Homer’s texts and Rome’s history? More than instruct, this (new) ideology pretends to destroy traditional Jewish institutions.⁶⁰

With the afore mentioned, one can infer that Sephardi opposition to the Enlightenment does not imply a repudiation of European culture or a spiritual ghettoization, as happens in Ashkenazi communities. The greatest Sephardi authorities allowed the inclusion of non-religious subjects in their study programs. Among them, the rabbis Ismael Cohen, Isaac ben Walid (1777-1870), Hayyim (1788-1869) and Abraham Palaggi (1809-1899), Israel Moshe and Eliahu Hazan (1845-

⁵⁵Rabbi Israel Moshe Hazan, *Kerakh shel Romi* (Liorna, 5636-1876), fol. 117c. To see the admiration towards Diderot *et al*, see Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New Yor: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 281ff.

⁵⁶Quited in “Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century,” pgs. 34-35.

⁵⁷Quoted in *ibid.*, pgs. 35-36.

⁵⁸See *ibid.*, pgs. 34-39.

⁵⁹ *Kerakh shel Romi*, fol. 18a.

⁶⁰ *Dell’Autenticita del Pentateuco*, pgs. 11-12.

1908), Joseph Arraves (1847-1925), and the *Rishon le-Sion* or the Chief Sephardic Rabbi in the Holy Land, Rahamim Joseph Franco (1835-1901).⁶¹ According to the illustrious Rabbi Yehudá Bíbas (1780-1852), even an ample Humanist education must precede the study of the Torá.⁶²

Instead of anti-religious secularisms, proposed by the new Jewish “science”,⁶³ Sephardim thinkers proposed a Humanistic focus to Judaism, specifically in accordance to the lines proposed by Vico.⁶⁴ According to this focus, instead of perceiving Christianity in a negative way, one must accentuate that which is common to both monotheistic religions. In a conversation with a Scottish missionary, Bíbas declares his love towards Christians; he adds, “that no Christian loves the Jews as he loves the Christians.”⁶⁵ Joseph Salvador describes the relationship between Judaism and Christianity as the two branches of the same tree.⁶⁶ Hazan extends this metaphor to include the three monotheistic religions: one must nurture that which is common in the three religions; damaging one branch would end affecting the whole tree.⁶⁷ This should not surprise us, henceforth Hazan maintains friendly relationships with Pope Pius IX,⁶⁸ he dedicates him a poem in Hebrew,⁶⁹ and consults with Catholic clergy on legal decisions over inheritance.⁷⁰ The same Rabbi allowed naming a Christian educator as director of a (religious) Jewish school. Among one the arguments that he develops, from a halakhic (legal-religious) point of view, one must prefer a Christian than an assimilated Jew as educator.⁷¹

In sum, faithful to their spiritual and cultural roots, the Sephardim propose a Religious Humanism as an alternative to the Enlightenment, which is essentially violent and essentially anti-religious; therefore, essentially anti-Jewish.

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⁶¹See “Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century,” p. 33.

⁶²For quotes and sources, see *ibid.* pgs. 33-34. Cf. “Early Zionist Ideals Among Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century,” pgs. 60-61.

⁶³The fact that they denominate their studies *Wissenschaft* (“science”) demonstrate that those researchers did not have the slightest clue as to what “science” meant. This methodology is based more in intuition than in scientific research, cf. *Homo Mysticus*, p. X. I suppose that the reason why they did not denominate this method as “criticism” is to impress the reader and invest their conclusions with the authority of exact sciences.

⁶⁴See “Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century,” pgs. 39-45.

⁶⁵Quoted *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶⁶*Paris, Rome, Jerusalem*, vol. 1, p. 336.

⁶⁷See “Sephardim in the Nineteenth Century,” p. 46.

⁶⁸Over his relationship with the Pope, see A. Berliner, *Geschichte der juden*, 2 vls. (Frankfurt a. a., 1893), vol. 2, p. 152.

⁶⁹Printed in the Panflet celebrating his investiture as Chief Rabbi of Rome, *Il Possesso* (Roma: Tip. Menicanti, 1847), pgs. 21-27.

⁷⁰See *Rabbi Yisrael Moshe Hazzan*, pgs. 85-86.

⁷¹See *ibid.*, pgs. 91-93.

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