

SUMMARY

RABBI SAUL LEVI MORTEIRA'S TREATISE "ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION"

by JOSEPH KAPLAN*

HIS LIFE AND WORKS

R. Saul Levi Morteira [(Morteyra or Mortera) (c. 1596–1660)], rabbi and scholar in Amsterdam, was in his time one of the dominant personalities of Sephardic Jewry in Western Europe during the seventeenth century. His position and authority among Sephardic Jews in Amsterdam, his scholarship and original literary contribution all point to him as a key figure in the study of the history of Sephardic Jewry in Western Europe in general, and of Amsterdam in particular.¹ Born in Venice, where he received the

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1. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: 1949), Vol. IV, p. 682ff., or Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden* (Leipzig: 1902), Vol. X, p. 9ff.; M. Kayserling, *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums (MGWJ)* IX (1860), p. 313ff.; Y. Shein and E. Plout, *Toledot HaRav ve HeHakham Shaul Levi Morteira ve-Toledot Hityashvut HaYehudim HaAnusim be-Holland* (Warsaw:

basis for his education from the Jewish community, he became one of the channels by which Renaissance Italian Jewry influenced the Sephardic Jews of Holland.²

Morteira has left us a long line of works in Hebrew, Spanish and Portuguese. Due to the stringent censorship on anti-Christian polemical works, only two of his books were printed — one in his lifetime, though many copies of manuscripts have been preserved. His pupils published fifty of his sermons in a book entitled *Givat Sha'ul* (Amsterdam, 1645), and seven of his sermons in Portuguese were published together with Reuel Jesurun's *Dialogo dos Montes* (Amsterdam, 1767).³ These sermons represent only a small part of those he wrote, most of which have been lost.

The essence of Morteira's literary contribution is in the area of apologetics and anti-Christian disputations. The many still extant copies of these works testify to their wide distribution. First of all, Morteira's treatise against the criticisms of the apostate Sixtus of Siena (1520–1569) which was written in Spanish, should be mentioned: *Respuesta a las objeciones con que el Sinense injustamente calunia al Talmud*.⁴ Morteira also wrote a polemical work in Spanish against a cleric from Rouen which includes his replies to twenty-three queries and one hundred seventy-eight questioning criticisms which the latter had laid before him concerning the New Testament in its entirety.⁵ However, without doubt, the most important of his apologetical

1901). The last mentioned article appeared as the introduction to Morteira's collection of sermons, *Givat Sha'ul*. Both articles are deficient, and have been superseded. Cf. also J. Ch. Wolff, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, II, p. 1021, § 1918; M. Kayserling, *Sephardim*, 1859 according to the name index; idem, *Biblioteca Española-Portuguesa-Judaica*, 1890, p. 74ff. [hereafter, Kayserling (1890)]. For interesting details of his life, see: H. Brugmans and A. Frank, *Geschiednis der Joden in Nederland*, 1940, passim [hereafter, Brugmans and Frank]; W. Ch. Pieterse, *Daniel Levi de Barrios als geschiedschrijver*, etc., 1968, passim [hereafter, Pieterse].

2. Cf., C. Roth, *A Life of Menasseh ben Israel*, 1934, p. 24. Concerning the connection of Sephardic Jews in seventeenth century Holland with the thought of Italian Jewish sages during the Renaissance and Reformation, cf., Y.F. Baer, *Galut* (English trans.), New York, 1947, p. 72ff.

3. It is a known fact that Jesurun's composition was read from during the *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks) holiday in 1624. Morteira's work was printed within it (pp. 45-100) with the title, "Discursos Academicos e Predicaveis que prégarão os Montes."

4. Re. Sixtus, cf.: C. Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 1946, p. 302ff. Morteira's work was written in 1646 [cf. Etz Haim (Amsterdam) ms. no. 48D40]. There are many of Morteira's manuscripts to be found at the Rosenthaliana and Etz Haim libraries in Amsterdam, the Bodleian library at Oxford University, as well as at various other scholarly institutions.

5. "Preguntas que hizo un Clérigo de Ruan de Francia, a las quales respondió el Exelente y Eminentísimo Señor H.H. Saul Levy Mortera" (Etz Haim ms. no. 48D38, folios 87r-181v).

treatises was *Providencia de Dios con Israel* which has sparked debate among scholars. It apparently was written in Portuguese.⁶

Morteira also wrote short works — (h)ascamot, eulogies, missives — primarily in Spanish.⁷ In addition to all these, Morteira wrote a book in Spanish which had almost completely disappeared from the various lists of his writings: *Obstaculos y Oposiciones de la Religion Christiana en Amsterdam*. The rest of our study is devoted to a discussion of this book.⁸

THE TEXT OF *OBSTACULOS Y OPOSICIONES DE LA RELIGION CHRISTIANA EN AMSTERDAM*

The volume has eighty-four leaves, and is preserved in manuscript bound together with the previously mentioned: "The Polemic Against the Cleric from Rouen." This copy — the only one known to us — was made in 1712 by M. Lopez. On its illustrated title page is written: "Compuesto por el Eminentissimo Sor H.H. Saul Levy Mortera Prophefor y célebre predicador de la nación hebrea" [= written by the eminent master, *hakham* (rabbi) Saul Levy Morteira, the famous teacher and preacher of the Hebrew nation]. This work is a theological polemic which describes in narrative form, the meeting between two Portuguese; one who had re-embraced Judaism, already residing in Holland a number of years, and the other a "New Christian" who had just returned from a trip to Rome and was planning to return to Portugal. The story revolves around the theological debate which they hold. Apparently, the meeting took place during August 1617 in Orleans, France. The author calls the Jew, *amigo* (= friend), and the New Christian, *peregrino* (= stranger).⁹ They were happy to have met abroad by chance, and both expressed pride in their Portuguese origins. "Our Portuguese nation excells above all" (p. 1r), says hte "friend" who invites the "stranger" to spend the night in his quarters. The "stranger"

6. The Portuguese source is preserved at Etz Haim library, ms. no. 48A9.

7. Cf. Kayserling (1890), *Ibid*.

8. Cf. Mendes dos Remedios, *Os Judeus Portugueses em Amsterdam*, 1911, p. 107. The author mentions the Etz Haim-Montezinos ms. (no. 48D38) without saying a word about its content.

9. Here, the word "friend" signifies a Jewish rabbi, and was inspired by the use of this word in R. Judah ha-Levi's *Sefer ha-Kuzari*. The word *peregrino* signifies one belonging to another religion (cf., e.g. *Shebet Yehuda*, A. Shohat edition, 1947, p. 29). In Orobio de Castro's work *Prevençiones Divinas contra la Vana Idolatria de las Gentes* ("Divine Admonitions Against the Vain Idolatry of the Gentiles"), the term *peregrino* has two meanings as per its usage in the contemporary literature: a) as a proselyte (*ger*) — *Ni en aquellos tiempos y los presentes los que de las Gentes entraron a la observancia de la Ley de Moseh, se clamaron Israelitas sino Peregrinos* (Etz Haim ms. no. 48B13); b) as a stranger or Gentile (*nokhri*) — *Y siendo Herodes extraño y Peregrino* (*Ibid.*, p. 196).

does not present himself as a New Christian, but this becomes clear to the Jew, and the reader from the beginning of the story.¹⁰

During the night, a lively conversation develops, the “stranger” telling his new friend about his wanderings. He had only just returned from Rome where he had lived four unhappy years (p. 1v). The “friend” recounts that after his departure from Portugal, he spent eight years in France, and had already lived in Holland for seven. The “stranger” was interested in knowing whether Portuguese lived in Holland as well. In Rome he had met many Portuguese who were intent on moving to Venice (*ibid.*). At this point, he asks in astonishment: what is the reason for the dispersal of the Portuguese?¹¹ The “friend” answered him, saying this question is very simple, and that he is not afraid to answer since they are meeting now in a free land: the Portuguese dispersion came about because the Inquisition turned their country into an unkind stepmother; because of its cruelty they are forced to emigrate to other lands.¹²

When the “stranger” heard this, he began to unravel his life story. He was born at Montemór-o-Novo in southern Portugal (west of Evora), an only child of parents who were shopkeepers. One night they were imprisoned by the Inquisition along with thirty-two others — apparently New Christians as well. He was then nine years old, and was taken in by an “Old Christian” neighbour who took care of him for three years. On one occasion he was even a spectator at an *auto-da-Fé* thinking that perhaps he might find his parents there — but all his searching was in vain. After some time, it became known to him that his mother had died shortly after being imprisoned, and his father had been condemned to burn at the stake by order of the Inquisitional tribunal. When he reached adolescence, he was accepted as a pupil at a Jesuit seminary where he studied Latin and theology. He became very devoted to his Jesuit teachers, and they helped and encouraged him in his studies. When he reached the age requiring him to choose his path in life, he decided to ask the help of his teachers in obtaining admittance to membership of the order. But he experienced bitter disappointment: all those around him changed their attitude to him overnight, rejecting his request. His depression did not allow him to continue his studies at the seminary. A few of the monks close to him sug-

10. It can be assumed that by using the words *nuestra Nación Portuguesa*, the “friend” was referring to the Portuguese New Christians. The term *miembros de la Nación* was used as an appellation for them in the period after the edicts of expulsion, and forced conversion. Cf. N. Slouschz, *HaAnusim be-Portugal* (Tel-Aviv: 1932), p. 20; C. Roth, *A History of the Marranos*, 1947 (rev. ed.), p. 74.

11. The above mentioned ms., fol. 20.

12. *Ibid.*

gested that he travel to Rome. They thought that his chances of being accepted as a member of the order would be better there. Four months later he arrived in Rome where he was received by a Spanish cardinal who provided his keep for two years. But all the "stranger's" endeavours were for naught; after four years in Rome, he had to leave empty-handed. He decided to return to Portugal but because of the mental depression which overcame him, he extended his wanderings. Five months had passed, and he was still travelling the roads.¹³

The "friend" suggested that they stay for two days at the inn, and then sail together on the river to Nantes. From there, he would be able to reach his destination by himself. Indeed, two days later, the two of them sailed along the river. During the course of the journey, a new conversation developed between them (p. 4v ff.). The "stranger" told him, that while in Rome he had come across many Portuguese. His host, the Spanish cardinal had advised him to keep his distance from them, and had even told him that these Portuguese had left their country in order to convert (i.e. return to Judaism). At this point, he asked the "friend" whether in the lands in which he resided, i.e. France and Holland, there were Portuguese who 'erred' in the same way. The "friend" replied that the "stranger" had no right to hand down demerits or call them 'errant', since he knows nothing of Judaism. Only here, in a free country, did he have occasion to become acquainted with Judaism.¹⁴ Against this reasoning, the "stranger" argues that his baptism is adequate cause for him to remain a loyal and observant Christian. The "friend" replied that regarding a matter of principle of such importance as that of salvation, this cannot be sufficient reason. Man as a creature with the gift of free will is obligated to find his own way, and to consider the right path by himself.¹⁵ The "stranger" was taken aback by these harsh words. From here on, they were locked in debate on the tenets of Judaism and Christianity — each presenting the stock positions of his religion (see hereafter). Reading between the lines,

13. The autobiographical description is provided there, p. 2r ff. He does not specifically mention the name of the order. It is simply called *Compañia* (p. 3r), but the description as a whole mentions the prevailing mood in the Portuguese monasteries of the Jesuit order at the end of the sixteenth, beginning of the seventeenth centuries (and cf. hereafter). Neither is the Jesuit seminary where the "stranger" studied mentioned there. At that time, the Jesuits maintained eight seminaries in Portugal. The most prominent of them, were those in Lisbon, Coimbra, and Evora. It can be assumed that the "stranger" studied at the seminary in Evora which was the closest to his place of birth. In 1585, 1,400 seminarians were studying there. Cf. J. Brocker, *La Compagnie de Jesus*, 1919, p. 217ff.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 5r.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 5v.

we learn something of the "friend's" life in Portugal. He had lived at a place near Lisbon, by the Tejo river, until one day he was caught by the Inquisition along with other of the *gente da nação* (men of the nation = Jews), and brought on board a ship in chains. We do not know more than this concerning his Portuguese past.¹⁶

The "friend" invokes hard words against Christianity, and the "stranger" accepts them with constraint, remarking that he does not harbour any grievance against him. Regarding himself, the "stranger" states that he was born a Christian, and has no intention of converting. He is willing to debate since it is a kind of practical amusement easing the passage of time during the journey.¹⁷ At the height of the debate, he added that he does not relate to what was said, as if it were an argument. His intention is simply to present questions, and hear the "friend's" replies.¹⁸ As the conversation neared its end, the "stranger" thanked the "friend" for his sincere words; they had shown him the true way. The "stranger" sees in their meeting a sign of Divine Providence. In the confines of his heart, he had thought about such matters while on his way to Portugal — and had arrived at the same conclusions, though fearing to reveal them to a soul. Before reaching Nantes, as they were about to take leave of one another, the "friend" invited the "stranger" to visit him at his home should he have occasion to be in Amsterdam.¹⁹

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE NARRATIVE

Without doubt, this work represents a specific historical reality. Certainly, the author wanted to deal with a few of the contemporary problems which concerned Sephardic Jewry in Western Europe. We may assume that Morteira composed the story at the beginning of the 1620's when he still clearly remembered his journey to France, and his conversations with Elijah Montalto. It was these experiences that spurred him to write this work. Similarly, and undoubtedly, Morteira would not have spoken of France as a free country nor would the "friend" have permitted himself to speak so freely against Christianity, after the events and trials of the 1630's which overtook the New Christians of Rouen; these factors strengthen our assumption that this work was written prior to the 1630's.²⁰

16. *Ibid.*, p. 51v.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 10r.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 37r.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 84r ff.

20. Re. the events in Rouen, see: C. Roth, "Les Marranes à Rouen," *Revue des Études Juives (REJ)*, 88 (1929), p. 124ff; also: I.S. Révah, "Auto-biographie d'un Marrane," *REJ*, n.s. 19 (1961), pp. 41-130.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the activities of the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal reached their pinnacle, with the emigration of New Christians from the Iberian peninsula attaining new impetus. Many of them sought refuge in the *Midi* near the Spanish border.²¹ In these circumstances, a small New Christian community was established at St. Jean de Luz, whereas at Rouen, Nantes, Lyons, Montpellier and La Rochelle more substantial communities were established by New Christian exiles already in the second half of the sixteenth century. Formally speaking, it was forbidden for Jews to settle in France, the New Christians being forced to conceal their origins, as well as suppress their feelings. In official documents (from 1550 and later) which detail the conditions of their settlement in France, they are defined as “marchands et autres Portugais, appelés nouveaux chrétiens” or “Portugais, Espagnols et autres bon catholiques.” But in fact, the authorities knew of their attachment to Judaism. Overlooking this point was convenient both for them and the New Christians.²²

Various facts brought forth in Morteira's story reveal colourful details on the life of the Portuguese New Christians in the France of those times: the “friend” tells about a religious disputation between French merchants and a Portuguese, held at La Rochelle during the fair there. Present, were Catholics, Calvinists, and Lutherans who contended with the Portuguese on the veracity of the religion. He knew how to reply to them accordingly, also saying: “First come to agreement among yourselves, after which you can dispute with me.”²³ At another point, the “friend” reveals to the “stranger” that he had brought a Hebrew Bible in his valise for a friend living in Bordeaux (we can assume that he was also Portuguese).²⁴ In

21. Cf. Roth (above, n. 20), p. 143. Re. the migration to France from Portugal in this same period, cf., I.S. Révah, “Le premier établissement des Marranes portugais à Rouen (1603–1607),” *Mélanges Isidore Levy*, 1955, p. 541 [hereafter Révah (1955)]; see also: Millás Vallicrosa, *Sefarad*, 19 (1959) pp. 142–44, which has a description of the migration of many Catalan New Christians to Bordeaux in 1608. The author's words adds to the general picture.

22. The researched studies of the socio-political status of the New Christians in sixteenth and seventeenth France are very rich. See for example: G. Cirot, *Les Juifs de Bordeaux, leur situation morale et sociale de 1550 à la Révolution*, 1920; Z. Szajkowski, *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research (PAAJR)*, 27 (1958), p. 83ff.; idem, *Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume*, 1964, p. 107ff.

23. Cf. above mentioned ms, p. 7v ff.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 23r. Révah has already pointed to the great benefit which grew out of the Hebrew Bible's translation into Spanish. (Ferrara, 1553). The Spanish (Hebrew) Bible was widely distributed among the New Christians — in particular those settled in France. Cf. Révah (1955), p. 547; Révah also commented on the courageous Jews who in the seventeenth century went from Holland to France, and even

addition we learn that there were close ties between Portuguese New Christians living in France and Jews that had settled in those countries that had permitted it. The fairs served not only as a focus for economic activity but also as a suitable occasion for establishing social connections between Spanish and Portuguese New Christians, and Jews living in Western Europe.

Clearly not all of the New Christians who had fled from the Iberian peninsula, and the Inquisition's tentacles intended to re-embrace Judaism. Doubts gnawed at the hearts of many of them, giving way at times to apathy towards their religion, and even outright apostasy. However, the "stranger" is sufficiently well informed to state that the *gente de nação* (in other words, the New Christians), while still in their land of birth thought of returning to Judaism. But the "friends" position is more balanced and realistic. He argues that there is no telling what are the heartfelt wishes of the New Christians living in countries under the sway of the Inquisition. Under conditions of suppression, it is difficult to prove one's loyalty to Judaism but his past experience told him that the New Christians were not always inclined to go over to Judaism once they had managed to escape the clutches of their persecutors.²⁵ Morteira certainly knew of his mentor's (Montalto of Paris) correspondence with the learned doctor Pedro Rodrigues, and his wife Isabel de Fonseca (Montalto's in-law). Pedro Rodrigues who had succeeded in fleeing with his family to St. Jean de Luz, remained faithful to Catholicism for reasons of convenience. Actually, he was apathetic to any religious belief whatsoever. In 1612-13, Montalto carried on a rather interesting correspondence with his relatives. He sent them a note in which he attempted to convince them to re-embrace Judaism — but all his efforts were fruitless.²⁶ We have before us here a typical example of an intense controversy which visited the New Christian dispersion in those days; those faithful to Judaism would try to return those who had gone astray, and were eaten by doubts and fears, to the Jewish fold.

This work, like many others by Morteira which are still in manuscript form, belongs to religious polemical literature which was initiated in the seventeenth century by the Sephardic Jewish communities of Western

to Spain in order to strengthen the New Christians' belief in Judaism [(*REJ*, n.s. 18 (1959), p. 58.)

25. The above mentioned ms., p. 10v.

26. Cf. C. Roth, "Quatre Lettres d'Elie de Montalto," *REJ* 87 (1929). Roth published four letters written in Portuguese which Montalto sent to his above mentioned relatives. Undoubtedly Morteira was influenced by the letters' contents. A few of the arguments which are brought forth in the letters are raised by the "friend" — sometimes even with similar wording. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 151, 153-54, 163, etc.

Europe. This body of literature is intended for perplexed New Christians who had known the bitter experience of the Inquisition, and had grown weary of Catholicism. On the other hand, they had difficulty accepting Judaism, knowing of it from hostile Spanish and Portuguese writings. From this perspective, the great importance of studying the above mentioned literature is clear. Its contents tell us much about the nature of the community for which it was meant.²⁷ When Morteira describes what happened to the "stranger" at the time he requested admittance to the Jesuit order (which was denied despite all his efforts), once again a social reality which had been known to him from his contacts with the New Christian community is revealed before his very eyes. Scholars have already discussed the entrance of New Christians into Christian religious orders in the Iberian peninsula up to the fifteenth century, prior to the Spanish expulsion, and Portuguese mass forced conversion.²⁸ Even then they were admitted only after great obstacles had been surmounted; their admittance and absorption into the monasteries was made a burdensome matter. These difficulties increased in the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries with the spread of the *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) statutes, which were implemented in many institutions including churches and monasteries throughout the Iberian peninsula.²⁹ In late sixteenth century Portugal, there are an increasing number of orders, whether royal or episcopal which repeat the formula: "nāo serem providas de beneficios pessoas de naçāo do Christaōs novos."³⁰

27. Cf. Immanuel Aboab's missives of 1626-27 to his friends and relatives at La Bastide in the south of France, or those at Antwerp (as per Roth's conjecture) which attest to the whole range of problems which arose in the meeting of New Christians who had left Spain but preferred to continue living as Christians — and professing Jews. The missives were published by Roth: C. Roth, *Jewish Quarterly Review (JQR)* n.s. 23 (1932), pp. 121-62, and cf. A.S. Halkin, "A Contra Christianos by a Marrano," *M.M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume*, 1953, English section, p. 399ff.

28. See for example: H. Beinart, "The Judaizing Movement in the Order of San Jerónimo in Castile," *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, 7 (1961), pp. 167-92; A.A. Sicroff, *Les Controverses de Statutes de "Pureté de Sang" en Espagne du XV au XVIIe siècle*, 1960; idem, "Clandestine Judaism in the Hieronymite Monastery of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe," *Studies in Honor of M.J. Bernadete*, 1965, p. 89ff., and of S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, XIII, 1969, p. 84ff.

29. Cf. Sicroff (above, n. 28). Re. the limitation to admitting New Christians to religious and military orders in Portugal during the reign of Philip II, cf. J.L. D'Azevedo, *Historia dos Christaōs Novos Portugueses*, 1921, p. 150ff. Interesting documents pertaining to this subject have been published by Alves: F.M. Alves, *Os Judeus no distrito de Bragança*, 1925, p. 189ff.

30. Cf. Alves (above, n. 29) *Ibid.* Cf. also *Ibid.*, p. 191ff., re. the decision of the Council of Sé against Jeronymo da Fonseca, a New Christian who was invested as a priest in Rome.

On January 23, 1588, Pope Sixtus V informed the Portuguese delegate to the Holy See that instructions had been handed down freezing the priestly investitures of novices suspected of judaizing until the Inquisition had had an opportunity to investigate them.³¹ These limitations raised special problems in the Jesuit order. Despite the fact that to a large extent this order was established because of the intensive activity of many New Christians who joined Loyola (perhaps because of this), including such famous monks as Diego Lainez and Juan de Polanco, and the fact that the "limpieza" statutes stood in complete contradiction to Jesuit principles, there were nevertheless a number of Jesuits who supported the eradication of New Christian influence from the order. Already in 1552, the admission of New Christians to the Jesuit order in Alcalá de Henares was curtailed by order of Loyola himself. Despite this, it can be pointed out, that Loyola felt that Christians of Jewish origin should be tolerated. When their admission to the order in Spain raised problems, he tended to transfer them to Rome where they would not be suspected of judaizing.

In 1572 when Francisco Borja, the superior general of the Jesuit order passed away, there were many monks in the order who opposed the appointment of Juan de Polanco in his place because of Polanco's Jewish origins. This opposition was especially sharp among Portuguese Jesuits. During the Belgian Everari Mercurian's stewardship of the order, they constantly demanded the removal of New Christian members. Their main argument was that these people blackened the good name of the Jesuits, with everyone inclining to view the order as a center for judaizing. In 1592, Claudio Acquaviva, Jesuit provincial in Spain decreed that New Christians would no longer be accepted into the order in his country. In December 1593, a deliberation was held at the Fifth General Congregation of the Jesuits, at which it was decided that the *limpieza de sangre* statutes would become one of the factors determining acceptance into the order. The Jesuit Pedro de Rivadeneira wrote a special treatise against the introduction of these statutes in the order, reiterating his opposition during the deliberations of the Jesuit General Congregation of 1608 at Rome. But all his efforts towards abrogating the decree were of no use.³² In light of this situation, it was only natural that many New Christians that had sincerely desired acceptance into the order, left Spain and Portugal to try

31. These instructions were reconfirmed by Pope Clements VIII on October 18, 1600; and cf. D'Azevedo (above, n. 29), p. 151ff.

32. Concerning the problem of *limpieza de sangre* in the Jesuit order, cf.: Sicroff (above n. 28), p. 270ff., and M. Mir, *Historia interna documentada de la Compañía de Jesús*, 1913, I, p. 332ff. Rivadeneira's work is entitled: "Las razones que se me ofrescen para no hazer novedad en el admitir gente en la compañía."

their luck in Rome, since the 'fear' of a judaizing problem did not exist there, nor were impediments placed before them there. The New Christians' condition worsened in 1593, when decisions were taken requiring the observance of *limpieza de sangre*. In principle, these statutes blocked their entrance into the order.

Certainly, Morteira knew such cases. Undoubtedly he came across Portuguese New Christians more than once, who had gone to Rome to gain acceptance into ecclesiastical orders or to serve in other priestly capacities. We may assume that he knew what happened to the poet Reuel Jesurun (formerly Paulo de Pina) who had left Lisbon, and journeyed to Rome with a view towards entering the order there. But Montalto who was living in Livorno convinced him to return to the faith of his forefathers.³³ We learn from a question sent to Morteira in Amsterdam and his *responsum* to it, of the reason for his involvement in the New Christians' struggle to be accepted into ecclesiastical orders. Apparently this struggle had disturbed many in the New Christian community. The manuscript of the *responsum* in Morteira's own hand, is to be found in a collection of rabbinical *responsa* and judgments written by sages from Eretz Israel, the Levant, Turkey, Italy, and elsewhere during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is available at the Department of Manuscripts and Archives in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.³⁴ The following is the text of the question:³⁵

"May our Rabbi teach us: A certain Jew from Amsterdam was approached by a Gentile from Portugal with the following offer: 'There is a certain business which will bring you a great deal of profit every year, if you agree to take it on, as follows: I live in the kingdom of Portugal and, as you know, the inhabitants of our kingdom frequently require permission of the Pope for various things — to marry certain relatives who are forbidden to them by their law; to build altars/churches (Heb. *bamot*, lit. high places) for their images;³⁶ to initiate priests into service; to confirm the conferring

33. Cf. Roth (above, n. 26), p. 141; idem (above, n. 10), p. 312. Re. Reuel Jesurun, cf.: J.S. da Silva Rosa, *Geschiedenis der Portugeesche Joden te Amsterdam*, 1925, p. 34; Brugmans and Frank, p. 220ff.; Pieterse, p. 65ff. It turns out that Morteira had a close association with him.

34. No. Heb. 8^o 2001; Morteira's *responsum* is to be found there on pp. 164a-176b. See F. Kupfer, *Przegląd Orientalistyczny*, Warsaw, 1956, pp. 97-99, where the question and segments of the *responsum* from *Zera' Anashim* appear. This is a manuscript collection of early and later rabbinical *responsa* with two hundred and eighty-seven sections. (Cf.: Hayyim Yosef David Azulai, *Shem ha-Gedolim ha-Shalem*, II). I would like to thank Dr. Kupfer for turning my attention to his above mentioned article, as well as for his kind assistance in clarifying its contents.

35. The above mentioned ms. p. 164a.

36. In the text published by Kupfer it says: "לאלילים".

of the rank of bishop/cardinal (Heb. *hegmon*) to people to whom this has been granted,³⁷ and similarly with regard to various other ranks within their church, each one of which requires the dispensation and will of the Pope. (Among these Christians are a number of *conversos* of the seed of Israel, who abandoned God and forgot him and are now requesting permission from the Pope to allow their sons to become priests and their daughters nuns.) I, who dwell there, will receive all these requests and refer them to you, because I know that you have a good Christian friend in Rome, whom you can ask to intercede to arrange these dispensations, called bulls,³⁸ on your behalf. You will lay out your own money to cover the costs of this intercession and, in return, receive both payment for your own services as an intermediary, and interest on the money which you have laid out — and you will receive all this easily and without much trouble, simply in return for asking your friend who lives there to do these things, and *your store-houses will be filled with plenty.* This Jew, realizing that *finding a livelihood is as difficult as the parting of the Red Sea*, decided that, if this arrangement did not involve anything which was prohibited by Jewish Law, he would gladly accept it. But if it was found to involve anything which entailed even a hint of the prohibited or the idolatrous, then he would reject it *in toto*. May you then our teacher, instruct us how to behave with regard to this matter, and what its character and status is according to the law of our Torah: whether one ought to keep oneself faraway from it, or whether to seize this opportunity, and not neglect it — and may he receive his reward from heaven.”

We have before us an account of an Amsterdam Jew who found the way to earn a “great reward” in return for requesting a Gentile acquaintance of his from Portugal to ask another Gentile in Rome to intercede with the Pope. The intention was to obtain a papal bull that would ease the restrictions on Christians of Jewish origin (“*conversos* of the seed of Israel who abandoned God”) from serving in ecclesiastical functions whether as priests “at various other ranks of the Church” or as monks and nuns. Out of fear that perhaps there would be even a “hint of prohibition”, he addressed the question to Rabbi Morteira.

At the beginning of his *responsum*, the Rabbi took up the prohibitory aspect in this case:³⁹

“There are four possible difficulties involved in this enterprise: First, that the one involved violates the prohibition, ‘thou shall place no stumbling block before the blind’⁴⁰ — and this with regard to matters involving idolatry; second, that he violates the law, ‘that their names (i.e. false gods) shall

37. *Ibid.*: “יתונה”.

38. *Ibid.*: “יבולים”.

39. The above mentioned ms., pp. 164a-b.

40. Lev. 19:14.

not be heard on your lips"⁴¹ according to Rabbinic interpretation, 'that your actions not cause their names to be mentioned *by others*,' as explained in the first chapter of tractate *Avodah Zarah*,⁴² as the Gentile who receives the papal dispensation via his intervention, then goes and recognizes a false god; third, that by giving his money to an idolatrous church they enjoy the benefit thereof; fourth, that it is as if he does business in idolatrous objects, and we know that the money paid for such objects to a Jew is banned (Heb. *assur be-hana'ah*, lit., prohibited from benefit). Moreover, he gains profit from this money, and it is forbidden to derive profit out of anything which is banned."

After considering the matter, Morteira attempts to prove step by step that there is nothing harmful in this endeavour nor is there reason to fear from the slightest hint of prohibition. After all, not one of the above-mentioned prohibitions occurs in this case. Characteristic of Morteira's method is the reasoning he raises at the end of his *responsum* against the "third reason":

"This being so, we have shown that the money paid to the Pope, to his scribes, and to his priests in order to obtain these dispensations is used neither to buy idols nor to purchase offerings for them, nor to adorn them, but are used by these individuals for food and drink, and other of their needs. Therefore, this arrangement is completely permitted, it not involving any benefit to idolatry whatsoever."⁴³

The situation described here is remarkably compatible to the thought process at work in Morteira's treatise: 1) New Christians who neglected their Judaism, and wanted to be accepted to ecclesiastical office or into monastic orders encounter numerous difficulties; 2) In Rome things were easier for the New Christians; 3) A Gentile resides in Rome who has some influence with the Pope—a detail which reminds us of the Spanish cardinal in Morteira's story, who gave the "stranger" lodging in Rome. We would not be exaggerating if we were to conjecture that this question served him as background for the story described in "Arguments Against

41. Ex. 23:13.

42. BT *Av. Zar.* 6b.

43. The above mentioned ms., pp. 174a-b. In the text published by Kupfer there are some small changes. Additional evidence of New Christians in Christian monasteries during the seventeenth century is to be found in a *responsum* of R. Azariah Figo (*Zera' Anashim*, Husyatin: 1932, para. 23). But in contrast to the previous question, these New Christians did not abandon God nor forget Him. R. Azariah views the request with great gravity, but he is lenient, pointing out the difference between this situation and the one in the question to Morteira. Cf. S. Assaf, "The Conversos of Spain and Portugal in the *Responsa* Literature," (Hebrew), *Me'assef Zion* V (1933), p. 46ff.; and Baron (above, n. 28), p. 148.

the Christian Religion.”⁴⁴ As has been stated above, Morteira’s pupils mentioned that he had written a book of *responsa* — but it has not been preserved; only this *responsum* and references to some of Morteira’s other *responsa* have come down to us.⁴⁵

However, perhaps from the *responsum*’s content we will be able to understand the meaning of: “from the stranger who is not our brother” which appears in the pupils’ preface; there is reason to believe that the pupils intended to say that Morteira received questions concerning New Christian matters — “*conversos* of the seed of Israel who abandoned God,” who were regarded as Gentiles. Perhaps this is the basis for the appellation *peregrino* (= Gentile or stranger) which serves as Morteira’s “nickname” for the New Christian in his story (see above, fn. 9).

THE POLEMIC’S CONTENT AND OUTSTANDING MOTIFS

Undoubtedly, the main aim of Morteira’s treatise was to be didactic and educational. Morteira had the “stranger” asking the question that disturbed New Christians in the Iberian peninsula, and resulted in many of them being driven into complete despair and alienation from Judaism; we may ask: Why did important and respected individuals believe in Christianity? Why is the Inquisition so powerful? Why is Israel’s punishment so onerous? Why has Israel’s exile continued for such a long time? In the long and exhaustive responses of the “friend”, Morteira attempts to remove the New Christians’ doubts: Israel is still with the Lord; this exile, hardest of all, will end with the Redeemer’s coming. Although, in the polemic before us, there are no essential innovations, and the reasoning brought up by both sides is to be found in most of the Judeo-Christian polemical literature of the Middle Ages, the text merits survey. From it, we can learn something of the socio-historical reality of the period.

Here is the essence of the Christian arguments: The “stranger’s” words are attested by the devotion of so many kings, Popes, notables and scholars to Christianity. On the other hand, only a few “stupid” people hold to

44. Kupfer (above, n. 34) mentions that this *responsum* was composed during Morteira’s early years in Amsterdam when his authority was still limited. In concluding, he emphasizes that he does not consider himself qualified to give judgement in the matter, saying that it merits the attention of great rabbis.

45. Among the sources mentioning this work is *Be'er ha-Golah, Even ha-Ezer* (*Shulhan Arukh*), section 16, para. 1. See additional references to those of Morteira’s *responsa* which have not come down to us in: R. Judah Aryeh Modena, *Ziknei Yehuda; responsa*, ed. S. Simonsohn (Jerusalem: 1956), sections 54, 97; R. Jacob Sasportas, *Ohel Ya'akov* (Amsterdam, 1737), section 17.

Judaism. The “friend” replies that there were many more emperors, kings and philosophers who during the course of time believed in foolishness worse than Christianity. Presently the combined numbers of Turks, Moors, barbarians, and pagans is greater than the number who believe in the religion of Jesus. God chose Israel not because it is a mighty nation, but because of its quality.⁴⁶ No one undermines Mosaic law — it is accepted by one and all — Christians and Moslems. Such is not the case concerning the New Testament and the Koran.⁴⁷ But the proliferation of Christian denominations weakens belief in Mosaic law.⁴⁸ Regarding the “stranger’s” argument that while Mosaic law is valid, after Israel deviated from the right path, God brought Christianity to take its place — the “friend” replies that God does not alter His will, nor is His law dependent on the deeds of Israel for it is eternal.⁴⁹ Concerning the “friend’s” argument that the Inquisition prohibits the reading of the Torah in Spain because it fears its influence, the “stranger” replies that the Inquisition acts in this manner out of concern that the lofty words of the Torah will not be properly understood by the masses. Despite the fact that the Inquisition ruined his parents’ lives, he is willing at this stage to defend it. He even adds that any criticism against the Inquisition is of no use since it has been in a dominant position for years, and continues to be so. Concerning the victories of the *Suprema* (of the Inquisition), the “friend” responds that God delivered the Jews into its hands because of their sins. It happened many times in their history, that they were delivered into the hands of their enemies. After their enemies had fulfilled the Lord’s purpose, He annihilated them.⁵⁰

A great deal of space has been allotted to criticism of such Christian tenets as the Holy Trinity and the Messiah who supposedly has already appeared to provide salvation for sinful mankind. The “friend” attempts to prove to the “stranger” that these tenets contradict what is written in the Holy Scriptures, and are alien to the Prophets’ will.⁵¹ The “friend” sees

46. *Arguments*, p. 6ff., and cf., Isaac Orobio de Castro’s polemic with Limborch: *De Veritate Religionis Christianae*, Gouda, 1687, p. 136. It is difficult to accept the authors’ determination that Orobio’s tract against Limborch is the first open attack on the Evangelion written by a Jew in a European language. Similarly sharp attacks in Latin, Spanish and Portuguese are to be found primarily in manuscripts, and Orobio undoubtedly knew them well. The novelty of the Orobio-Limborch polemic was in its being printed.

47. *Arguments*, fol. 7r.

48. *Ibid.*, fol. 7v.

49. *Ibid.*, fol. 8r ff.

50. *Ibid.*, fol. 14r ff.

51. *Ibid.*, fol. 15v ff.

the supreme Providential hand in the New Christians' sufferings, their ostracism by Christian society in the Iberian peninsula, and even their intention to be integrated into this society now—as well as the *limpieza de sangre* statutes which curtail their steps. The Providential hand watches over Israel eternally, so it will not be lost or swallowed up by the Gentiles.⁵² Because Israel had sinned in their Land, and worshipped other gods, the Jews were banished from their Land, and forced under duress to worship the Gentiles' gods in the Diaspora. The New Christians have been given an overall historical function: their sufferings serve as atonement for the sins of the Jewish people as a whole. Like many other writers from the Sephardic community, Morteira is inclined to consider Spain and the New Christians' condition in it as being of crucial importance in understanding the fate of the Jews.⁵³

In opposition to the Christian distinction between Israel and the flesh, and that of the spirit, the "friend" states that the promises which Israel received from its God were not exclusively corporal in nature. No other people has been promised greater spiritual things. No other community has been bestowed with kings, prophets, and priests with whom God had spoken face to face or in visions. The characters of the New Testament are all coarse people lacking in wisdom and understanding.⁵⁴ Their testimony cannot be accepted as reliable. They chose for themselves a dead Jew, and made him into God. On the other hand, the priests of Israel were ordered to keep their distance from the deceased.⁵⁵ The "friend" completely rejects the Christological interpretations of Isaiah 53, proving that what is written there does not refer to the Messiah, but rather to the Jewish people.⁵⁶ Instead of the peace promised for the Messianic Age, Christianity brought murder, wars, and sectarian struggle.⁵⁷ Regarding the "stranger's" argument that this time God did not say to the Jews how long their exile would continue, supposedly testifying to God's abandonment of His people, the "friend" replies that such a conclusion is not called for: the length of exile is a divine secret; redemption can be realized. The lengthy exile provides Israel with the time to atone for all of its sins.⁵⁸

52. *Ibid.*, fol. 36v.

53. *Ibid.*, fol. 39v.

54. *Ibid.*, fol. 43r ff.

55. *Ibid.*, fol. 43v ff.

56. *Ibid.*, fol. 44v ff.

57. *Ibid.*, fol. 48r.

58. *Ibid.*

Concerning the spiritual character of Christianity, and its emphasis on the salvation of the soul, and the spiritual benefits which it promises, the "friend" says that such things only try to blur the fact that since Christianity's appearance, the world has been filled with much suffering.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the good things that have been promised to Israel on earth shall be provided. The "friend" proves that the prophecies which speak of the last Temple were not fulfilled in the time of the Second Temple. In this period filled with wars, the Temple lacked *Urim* and *Thummim*.⁶⁰ The redemption of Israel will come when the dispersal of the Jewish people is absolute. This has not yet come about since in the meantime certain lands have been discovered in which no Jews have lived.⁶¹ The Messianic prophecies refer to the period of the Roman empire, whose successor is the Christian empire, headed by Spain.⁶² Spain which because of its transgressions has not enjoyed the benefits of the Jews' presence, who with their wisdom have enlightened the free countries of Europe. Spain will recompense God for the innocent blood spilled.⁶³

Morteira undoubtedly knew the anti-Christian polemics well, his mentor Montalto having had a clear influence on him. He could interpret Isaiah 53 as seen from the "friend's" statement regarding the chapter's significance.⁶⁴ Morteira did not make much use of talmudic and rabbinic literature in this treatise. This phenomenon is not surprising concerning authors such as Montalto, Orobio de Castro, and others. They were already adults when they left the Iberian peninsula, and had not had sufficient opportunity to study the Talmud as needed, or to acquire a basic understanding of rabbinic literature. As regards Morteira, he received a Jewish education in Venice, and later served as a rabbi. Morteira's treatise was intended for the New Christians whose knowledge of the Talmud was miniscule, and deficient in general. He thought that he could bring the New Christians closer to the precepts of Judaism by providing a new commentary of the Holy Scriptures, which were known to them from Christian texts and translations. This situation can perhaps provide the reason for the wide

59. *Ibid.*, fol. 54r ff.

60. *Ibid.*, fol. 63r ff.

61. *Ibid.*, fol. 69r. Cf. further on; this motif concerning the absolute dispersal of the Jews took on new impetus at the end of the 1640's, and the beginning of the 1650's with the publication of Antonio de Montezinos' account in Menasseh ben Israel's book, *Esperança de Israel* ("The Hope of Israel"). Cf.: L. Wolf, *Menasseh ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell*, 1901.

62. *Ibid.*, fol. 79v.

63. *Ibid.*, fol. 11r.

64. *Ibid.*, fol. 44r ff. Cf.: Eliau Montalto, "Tratado sobre o Principio de Cap. 53 de Jesayas," Etz Haim-Montezinos ms. no. 49A1, and see above n. 26.

distribution among Sephardic Jews in Western Europe of *Sefer Hizzuk ha-Emunah* by the Karaite Isaac ben Abraham Troki. This book already was translated into Spanish in 1621, and during the course of the seventeenth century additional translations were made into this language as well as Portuguese. *Sefer Hizzuk ha-Emunah* fit the needs of the former New Christians who had been forced to base their major arguments on the Hebrew Bible alone due to their limited knowledge of the Mishna and the Talmud.⁶⁵

In conclusion, there is no doubt as to Morteira's influence on the apologetical literature of Sephardic Jewry in Western Europe. One who delves into the works of Menasseh ben Israel, Isaac Cardoso, Isaac Orobio de Castro, and others, will find many motifs taken from Morteira's writings which left their imprint on the Sephardic dispersal. The former New Christians who had soaked up the culture of Catholic Spain, and wandering on the paths of life, eaten by doubts, were inclined towards philosophical currents that were Catholic in character — despite their known revulsion towards that religion. In these writings, they found answers to their troubles, and could make use of them in their desperate attempts to save the few survivors from amongst their New Christian brothers who remained in the Iberian peninsula. These same New Christians still preserved their attachment to Judaism, notwithstanding more than one hundred years of Inquisitional persecution.

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65. In the Etz Haim-Montezinos library are a number of translations of *Sefer Hizzuk ha-Emunah* in manuscript in Spanish, Portuguese, French and Dutch.