EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 6: Reading across Cultures: The Jewish Book and Its Readers in the Early Modern Period, 2009, The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

From Apologetics to Polemics

Isaac Orobio de Castro's Defences of Judaism and their Use in the French Enlightenment

Adam Sutcliffe, King's College London, UK

ABSTRACT: This presentation explores the use by non-Jews in eighteenth-century France of controversialist works written primarily for manuscript circulation within the seventeenth-century Sephardic communities of the Netherlands. In response to sustained theological doubts regarding Judaism posed by Sephardim deeply conditioned by having lived as outward Catholics in the Iberian peninsula, several community leaders in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, such as the doctor and controversialist Isaac Orobio de Castro (c.1617-1687), authored trenchant attacks on Christian doctrine, in particular emphasizing the enduring validity of Jewish law and the superiority of Jewish biblical exegesis. French translations of some of these texts - which circulated in Paris and beyond in the early eighteenth century, and were first published in the 1770s – were read by non-Jewish philosophical radicals as novel and piquant critiques of Christian orthodoxy. However, it is misleadingly simple to regard these texts, as some historians have done, as 'Jewish sources' for the Enlightenment. Through a close examination of the inflections of translation, editing and presentation in one key text, I will seek to explore the complex transformations in the reading practices that were invited or made possible in these two very different cultural contexts.

This presentation is for the following text(s):

- Divine Warnings against the Vain Idolatry of the Gentiles
- Israel Avenged

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop

EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 6: Reading across Cultures: The Jewish Book and Its Readers in the Early Modern Period, 2009, The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Adam Sutcliffe, King's College London, UK

Histories of the intellectual interaction between Jews and Christians in the early modern period have generally been written in an ameliorative mode, highlighting the gradual rise of a more civil tone in theological exchanges over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Using the texts presented here, however, I would like to outline a more complicated itinerary: not one from 'polemics to apologetics', as Ralph Melnick has characterized the textual history of Jewish-Christian relations in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, but in anything rather the reverse. A number of scholars – most notably Silvia Berti and Richard Popkin – have noted the use by Enlightenment thinkers, in France particularly, of anti-Christian texts written by prominent members of the Sephardic community of seventeenth-century Amsterdam. While at first sight this appears as a notable instance of Jewish influence on the development of Enlighenment irreligion, the ways in which these Jewish texts were deployed are extremely fluid and ambiguous. A close study of this process holds the potential of offering particularly rich insights into the complexities of 'reading across cultures' in the eighteenth century.

The physician and philosopher Orobio de Castro (c.1617-1687) was one of the most interesting seventeenth-century Sephardic interlocutor with Christians, and his writings were also the most widely diffused of their kind among Christians in the following century. Born in Braganza, a leading centre of Portuguese crypto-Judaism, Orobio acquired a scientific and medical training in Spain before settling in Amsterdam in 1662, where he was prominent in engaging both with Jewish heretics, such as Spinoza's associate Juan de Prado, and with progressive Christians such as Johannes Bredenberg and Philip van Limborch. His *Prevenciones Divinas* is his most pointed attack on the doctrines of Catholicism. In his introduction to the text, Orobio states that he first presented his arguments in a debate with some Carmelite friars, most probably in the Southern Netherlands. The work circulated widely, in manuscript form only, among Sephardic Jews in Amsterdam, for whom it served to shore up communal confidence and offered ready counter-arguments to any lingering theological doubts that might

linger in the minds of members of the community who had difficulty throwing off the Catholic perspectives they had internalized on the Iberian peninsula.

Orobio's writings appear to have been introduced into France by the French deist Jean Lévesque de Burigny (1692-1785), who acquired from Jewish contacts copies of his anti-Christian texts while in Amsterdam in 1720. Soon afterwards he and others introduced them, often very freely translated, adapted, or spliced with other identified material, into circulation in the clandestine French philosophical underground. This was the leading medium of radical philosophical interchange in the early French Enlightenment, and Orobio's arguments in this context provided a particularly piquant spectacle of the undermining of Christianity by Jewish exegetical logic. Several copies have been located of a manuscript titled *Dissertation sur le Messie*, which was based on a loose translation of the early chapters of Orobio's *Prevenciones*, though framed by introductory and closing chapters clearly written by a non-Jew (perhaps Burigny himself), which combine to cast an ironic inflection on the main body of the text.

In 1770 there appeared the first printed edition of Orobio's anti-Christian writings, in French translation, under the title *Israel Vengé*. Presented straightforwardly as Orobio's own work, the publication was in fact sponsored by the radical materialist and atheist the Baron d'Holbach, with other members of his Parisian circle. The overwhelming majority of this text was in fact drawn from the earlier clandestine manuscript translations. The first section of *Israel Vengé* is largely taken from a manuscript titled *La Divinité du Jésus-Christ détruite*, itself a free translation from an essay by Orobio on the 53rd chapter of Isaiah (which in turn was largely based on a section on this topic in his *Prevenciones*). The second and final section, meanwhile, is simply a printing, under the same title, of the *Dissertation sur le Messie*. Holbach's text carefully follows the rationalist logic of Orobio's critique of the Trinity and his exposure of the contradictions he sees as besetting this doctrine. However, through various subtle twists of language the French version discreetly but unmistakably distances itself from Orobio's Spanish original, lightly ridiculing his scriptural fealty while at the same time deploying it as an anti-Christian argument. The use of Orobio's arguments in the French Enlightenment certainly did not necessarily imply any underlying acceptance of them, or even admiration of them. Orobio himself wrote at the intersection of Jewish and Christian cultures; in his appropriation by D'Holbach we encounter an instance of ventriloquistically multi-layered and attitudinally indeterminate intercultural reading.

Bibliography

Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*

(Oxford: Littman Library, 1989)

Adam Sutcliffe, 'Judaism and Jewish Arguments in the Clandestine Radical Enlightenment', in Gianni Paganini, Miguel Benítez and James Dybikowski, eds., *Scepticisme, Clandestinité et Libre Pensée* (Paris: Champion, 2002) 97-113

Miguel Benítez, 'Orobio de Castro et la littérature clandestine', *La Face cachée des lumières: Recherches sur les manuscrits clandestins de l'âge classique* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996) 147-54

Silvia Berti, 'At the Roots of Unbelief', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995) 555-75

Richard H. Popkin, 'Jewish Anti-Christian Arguments as a Source of Irreligion from the Seventeenth the the Early Nineteenth Century', in Michael Hunter and David Wootton, eds., *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 159-81

Ralph Melnick, *From Polemics to Apologetics: Jewish-Christian Rapprochement in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (Assen, Neths.: Van Gorcum, 1981)

Ira O. Wade, *The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophic Ideas in France, 1700-1750* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938)

Alan Charles Kors, *D'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976)

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop

EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 6: Reading across Cultures: The Jewish Book and Its Readers in the Early Modern Period, 2009, The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Divine Warnings against the Vain Idolatry of the Gentiles

Prevenciones Divinas contra la Vana Idolotria de las Gentes

1669-1675

Translated by Adam Sutcliffe, King's College London, UK

Composed in Amsterdam between 1688 and 1675; circulated in manuscript only.

Original: London, British Library, MS Harley 3430. Copyists: Joseph and Samuel Pereira, 1679. 146 numbered folio sheets, written on both sides in a tight, neat hand.

[20 other MS copies have been located – see Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford: Littman, 1989) 436-9.]

[This extract consists of the opening and closing sections of the first chapter – folios 5r-5v, 6v in BL MS]

Title Page:

Divine Forewarnings

Against

The vain Idolatry of the gentiles

Book One

Proof that God forewarned Israel in the five books of the law about everything that the Christians would invent, so that, with these warnings, they could not accept such errors.

By the Doctor Isaac Orobio de Castro, Graduate in Metaphysics and Medicine from the

universities of Alcala and Seville: Doctor to the Chamber of the Duke of Medina-celi and of the Borgoña family of King Philip IV. Medical Professor and advisor to the King of France at the illustrious university of Toulouse.

Faithfully and correctly copied from the original by Joseph and Samuel Israel Pereira in Amsterdam

Year of the creation of the world 5439 which corresponds to the year 1679.

...

Chapter 1

Proof that in the five books of the law God warned Israel about all the idolatries of the gentiles, about the philosophers, and about the trinity that the Christians would invent.

First of all, in response to the proposed argument, in no sense was it necessary that God our Lord should express himself, as the divine oracle, on the Christian sect, naming it, and identifying it as preparing to impose itself on humanity, nor go so far as identifying its false doctrines, rites and sham mysteries, just as he did not do this with respect to the fictitious deities of the ancient pagans: he did not speak of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Bacchus, Venus and the others, nor did he mention the superstitions of their false cult, although this idolatry was no less famous or widespread, and in no small terms harmful to Israel; but this has passed, as (will) the present, as the lord God forewarned his beloved people in the divine law that is the archive and sum of all prophecy: there they were clearly taught enough not to accept and to dismiss the many idolatries and superstitions that could be invented by the wickedness or the ignorance of men in all ages, and how this was to become very diverse; in opposition to all these the divine wisdom was able to and knew to give a general doctrine, refuting all these with general precepts - whatever evil might be invented or feigned in the unfolding of time, declarations that his mighty hand or his divine love created the heavens and the earth, humanity and all other creatures, and explanations of how he put in place this universe in all its perfection, thus excluding the vain opinions of the future philosophers of the gentiles, so that in the time of Abraham our father, as later against the Greeks and the Romans' defences of the eternity of the world, this was denied through the principle that in the beginnning God created the heavens and the earth, a truth that is repeated several times in the holy law.

Passing through the intermediate eras and arriving at the divine gift of Sinai, which intimated to the people God's ineffable unity, that God, the lord of Israel, was one God, which is a doctrine repeated many times by the creator, and which does not require

arguments, and because of the danger of being caught up with human reason, natural proofs that qualify this are excluded, particularly as almost all the people in the universe claim truth while obfuscating with various errors; with this divine conclusion the mightly lord locked the gate to the children of Israel, so that they should not enter into the false credit of a multiplicity of Gods, and he excluded not only the past sects of the Chaldeans, Greeks and Romans, and all the other nations that in different parts of the world worship these or many Gods, but also in the present the Christians, who claim to split God and divide him into three propositions, or truly distinct people, which is the same as dividing him into three individuals, because a number is no different than several combined unities, and the number three, as three unities, and thus nobody who believes in the unity of God, if they examine his own words, can believe in three Gods, because this is impossible, and is incompatible with the natural mode of speaking that is our own interior understanding; to say that God is three, and thus that there are three Gods, and that there is not one God, not a unified God but a triple God, whereas the holy lord inscribed our hearts teaching us that there is only one God, without any kind of superfluity, plurality or division; in this quiet way Israel was warned by the divine oracle not to assent to the triple Deity put forward by Christians, as there was no need to make God triple, or double, as God was essentially one, and no more.

...

Israel was also warned in many places in the sacred scripture that God did not depend on another in his divine actions, and was the master of all that he might wish to do, and whoever told God what to create or to do was his advisor only, since just as he is independent in his existence, so is he in his actions, which cannot be distinguished from his existence; thus it cannot be possible to believe the Christian, who proposes that God the father sent God his son to the world to die for mankind, as is affirmed in an infinity of places in the Gospels, and by Paul, and the acts of the apostles, where it also says that I do not follow my own will, but that of he who sent me; I follow the will of my father who sent me to you, and I will return to he who sent me, his only divine son, so that he might suffer. It is not valid to say that he sent him as a man because he sent him to the world so that he should make himself into a man, and then that he sent him as a God so that he should become man and that before this he was not man but God (as they [Christians] claim), and then that he sent him in a divine state, or as God, and he was sent or commanded to come and redeem, and yet he depended in this work of redemption on his father, and could not act independently, as is also admitted again and again; thus how could an Israelite belive in such a meek, obedient God, so dependent in his being and in his actions, being taught by the same all-powerful God that he is independent in his being and his actions and without dependence or alien advice: a person could not stumble into such weak unbelief when he is strengthened by the divine doctrines which teach the opposite to this opinion, which is so injurious to the essence of his creator.

EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 6: Reading across Cultures: The Jewish Book and Its Readers in the Early Modern Period, 2009, The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Prevenciones Divinas contra la Vana Idolotria de las Gentes

Divine Warnings against the Vain Idolatry of the Gentiles

1669-1675

Prepared by Adam Sutcliffe, King's College London, UK

Composed in Amsterdam between 1688 and 1675; circulated in manuscript only.

London, British Library, MS Harley 3430. Copyists: Joseph and Samuel Pereira, 1679. 146 numbered folio sheets, written on both sides in a tight, neat hand.

[20 other MS copies have been located – see Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford: Littman, 1989) 436-9.]

[This extract consists of the opening and closing sections of the first chapter – folios 5r-5v, 6v]

Title Page:

Prevenciones Divinas

Contra

La vana Idolotria de las gentes

Libro primero

Preuvase que todo quanto se avia de inventar en el Christianismo, previno Dios a Israel en los sinco libros de la ley para que avertido no pudiesse admitir tales errores.

Por el Doctor Ishak Orobio de Castro Cathedratico de Metaphisica y Medicina en las

universidades de Alcala y Sevilla: Medico de Camara del Duque de Medina-celi y de la familie de Borgoña del Rey Philipe IV. Professor Medico y conseiero del Rey de Francia en la insigne universidad de Tolosa.

Sacado de su original fiel y correctamente por Joseph y Semuel Israel Pereira en Asterdam

Año de la criacion del mundo 5439 que corresponde al Año de 1679.

...

Capitulo 1

Prueva que en los cinco livros de la ley previno Dios a Israel contra todas las Idolatrias de las gentes contra los philosophos y contra la trinidad que avian de inventar los christianos.

Lo primero se responde al propuesto argumento que de ninguna manera era necessario que Dios nuestro Señor expresase en el divino oraculo la Christiana secta nombrandola con el mismo nombre que se avian de imponer los hombres ni llegar a individuar sus falsas doctrinas ritos y fingidos misterios, como tan poco lo hize en las fabulosas deidades de la antigua gentilidad, ni hablo de Saturno, Jupiter, Marte, Baco, Venus, los demas, ni hizo mencion de las supersticiones de su falso culto, aviendo sido no menos celebre esta idolatria ni menos universal y no poco nociva a Israel; mas assi esta passada, como la presente las previno el señor Dios a su amado pueblo en la ley divina qu es archivo y summa de toda la prophesia, ally vocalmente fueron enseñados de quanto basto para no admitir y arrojar de si quantas idolatrias y supersticiones podia inventar, la malicia o la ignorancia de los hombres en todos los tiempos, y como estas avian de ser mui diversas, pudo y supo la divina sabiduria dar doctrina general que se opusiete a todas, y controdise esse con preceptos generales, quanta maldad podia inventar y fingir la sucecion de los tiempos, dixoles que su poderosa mano o su divino querer avia criado los cielos y la tierra, el hombre y todo el resto de las criaturas, y explicoles del modo que puso en su perfeccion todo este universo, con que excluso las vanas opiniones de los futuros philosophos de las gentes, que assi en tiempo de Abraham nuestro padre, como despues de los griegos y Romanos defendieron la eternidad del mundo, negando ser hechura del infinito opifice [?], en el principio crio Dios los cielos y la tierra, verdad que varias veces – repite en la sagrada ley.

Descando las edades intermedias y llegando al divino bono de Synay intimo al pueblo su inefable unidad, oie Israel el señor Dios fuio Dios uno, es doctrino que por repetida tantas veces del criador no necessita de alegaciones, y por alcançada por la misma

hombre de la raçon son escusadas [?] pruevas naturales que la califiqueren, particularmente confesando ya esta verdad aun que ofuscada en varios errores, casi todas las gentes del universo; con esta divina conclusion serro el poderoso señor la puerta a los hijos de Israel para que no entrasen en el falso credito de la multiplicidad de deidades y excluso no sola las sectas passadas de Caldeos, Griegos, y Romanos, y de todas las demas naciones, que en diferentes partes del mundo adoran hasta oi muchos dioses, sino tambien en la presente de los christianos, que afectando creer la unidad de Dios la parten y dividen en tres supuestos o personas realmente distintas, que es, lo mismo, que en tres unidades; porque no es otra cosa el numero que muchas unidades juntas, y el numero tres, que tres unidades; y assi aun que creen la unidad de Dios se se implican en sus mismas palabras pues confiesan tres que son Dioses, por que es imposible, ni lo sufre el natural modo de hablar que significa nuestro concepto interior, decir son tres Dios, sino tres Dioses, y assi no son uno, ni unidad si no triphsidad, laqueal el señor bendito aparto de nuestros coraçones ensenando nos que es solo uno sin algun genero de inultitud, pluralidad, o division, con que en esta parte quedo Israel bien advertido por el divino oraculo para no assentir a la triplicada Deidad que lo propone el Christiano, sin que fuesse menester de dararle la trinidad, ni la dualidad, sino solo que es essencialmente uno y no mas otro.

...

Tambien fue advertido Israel en muchos lugares de la sagrada escriptura que Dios no depende de otro en su divino obrar, el señor todo lo que quiso hizo, y quien fue su consegero, quien dira a Dios que haze y que obra, por que como es independiente en su ser, lo es en su obrar, que no se distinge de su mismo ser; pues como creera al Christiano que le propone que Dios padre envio el Dios su hijo al mundo a morir per los hombres, assi lo afirma en infinitos lugares el Evangelio, y Paulo, y actos de los apostolos, y el mismo que dize yo no hago mi voluntad, sino la de el, que me envio, yo hago la voluntad de mi padre que me envio a vos, yo vuelvo al que me envio, el Dio su hijo unigenito al mundo, para que padeciesse. Ni vale de decir que lo envio en quanto hombre porque lo envio al mundo para que se hiciesse hombre, luego lo envio en quanto Dios para que se hiciesse hombre y antes de ser lo no era aun hombre sino Dios (come fingen) luego lo envio en aquel estado de Dios o en quanto Dios, y si fue enviado, o mandado que viniese a redimir ya dependia en esta obra de la redemcion de su padre y no podia obrar independiente de otro, como el mismo lo confiesa a cada passo, pues como creere el Israelita Dios tan humilde, tan obediente, tan dependiente en su ser y obrar estando enseñado por el mismo Señor Dios todo poderoso, que el es independiente en su ser que su obrar es sin dependencia ni ajeno consejo: no puede tropeçar en tan debil laico fortalecido con la divina doctrina que le enseña lo contrario de opinion tan injuriosa a la essencia de su criador.

Archive: London, British Library: MS Harley 3430

EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 6: Reading across Cultures: The Jewish Book and Its Readers in the Early Modern Period, 2009, The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Israel Avenged

Israel Vengé

1770

Translated by Adam Sutcliffe, King's College London, UK

London [Amsterdam?], 1770. Pp. 248.

[This translation is of the entirety of the first chapter of the second section of this text – pp. 200-204 in the French original]

Dissertation on the Messiah

Chapter 1

In which it is proved that God made known to the Israelites in the five books of the law everything that they needed to do so as not to be seduced by the nations, and not to abandon the true religion to follow that of the Christians.

God schooled the Israelites so well in the law that they had to follow that he judged it unnecessary to warn them of that which Jesus Christ would introduce several centuries after Moses. The pagans among whom this chosen people lived followed many religions and worshipped a plurality of Gods incompatible with the unity of the true God. Nowhere in the sacred text does one see that the Israelites were warned that false Gods would rise up capable of seducing them. The only precaution that the Lord took to protect his people from false doctrines consisted in the interdict that he made on their worship of Gods unknown to their ancestors, and in the order in which he commanded them to punish as false prophets all those who told them that they should abandon the holy laws and precepts that He had ordered them to follow in perpetuity. These sacred orders needed to suffice for the Israelites to condemn all dogmas that were not entirely in conformity with the irrevocable decrees of the Divinity.

The divine wisdom, foreseeing that there would emerge one day a religion that would

establish a Trinity, and that a doctrine contradictory to his divine commands could smother that which Moses had taught the children of Israel to follow in perpetuity, advised Moses to assure them that he [God] was and always would be single, and independent of everything; that his existence could not be separated or divided, however hard one might try to explain such a division. Consequently, this doctrine, according to which three are only one, is untenable, because if the son is begotten by the father, it follows absolutely that he is dependent on him as an effect is dependent on its cause; there being nothing more natural than the dependence of a son on his father: this, according to the laws of philosophy, makes equality absolutely impossible. It is consequently impossible that the son should be God, because he is not what he is because of himself, but in order to exist he depends on another being.

The Israelites, who believe in the unity of God and follow his irrevocable commandments, will never be able to consider him as dependent. They will never be able to worship a created God, produced by another; they are too well-bred, without offending the true God, to accept such an impious Doctrine, which would render them unworthy of the glorious distinction that the divine majesty had bestowed on them among all the nations. I am the Lord your God and there is no other before me (which clearly proves that he has not been created by another) and there will be no other after me. This formal declaration must suffice to convince Christians of the falsity of an opinion they try to demonstrate using even more contrived arguments and even more awkward distinctions than the doctrine itself that they have instituted. The theologians who do all they can to support this doctrine are reduced to saying that these three divine people that they worship are only one single and identical God, and that God is triple in one unity.

It is an effect of Divine Providence that Christians have always persisted in holding this absurd opinion; it is an impenetrable barrier that prevents Jews from accepting a law contrary to that which Moses gave them. Perhaps they might have allowed themselves to be won over if the Christians had chosen to get rid of a principle that is strongly repellent to good sense, and to accept the doctrine of Arius, who well understood that the divinity of Jesus Christ would strengthen the Jews in the religion of their fathers and would prevent them from knowing or following unfamiliar Gods.

The holy text teaches the Israelites that God depends on nobody. The Lord has acted as he has wished, he has not had advisors; it is from his divine will and his infinite science that his sacred and irrevocable commandments emanate. How could one be persuaded that he had come to Earth? How could one dare say without blashpemy that God has died, or that he has sent his son with instructions on what he should do for the salvation of humanity, this son not being dependent on him, as he is the same God as his father, and as such not dependent on anybody? One finds nothetheless in the Gospels, in the Acts of the Apostles and in St. Paul, that this human God does not do what he wishes,

but follows the will of his father. I do, he says, that which my father, who has sent me to you, orders me; I return to him who sent me to you.

If God sent his son to the world in the figure of a mortal creature in order to bring about the redemption that the Prophets had promised to Israel, one could not consider him other than as a being in the form in which he was encountered. His power being limited, as were his days, and nobody being able to believe without impiety that the Divinity could be limited, or could not be absolutely independent, acting on its own accord, it is therefore impossible that the Israelites could recognize, in the face of signs so directly contrary to those that their redeemer must possess, the person who the Christians worship, and would like to be revered by the Lord's chosen people.

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop

EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 6: Reading across Cultures: The Jewish Book and Its Readers in the Early Modern Period, 2009, The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Israel Vengé

Israel Avenged

1770

Prepared by Adam Sutcliffe, King's College London, UK

Isaac Orobio de Castro, *Israel vengé. Ou exposition naturelle des prophéties hébraïques que les Chrétiens appliquent à Jésus, leur prétendu Messie. Par Isaac Orobio.*

Londres [Amsterdam?], 1770. Pp. 248.

[Included in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*]

[This extract is the entirety of the first chapter of the second section – pp. 200-204]

Dissertation sur le Messie

Chapitre 1

Dans lequel on prouve que Dieu a fait connoître aux Israélites dans les cinq livres de la loi tout ce qu'ils devoient faire pour ne point se laisser seduire par les nations & pour ne point abandonner la véritable religion pour suivre celle des chrétiens.

Dieu a si bien instruit les Israélites dans la loi qu'ils doivent suivre, qu'il a jugé inutile de les avertir de celle que Jésus Christ devoit introduire plusieurs siecles après Moïse. Les payens parmi lesquels ce peuple choisie vivoit, s'étoient fait des religions & adoraient une pluralité de Dieux incompatible avec l'unité du vrai Dieu. On ne voit dans aucun endroit du texte sacré que les Israélites seroient avertis qu'il s'éleveroit de fausses Divinités propres à les séduire. Toute la précaution que le Seigneur a prise pour garantir son peuple des fausses doctrines consiste dans la défense qu'il lui fait d'adorer des Dieux que leurs peres n'ont point connus & dans l'ordre qu'il lui intime de punir comme de faux Prophetes tous ceux qui lui annonceroient qu'il devoit s'écarter des divines loix & des préceptes qu'il leur avoit ordonné de suivre à perpétuité. Ces ordres sacrés doivent

suffire aux Israélites pour condamner tous les dogmes qui ne sont pas entiérement conformes aux décrets irrévocables de la Divinité.

La sagesse divine prévoyant qu'il devoit se former un jour une religion qui établiroit une Trinité; qu'une doctrine contradictoire à ses ordres sacrés pourroit étouffer celle que Moïse avoit enseignée aux enfans d'Israél pour la suivre à perpétuité, a recommandé à Moïse de les assurer qu'il étoit & qu'il seroit éternellement seul & indépendant de tout: que son être ne pouvoit être séparé ni partagé de quelque maniere qu'on s'efforçât d'expliquer cette division. Par conséquent cette doctrine en vertu de laquelle trois ne sont qu'un est insoutenable, parce que si le fils est engendré par le Pere, il faut absolument qui'il en dépende comme l'effet de sa cause; n'ayant rien de plus naturel que la dépendance d'un fils envers son pere: ce qui dans les regles de la Philosophie empêche absolument l'égalité. Il est par conséquent impossible que le fils soit Dieu, puisqu'il n'est pas celui qui est par lui-même & que pour exister il dépend d'un autre être.

Les Israélites qui croiront l'unité de Dieu suivant ses ordres irrévocables ne pourront jamais le supposer dépendant. Ils ne pourront jamais adorer un Dieu créé & [d'(?)]un autre produit; ils sont trop bien instruits que sans offenser le vrai Dieu ils ne peuvent jamais recevoir une Doctrine aussi impie & qui les rend indignes de la glorieuse distinction que sa Majesté divine a fait d'eux entre toutes les nations. Je suis le Seigneur ton Dieu & il n'y en a point d'autre devant moi (ce qui prouve évidemment qu'il n'a point été créé par un autre) & il n'y en aura point d'autre après moi. Cette déclaration formelle doit suffire pour convaincre les Chrétiens de la fausseté d'une opinion qu'ils s'efforcent de prouver par des explications plus difficiles & par des distinctions plus embarrassantes que la Doctrine même qu'ils ont établie. Les docteurs qui mettent tout en oeuvre pour la soutenir, sont réduits à dire que ces trois personnes divines qu'ils adorent ne sont qu'un seul & même Dieu & que ce Dieu est triple dans une unité.

C'est par un effet de la Providence Divine que les chrétiens se sont toujours obstinés à soutenir cette opinion absurde; c'est une barriere impénétrable qui empêche les Juifs d'admettre une loi contraire à celle que Moïse leur a donnée. Peut-être se seroint-ils laissés séduire si les chrétiens avoient voulu se défaire d'un principe qui répugne si fort au bon sens, & s'attacher à la doctrine d'Arius qui a fort bien connu que la Divinité de Jésus Christ fortifieroit les Israélites dans la religion de leur peres & les empêcheroit de connoître ni de suivre des Dieux qu'ils n'avoient point connus.

Le texte sacré apprend aux Israélites que Dieu ne dépend de personne. Le Seigneur a fait ce qu'il a voulu, il n'a point eu de conseillers; c'est de sa Divine volonté & de sa science infinie qu'émanent ses ordres sacrés & irrévocables. Comment peut-on se persuader qu'il soit venu sur terre? Comment oseroit-on dire sans blasphêmer que Dieu est mort ou qu'il a envoyé son fils avec des instructions sur ce qu'il devoit faire pour le salut de l'homme, ce fils n'etant point dépendant de lui, puisqu'il est le même Dieu que

son Pere & qu'en tant que tel il ne peut dépendre de personne? On trouve cependant dans l'Evangile, dans les Actes des Apôtres & dans St. Paul que ce Dieu mortel ne fait point ce qu'il veut, mais qu'il suit la volonté de son pere. Je fais, dit-il, ce que mon Pere qui m'a envoyé vers vous m'ordonne; je retourne vers celui qui m'a envoyé vers vous.

Si Dieu a envoyé son fils au monde sous la figure d'une créature mortelle pour opérer la rédemption que les Prophetes avoient promise à Israël, on ne pouvoit le considérer que comme un être tel qu'on le connoissoit. Son pouvoir étoit borné aussi bien que ses jours & personne ne peut croire sans impiété qu'il puisse y avoir des bornes dans la Divinité, qu'elle ne soit pas absolutement indépendante & qu'elle n'agisse point par elle même; il est par conséquent impossible que les Israélites puissent reconnoître à des marques si fort opposées à celles que doit avoir leur rédempteur, celui que les chrétiens adorent, & qu'ils voudroient faire révérer au peuple choisi du Seigneur.

Publisher: London, 1770
Archive: available in Eighteenth Century Collections Online

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop