

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS: A TANGLED HISTORY

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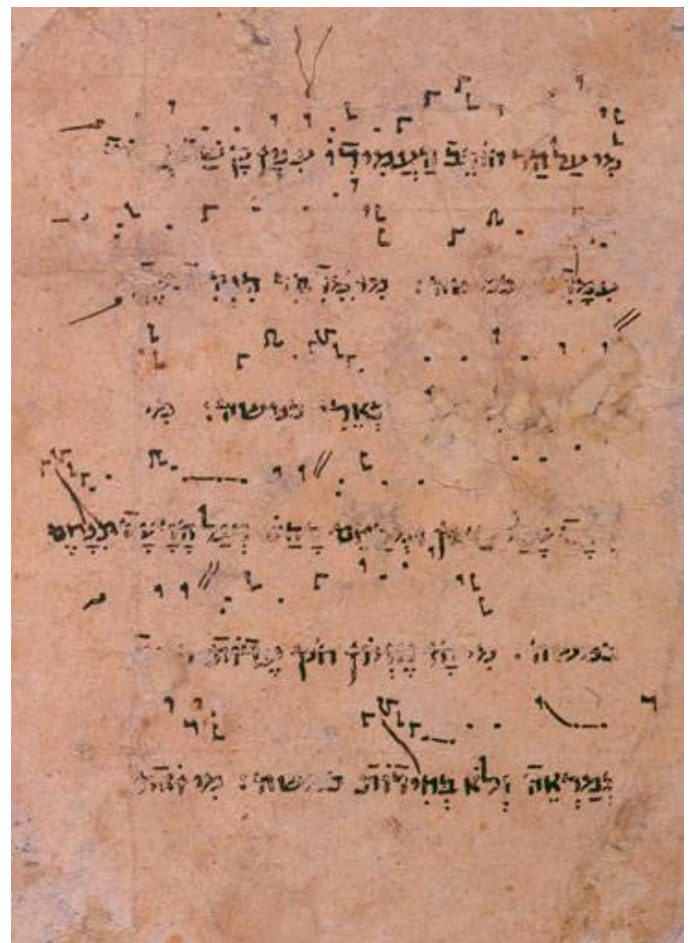
Session 7: The Reformation

Obadiah the Proselyte (11th-12th centuries)



Left: Part of Obadiah's memoir, preserved in the Cairo Genizah

(Cambridge University Library)



Right: Obadiah's musical notation of a Jewish liturgical poem about Moses.

For a recording of the song, visit:
<https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/content/mi-al-har-horev-manuscripts-obadiah-proselyte>

THE REFORMATION AND COUNTER-REFORMATION

Martin Luther, *On Translation*

First, you know that under the papacy it is not only taught that the saints in heaven intercede for us—even though we cannot know this as the Scripture does not tell us such—but the saints have been made into gods, and that they are to be our patrons to whom we should call. Some of them have never existed! To each of these saints a particular power and might has been given—one over fire, another over water, another over pestilence, fever and all sorts of plagues. Indeed, God must have been altogether idle to have let the saints work in his place. Of this atrocity the papists themselves are aware, as they quietly take up their pipes and preen and primp themselves over this doctrine of the intercession of the saints. I will leave this subject for now—but you can count on my not forgetting it and allowing this primping and preening to continue without cost.

John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (1543)

First, in regard to the sacraments, ceremonies devised by men were placed in the same rank with the mysteries instituted by Christ. For seven sacraments were received without any distinction, though Christ appointed two only [baptism and the eucharist], the others resting merely on human authority. Yet to these the grace of God was held to be annexed, just as much as if Christ had been present in them. Moreover, the two which Christ instituted were fearfully corrupted. Baptism was so disguised by superfluous additions, that scarcely a vestige of pure and genuine baptism could be traced; while the holy supper was not only corrupted by extraneous observances, but its very form was altogether changed.

What Christ commanded to be done, and in what order, is perfectly clear. But in contempt of his command, a theatrical exhibition was got up, and substituted for the supper. For what resemblance is there between the mass and the true supper of our Lord? While the command of Christ enjoins believers to communicate with each other in the sacred symbols of his body and blood, the thing seen at mass ought more properly to be termed excommunication. For the priest separates himself from the rest of the assembly, and devours apart that which ought to have been brought forward into the midst and distributed. Then, as if he were some successor of Aaron, he pretends that he offers a sacrifice to expiate the sins of the people.

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), *Letters*

The heretics have made their false theology popular and presented it in a way that is within the capacity of the common people. They preach it to the people and teach it in the schools, and scatter pamphlets that can be bought and understood by many; they influence people by their writings when they cannot reach them by preaching. Their success is largely due to the negligence of those who should have shown some interest, and the bad example and the ignorance of Catholics, especially the clergy, have made such ravages in the vineyard of the Lord. Hence it would seem that our Society should use the following means to end and cure the evils which the Church has suffered through these heretics.

Menasseh ben Israel (1604-1657), *A Humble Adresse* [to Oliver Cromwell]

It is a thing most certain, that the great God of Israel, Creator of Heaven and Earth, doth give & take away Dominions and Empires, according to his own pleasure; exalting some, & overthrowing others: who, seeing he hath the hearts of Kings in his hand; he easily moves them whithersoever himself pleaseth, to put in execution his Divine Commands. This, my

Lord, appears most evidently out of those words of Daniel, where he, rendring thanks unto God, for revealing unto him that prodigious Dream of Nebuchadnezzar, doth say: 'Thou that removest Kings, and sets up Kings'. And elsewhere, 'To the end the living might know, that the Highest hath dominion in Mans Kingdome, and giveth the same to whom he please'. Of the very same mind are Thalmudists likewise, affirming that a good Government, or Governor, is a Heavenly Gift, and that there is no Governor, but is first called by God unto that dignity: & this they prove from that passage of Exodus: 'Behold I have called Bazalel by name', &c. [...] This the Examples of great Monarchs make good; especially of such, who have afflicted the people of Israel: For none hath ever afflicted them, who hath not been by some ominous Exit, most heavily punished of God Almighty; as is manifest from the Histories of those Kings, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, Epiphanius, Pompey, & others. And on the contrary, none ever was a Benefactor to that people, & cherished them in their Countries, who thereupon hath not presently begun very much to flourish. In so much that the Oracle to Abraham (I will blesse them that blesse thee, and curse them that curse thee) seemeth yet daily to have its accomplishment. Hence I [...] could not but for myself, and in the behalf of my Countrey men, make this my humble address to your Highness, & beseech you for Gods sake, that ye would [...] vouchsafe to grant, that the Great & Glorious Name of the Lord our God may be extolled, and solemnly worshipped and praised by us through all the bounds of this Common-wealth; & to grant us place in your Countrey, that we may have our Synagogues, and free exercise of our Religion. I nothing doubting, but that your Clemency will easily grant this most equitable Petition of ours. [...] since you have so great knowledge of, and adore the same one onely God of Israel, together with us. [...]

First and Formost, my Intention is to try, if by Gods good hand over me, I may obtain here for my Nation the Liberty of a free and publick Synagogue, wherein we may daily call upon the Lord our God, that once he may be pleased to remember his Mercies and Promises done to our Fore fathers, forgiving our trespasses, & restoring us once again into our fathers Inheritance; and besides to sue also for a blessing upon this Nation, and People of England, for receiving us into their bosomes, and comforting Sion in her distresse.

My second Motive is, because the opinion of many Christians and mine doe concur herein, that we both believe that the restoring time of our Nation into their Native Countrey, is very near at hand; I believing more particularly, that this restauration cannot be, before these words of Daniel Chap. 12. ver. 7. be first accomplished, when he saith, 'And when the dispersion of the Holy people shall be compleated in all places, then shall all these things be completed': signifying therewith, that before all be fulfilled, the People of God must be first dispersed into all places & Countreys of the World. Now we know, how our Nation at the present is spread all about, and hath its seat and dwelling in the most flourishing parts of all the Kingdomes, and Countreys of the Worlds, as well in America, as in the other three parts thereof; except onely in this considerable and mighty Island. And therefore this remains onely in my judgement, before the MESSIA come and restore our Nation, that first we must have our seat here likewise.

My third Motive is grounded on the profit that I conceive this Common-wealth is to reap, if it shall vouchsafe to receive us; for thence, I hope, there will follow a great blessing from God upon them, and a very abundant trading into, and from all parts of the World, not onely without prejudice to the English Nation, but for their profit, both in Importation, and Exportation of goods. [...]

The fourth Motive of my coming hither, is, my sincere affection to this Common-wealth, by reason of so many Worthy, Learned, & Pious men in this Nation, whose loving kindnesse & Piety I have experience of: hoping to finde the like affection in all the People generally, the more, because I alwaies have, both by writing and deeds, professed much inclination to this Common-wealth; and that I perswade my self they will be mindfull of that Command of the Lord our God, who so highly recommends unto all men the love of strangers; much more to those that professe their good affection to them. For this I desire all may be confident of, that I am not come to make any disturbance, or to move any disputes about matters of Religion; but onely to live with my Nation in the fear of the Lord, under the shadow of your protection, whiles we expect with you the hope of Israel to be revealed.



Menasseh ben Israel, portrait by Rembrandt

Further reading

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003)

David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton University Press, 2011), Chapter 5: 'Mingled Identities'