

RABBI JONATHAN EIBESCHUETZ AND THE ALLEGED JEWISH-CHRISTIAN SECT IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AMSTERDAM

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Some forty years ago, I was browsing through the stacks of the Day Missions Library at Yale Divinity School and chanced upon a German missionary periodical, *Saat auf Hoffnung* (*Seed of Hope*), that attracted my attention. After leafing through the first twenty-six volumes, an essay published in 1890 by the distinguished Orientalist and Protestant theologian, Gustav Dalman, caught my eye.¹ It told an incredible story.

In 1772, a Jew from Amsterdam named Simon approached Pastor Burgmann of the Lutheran Church in London, seeking, as it were, spiritual asylum. He was knowledgeable in matters Christian and claimed that he had been baptized in Amsterdam by a secret society of Jewish-Christians who were outwardly Jewish but secretly Christian. Simon arranged for Burgmann to enter into correspondence with that secret society. The possibility that an entire group of Jews had converted to Christianity in one fell swoop intrigued Burgmann. Ultimately, Burgmann referred the matter to the Moravian Brethren, an evangelical and pietistic Protestant community with an office in London. The head of the London office, Benjamin Latrobe, referred the matter to the elders of the Moravian Brethren in Herrnhut, Germany. A Moravian Brethren missionary, Christian Solomon Dober, was assigned to Amsterdam in 1773 in order to make contact with the secret Jewish-Christian society. These efforts proved fruitless, and in 1777 Dober was

* For Prof. David Berger, distinguished scholar, teacher, colleague, and humanitarian אשר יראתו קודמת לחכמתו. Doubtless, Shakespeare had you in mind when he wrote (I am paraphrasing):

He is not only witty in himself, but the cause that wit is in others.
This essay is a revised and annotated version of a paper read at the Israel Academy of Sciences in Jerusalem on December 9, 1997, at the international symposium in memory of Prof. Gershom Scholem on "The Sabbatian Movement and its Aftermath: Messianism, Sabbatianism, and Frankism."

¹ Gustav Dalman, "Dokumente eines christlichen Geheimbundes unter den Juden in achtzehnten Jahrhundert," *Saat auf Hoffnung* 27 (1890): 18–37.

recalled. The case was ultimately closed and in 1780—with no further word of the secret Jewish-Christian society—Burgmann and Latrobe sent whatever official documents they still retained about the society to Herrnhut, where they were deposited in the archive. According to Dalman, this included five documents sent by the society in Amsterdam to Burgmann. Dalman visited the Herrnhut archive, located the documents, and published them.

The contents of the five documents are as follows:

- (1) a history of the society;
- (2) customs and practices of the society;
- (3) a prayer;
- (4) a letter of warning from the society to Simon, reminding him that he would be expelled from the society should he continue to openly espouse Christianity;
- (5) a letter from the society to Burgmann, urging him to honor the practices and beliefs of the society. In effect, Burgmann was being asked to allow Simon to openly practice Judaism, while strictly adhering to Christian belief.

In common, all these documents reflected the theology of the society, which was that all Jews must secretly convert to Lutheranism, though outwardly they must remain observant Jews until the final redemption. Any Jew who openly espoused Christianity by being baptized in a church, or by participating in Holy Communion at a church, forfeited his membership in the society and sinned grievously.

Clearly, the most important of the documents is the one that tells the history of the society.² The original German version of the history of the society was sent in 1773 from the society in Amsterdam directly to Burgmann in London. We present it here as it was translated from the original German into English by Latrobe.³ All words and phrases

² The German original, sent from Amsterdam to London, is preserved in the Herrnhut archives, together with its envelope addressed to Burgmann. A transcription of the original document into readable German script (done, perhaps, by Latrobe) is also available in the archives.

³ Herrnhut, *Unitätsarchive* (henceforth, UA), R.16.6.4, fols. 1–18. Latrobe's translation was published (almost in its entirety) by Paweł Maciejko, "A Jewish-Christian Sect with a Sabbatian Background Revisited," *Kabbalah* 14 (2006): 95–113. Indeed, we are indebted to Maciejko for being the first to publish a transcription of Latrobe's translation. Alas, Maciejko's edition is marred by a series of misreadings and/or typos. For starters, an entire folio was omitted. What appears as folio 16 (on p. 110 of Maciejko's essay) is, in fact, folio 17; folio 16 was omitted. Some typical misreadings are (L = Latrobe; M = Maciejko):

in Hebrew script appear that way in the original German document and often (but not always) in Latrobe's translation. Where they are lacking in Latrobe's translation, we have entered them in brackets, which mark other editorial insertions as well.

[fol. 1]

Amos 5:13 [לכן המשכיל בעת ההיא ידם]

Most worthy teacher and preacher of the Holy Gospel:

[They first excuse themselves for not writing sooner, and add:]

We cannot refrain from sending to you the prayer which was humbly offered unto the Lord of Grace, at the time when it was resolved in our company to open to you the whole secret, as it is the first that one ventured to do it, and it is done with the unanimous consent of all our

Fol. 1:

L: But woe unto themselves, they have to their shame drawn back, they have slain the prince of life, and they, the children of Israel...

M: But woe unto themselves, they, the children of Israel...

Fol. 2:

L: O let them and us taste thy grace rightly. Do not banish us from thy presence. O look down upon us this moment in grace. Behold...

M: O hear them and us taste thy grace rightly. Behold...

Fol. 4:

L: While they thus called on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with sighs and tears...

M: While they thus called on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with sight and tears...

Fol. 5:

L: They were persecuted, but the Brethren also suffered by it, because they were remarked as having a particular walk and fellowship together, therefore the Jews believed that they were also Sabsazebitem. They suffered much persecution with great joy, but as they suffered much...

M: They were persecuted, but as they suffered much...

Fol. 9:

L: He is baptized in a מקוה, and that because it is otherwise customary among the Jews.

M: He is baptized in a מקוה, and that because it is otherwise unc customary among the Jews.

Fol. 13:

L: But according to all circumstances he was poisoned.

M: But according to all circumstances he was pardoned.

Thus, we felt it necessary to make available a corrected transcription of Latrobe's translation of the foundational document of the society.

Brethren who in stillness adore our all gracious Saviour, and [these] are they with whom we correspond. [Then follows the prayer.]

“O all gracious Saviour and Redeemer, thou who hast through boundless grace and mercy, willingly and patiently laid down thy life and shed thy precious blood for the redemption of all men without difference and because it cost thee so much, because thou hast bought this salvation so dearly, therefore by so much the more art thou grieved on account of each soul which shall be lost because they have no share in this dearly purchased redemption. O grant through thy endless mercy, that all souls may be saved, and plucked from death and Satan, but particularly the seed of Abraham, the house of Israel, thy brethren according to the flesh, who first of all spread abroad in the world the word of life and salvation: they brought the heathen who knew thee not to life, to light and eternal salvation; but woe unto themselves, they have to their shame drawn back, they have slain the prince of life, and they, the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, they have murdered with the sword thy prophets and apostles, they have so long blasphemed thy holy name and have walked continually in darkness and destruction. But thy infinite grace would not let them sink entirely into perdition, and the people that sat in darkness have seen a great light, and to those who sat in the shadow of death has a bright shining light sprung up. Thou hast promised that Israel shall be saved at the end of the world, and thou hast made the beginning to visit thy people Israel in grace. Thou omniscient O Saviour! Thou knowest with what zeal, earnestness and faithfulness thy name has been adored in the midst of Israel in stillness during 50 years, how many souls have been in that time redeemed and brought forth out of their deep corruption by thee and are gone into eternity, and who perhaps in this moment are delighting in thy brightness, shouting Hallelujah in the nearness of thy countenance. Thou also knowest how many souls out of Israel [fol. 2] now adore thee in stillness, thirsting for Grace, and weeping before thee. O let them and us taste thy grace rightly. Do not banish us from thy presence. O look down upon us this moment in grace. Behold what we are undertaking in this moment. A secret which perhaps thou thyself dost wish to conceal, which perhaps (and O God grant that it may) may end in the salvation of the whole people of Israel; even this secret we are going to discover in this moment. But it is done, O eternal Father out of particular love to thy Servant to whom thou hast in truth granted grace, by the correspondence with whom we have often edified one another. Preserve him O dearest Immanuel in thy grace, and let this secret remain sealed in his heart. But thou, O

thou omniscient Immanuel looketh deep into the hearts of men, might it prove to detriment or impure purposes, do thou so order it, that it may be hindered. Thou, O Saviour, thou prince of peace, thou knowest best the hearts of men, and turneth them according to thy most holy views to the prevention of such a misfortune in thy holy church on earth. O preserve thy people Israel in thy grace. Pour out thy holy spirit upon all souls. Let the whole earth be a temple in which thy holy name shall be adored. Thou wouldest that all nations of the earth be blessed. O let the people serve thee and call upon thy name in unity, surrender themselves up unto thee, when the various nations shall call out with holy rapture, the Lord has done great things with these, the Lord has done great things on us, we are glad in him. Thy kingdom come when all nations shall come together in the heavenly Zion with shouting and the noise of joy, singing Hallelujahs whose enraptured קדוש קדוש קדוש י-הוה צ-באות will rise much higher than the song of the Cherubim and Seraphim, even unto thy throne, O thou everlasting father, prince of peace, Immanuel, Amen!"

[fol. 3]

Worthy Sir: We must observe that in case you should meet with some supposed error in the whole; and you should meet with something like error in some points, do not try to confute us, as no Church can be established on earth, which have not immovable principles as fundamental. But think of us in your prayers, and recommend us to the grace and leading of our Saviour. Secondly, as we must be extensive and occasionally must write some names at full length on account of the connection, therefore you are entreated by many upright souls to burn this letter, or at least to scratch out the names, but the first expedient would be by far the best. One knows not how Satan may set to work. In brief, you will yourself consider the great importance of the matter, and act in such a manner that it may redound to the praise and honor of our Saviour.

Most worthy sir: Our conduct must have appeared very strange to you. As our Saviour has himself delivered this sentence, "Whomsoever confesses me before men, him will the Son of Man confess before his Father and before his holy angels in heaven." Our conduct toward Simon must also frequently have appeared strange to you, and not less our conduct towards our dear brother Baruch. Yea, in the conduct of our weak unconverted brother Simon, many things must have appeared necessarily very unaccountable to you, if he has acted consistent with his duty; many other things must have appeared strange to

you if you look back, as you may perhaps have met with favors (and may be, or you yourself will see, highly necessary) untruths. But all this will be soon unriddled. But we lay it once more on your conscience in the name of the true three-one God, that you act right faithfully and carefully in this affair, as you will see into the great importance of it. We therefore make the beginning in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen!

It came to pass between the years 1680 and 1690 that the Lord in his great grace and mercy thought on his people Israel by visions, apparitions, voices from heaven and dreams of godly men in Israel in sundry places, in Poland, Moravia, Bohemia, and in Turkey, but particularly in Pintschoff to the godly **מגלה עמוקות** ר', who was Chief Rabbi. The wonderful occurrences with this man are too extensive. There was Rabbi Chay Chayon in Constantinople, Rabbi Krokeffer in Prague, and Rabbi Sender in Moravia. They had many years before had visions but now had intimations by voices that each should go to Pintschoff to the R. Megalle Amukkoth. [fol. 4] It came to pass that they all came the same day, in the same hour into the house of the said R. Megalle Amukkoth. It was on **תשעה באב** when they all fasted and mourned for the destruction of Jerusalem, and were more than usual stricken with the deplorable state of Israel. When they came into the room and the old man met them with the usual salutation **שלום**, they all 3 answered him at once: **אין שלום אמר א-לֹה לרשעים**. How shall we have peace since we are all lost sinners, who are not redeemed and are removed from the presence of God." While they thus called on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with sighs and tears for grace and forgiveness, they heard a voice, "Go and baptize yourselves in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." In the Hebrew language: **מהרו וטבלו אתכם בשם האב והבן והרוח הקודש**.

As the praying men heard this voice, they were afraid that it was a voice from **סטרא אחרא**. Therefore, they prayed more earnestly and the voice was heard again and again, three times, and with it was heard the name **י-הוה**. Then R. Megalle Amukkoth stood up, took the 3 men by the hand and said unto them: "Strengthen yourselves ye men of Israel, let us not this day mourn, but rejoice for the Lord hath spoken unto us and will redeem us." All these 4 men felt a certain joy and called directly upon the name of the Saviour and went in that moment into the cellar where R. Megalle Amukkoth had his **מקוה**. There were always 3 witnesses as one of them plunged himself into the water, till after this manner they were baptized. The witnesses let him that

was baptizing say: **בשם האב והבן ורוח הקודש**. And the witnesses answered: **יתגלה מלכותו במהרה בימינו אמן**.

Here the Church of Christ took its beginning in Israel, without one of these men having ever seen the New Testament. We must here detain you long in giving an account of the spreading of the Church, but then, we will give you an account of its present state, and then of Simon and Baruch. Thereby you will see in what distressing circumstances we have been for the last 3 years. We must pray that Simon may not see this letter, as he himself does not know all that is contained in it, and must also not know it, until true signs of conversion are seen in him. God grant it unto him.

After the above act, and the love to salvation and our Saviour grew in the hearts of these 4 men, they consulted together with prayers and tears how they could propagate the Gospel in Israel. They resolved they each should go to his proper home, apply to the study of the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, and by prayer gain the confidence of their Brethren, and if possible, [fol. 5] to build them up, even at the expense of their lives, as faithful disciples and followers of our Saviour. They soon took leave and each returned home. As difficult as they represented it to themselves, by so much the easier did it go with the assistance of the Holy Ghost. They ventured to speak with the old men and in a short time each baptized 20 or 30 of the old men. They all applied to the Scriptures and procured the New Testament in Hebrew privately. The baptized were diligent in baptizing and converting their relations and friends, and to receive them into the community of Christ, so that 100 were baptized. But they never thought of a meeting for prayer or of the Holy Communion, but they rested therewith that they were baptized and believed in the Holy Trinity with their whole heart and soul. They kept to the ceremonial law. Every day more were baptized on their belief of the chief articles of the Christian faith, and hereby it remained a long time. Particularly in Prague, where so many **ראשי ישיבות** and many **בחורים** were, the Holy Ghost wrought powerfully and an uncommon blessing was spread abroad. The Brethren kept together both in Prague and in Moravia so that they would lay down their lives for each other. Rabbi Chay Chayon, who went again to Constantinople was also blessed with his labour, but as Satan had there laid errors in the way by means of **שבתי צבי** he could not effect much. Yea, even in Prague and Moravia this pestilence got an ascendancy. They were persecuted, but the Brethren also suffered by it, because they were remarked as having a particular walk and fellowship

together, therefore the Jews believed that they were also Sabszebitem. They suffered much persecution with great joy, but as they suffered much they did not in a long time dare to ask anyone about his salvation. It is still to be observed that Rabbi Chayim Ashkenaas, grandfather of our Baruch and Simon, and who was then a youth and afterwards Chief Rabbi of Kreutz in Hungary, and Rabbi Meir Eisenstadt, a friend of the former who was afterwards Chief Rabbi of Eisenstadt, where both of them were afterwards great blessing. These youths were rescued from the Sabszebitem and converted to the word of life, and afterwards brought many souls in Hungary to the true faith. There is still in hand a letter from Rabbi Chayim Ashkenaas which was written in or about the year 1740 in Kreutz, in which the late happy man laments bitterly to his brethren in Moravia that both his daughters were become terrible blasphemers, his youngest son-in-law⁴ (the father of Simon and Baruch) of whom he had in the beginning [fol. 6] good hopes, he afterwards found was become a virulent blasphemer. R. Megalle Amukkoth in Pintschoff had much blessing in his labor, but did not live long. At his death (as is known to all the Jews), he said that a child should be born in his family whose name would be יהונתן. He would bring much salvation to Israel. 100 children were born this year in Israel to whom this name, יהונתן, was given. But there was a grandson of R. Megalle Amukkoth whose name was Rabbi Nathan. He was in Prague at the ישיבה. His wife was with child in Pintschoff. (It was at that time the custom among the Jews that as soon as the wife was with child, the husband must travel from home.) But it came to pass that this Rabbi Nathan was converted in Prague, and as soon as he heard of the death of his grandfather and his prophecy, he returned home. But it came to pass that when he came to Dresden in an inn where was at the same time a real servant of our Saviour, a preacher whose name was Mr. Meysinger.⁵ They were both laid in one room. The preacher, to whom the spreading of the Gospel was very important, as soon as he observed that his companion was a Jew, he began to speak of the present state of the Jews as of the people of God, and to lay right questions home to his conscience. But instead of opposition as the preacher expected, he soon found his Jew melted into tears. O, said the Jew, it is this Saviour whom we seek. They both fell on their

⁴ The German original adds his name: R. Selig.

⁵ The German original reads: Maysinger.

knees, and swore by God that this should never be discovered by the preacher. Rabbi Nathan opened to him the whole secret, persuaded him to go with him to Pintschoff, and in case his wife should be delivered of a son, that he would after the circumcision baptize him. This was resolved. They went to Pintschoff. A son was born, was circumcised, and baptized by the above preacher and called יהונתן. But Satan who would that the whole should be discovered soon caused the whole affair to come to imminent danger. The preacher fell sick and died in Rabbi Nathan's house. It was then soon discovered that he was uncircumcised. The Jews daunst not bury him, the magistrates must be informed of the affair. The whole Jewish congregation in Pintschoff was in great danger, but money prevailed. The preacher was buried by a Catholic priest. Rabbi Nathan succeeded R. Megalle Amukkoth as Chief Rabbi in Pintschoff. As he thought that he discovered some signs in the boy, that he was the boy prophesied of by his grandfather, he began to take measures to leave Middle Poland and to remove to a Protestant country. But the Lord ordered it otherwise. By the endeavours of his Brethren and other circumstances, he was called to be Chief Rabbi in Eybeschuetz in Moravia. [fol. 7] He accepted the call, sent his family before him, but he died on the road in Poland. The mother and the boy were very poor in Eybeschuetz. But as the boy was very forward in his understanding, the mother resolved to bring him to Prague to study the Talmud. And to the astonishment of the Jews, he was so very forward that he was able to deliver a very acute דרשה to the Jews in the public synagogue when he was in his 10th year. All the Jews with one voice said: This is the boy of whom R. Megalle Amukkoth prophesied. The Jesuits sought to entrap him, but a divine providence watched over him. At length the Brethren began to converse with him, to lay before him the word of God. The Holy Ghost was active. The Brethren prayed earnestly to our Saviour for him, and they at last found him in his 14th year in such a disposition that they could make it known to him that he was baptized. And from the true signs of conversion which began to appear in him, the Brethren ventured to instruct him, and at length he pointed out to them that they were not quite right, that they should have sound doctrine, the Holy Communion. At last, he preached to them 2 or 3 times a week in a cellar which was appointed thereto. It came once to pass that as he once preached about the sufferings of Christ in Gethsemane, all his hearers began to cry and weep so loud that all the Jews ran together in the whole city of the Jews. He resolved to go to a Protestant country to get a better

foundation in sound doctrine that he might build the Church of Israel, and to consult godly teachers. Rabbi [Isaac] Machels, Ober Landrabbiner in Bohemia, who was an upright soul, married him to his only daughter, and as the said rabbi had relations in Hamburg, this place was appointed thereunto that Rabbi Jonathan should go thither. We have dwelt long on this subject, but we thought it needful; and before we treat the present state of the Church of Israel, we must tell how Rabbi Jonathan was appointed and inducted as a teacher and preacher in Israel. You will easily conceive why Rabbi Jonathan was called to be Chief Rabbi of Hamburg, viz. because his labour was much blessed there to many souls, who were converted and who believed that he would have much more blessing in his old age, but in vain. Satan, who guided the pen of Rabbi Emden, did much mischief therewith.

Rabbi Jonathan set out [and] came to Leipzig, got acquainted with the Gymnasium there. He stayed so long till he had learned the whole doctrine of the Church, viz. the Lutheran doctrine, and he received there the first time the Holy Communion by the hand of a certain Deacon Stephanus. He went to Hamburg and corresponded with his teacher Stephanus, who was bound with an oath never to reveal it. He became acquainted in Hamburg with one Michaelus. He stayed there 18 months, and did much good. [fol. 8] Michaelus went with him to Leipzig. They took with them an old godly man (who was no preacher), and in Leipzig he was by these 3 godly men ordained to [be] a teacher in Israel. Rabbi Jonathan went to Prague, established the fundamental doctrines of Christ, and administered the Sacrament. Since that time, the Holy Communion has been administered here in Prague, Moravia, and Hungary, in sundry places in Germany, and even in Turkey, as Rabbi Chay Chayon still lived to come to Prague and to receive the Communion from Rabbi Jonathan. Then was fulfilled the word: **רדה בקרב אויבֶיךָ**—Psalm 110[:2]. Were it possible that you could be present on such an occasion [to see] with what joy and tears it takes place, you would not be able to praise the mercy and love of God sufficiently.

Now worthy Sir. You see the greatness and endless importance of this secret. Our Brethren live chiefly in Catholic countries and if it should be discovered what could we even here (in Amsterdam) do? It would be said that we form a new religion. What divisions would it make between husbands and wives, children, families and relations. Our Saviour himself has taught us to pray that we should not be led into temptation. Yea in his most bitter sufferings said our Saviour to

his disciples: "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." In our Saviour's prayer it is said, "Lead us not into temptation." Peter, our Saviour's faithful disciple could not deliver himself from temptation. Now look upon our weak and poor souls with pity and compassion, and O keep it as secret as possible. Do, dearest sir. For heaven's sake let no friend be so dear to You as to open this secret to him. You can not only do hurt to individual souls, but to the salvation of Israel in general, which might issue in the space of 100 years by the assistance of the Holy Ghost in the conversion of the greatest half of Israel. Praised be our God and crucified Saviour. Consider and weigh in the presence of Jesus Christ what endless damage could be done to poor weak souls. Seal this secret in your bosom for the sake of love and mercy. Amen. Amen!

[fol. 9]

Now we must proceed and describe to you some of our usages. Rabbi Jonathan and more of our eminent teachers were entirely convinced by the Bible that the kingdom of Christ was at hand. Israel must first be converted, which should be a congregation for itself. And through Israel, which out of the bitterest enmity shall devote itself entirely to our Saviour, the rest of the nations of the earth and even the Christians shall be converted. You will find this meaning everywhere throughout the Scriptures. Therefore, we are very attentive and particularly cautionary when we convert a soul. We conduct ourselves as follows. We have constantly the *ספר נצחון* or *חזוק אמונה* with us. We lay before each with whom we speak the first time the questions and answers therein contained. We do our best thereby in an unnoticed manner with silent sighs to our Redeemer. Do we find the person we speak to is no miserable blasphemer, we proceed with the assistance of Grace. Do we perceive a blessing, we then lay the Old and New Testaments before him, and compare them, and finally lead him to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, to the atonement by Jesus Christ. So our proselyte convinced, and does he lead a godly and moral life and proves that he believes with his whole heart, we leave him in this situation 2 or 3 months. Do we then find that he is in downright earnest, we appoint 2 or 3 of our Brethren who must visit him. Holy Baptism is explained to him, does he earnestly long for it, and shows true signs of the feeling of his corruption, he is baptized in a *מקוה*, and that because it is otherwise customary among the Jews. Two of the Brethren who are witnesses of his baptism must soon leave the place and

go to another place where they are supported by the Brethren. (And we do so with such Brethren who have baptized anyone in another place and come hither.) But the third must constantly visit him, not take the least notice that the baptism has been administered to him. Do signs of real Grace show themselves to him, he gets more visits and instruction, and that agreeable to the pure evangelical Lutheran doctrine, and at length he is allowed to come into the meeting, but must go out of the meeting when the Lord's Prayer is prayed, until he becomes entirely thirsty for Grace and for the body and blood of his Redeemer. He is then allowed, having requested [fol. 10] permission, to be present at the Communion; and then after a strict examination touching doctrine and a confession of the faith, the Holy Communion is administered to him. Is he discovered, which is often the case out of zeal, that he made himself known to a Christian or by other circumstances, to be a Christian, he is then no more allowed to come to a meeting. He may after that receive the Communion by the hand of a Brother, but no more publicly. This is our custom and thus settled by our teachers, and to this we must swear. We also swear that we will reveal it to no Christian until our teachers look upon it as necessary and allow it. This is all so settled that we cannot possibly deviate from it, as we have mentioned at the beginning of this letter. Farther, we commend ourselves to the grace and mercy of him who must give us light and wisdom to eternal salvation. Honour and praise unto God in Christ Jesus. Amen!

[fol. 11]

It is now time that we turn to the circumstances of Simon and Baruch. You will certainly know that Simon in his very tender youth got the first impression of the Christian religion from a neighboring student. The spirit of admonition laid this impression by many opportunities upon his heart, until it came to an entire impulse, as you have probably heard from himself. Now we must relate in what manner Simon came to Rabbi Jonathan and at length to us. He by means of a foraging party lost his all, and either out of uneasiness touching his salvation, as he says, or with a view to get money in Germany, he left his home and would go to Hamburg, went from Breslau to Berlin by water, where he escaped in a wonderful manner with his life, as the whole ship was burnt. He was obliged to travel naked, without shoes or stockings, and in brief came to Schwerin in Mecklenburg, where Rabbi Prossnitz, his relation, was rabbi, but he did not know it. It was

the **יום כפור**. They would scarcely let him in at the gate, because he was so wretchedly clothed. The Day of Atonement began. Simon stood before the porch of the synagogue and prayed. Rabbi Prossnitz passed by, saw a poor stranger standing in such devotion and praying to himself. At last, he asked him why he did not go into the synagogue?

Simon: The singing and disorder disturbs me in prayer.

R. Prossnitz: Do you then pray otherwise than the people within?

Simon: No. I know not even how or for what I should pray. I am wretched.

R. Prossnitz: Could you not pray the common form of the **מחזור**?

Simon: O Yes, but I find no comfort in this prayer. My heart is very sorrowful.

R. Prossnitz: Why so? Are you so poor, or is some one of your family dead or has some other misfortune happened?

Simon: This is not the object which can make me so sorrowful above measure. It is quite something else and more important than worldly affairs.

R. Prossnitz: So it is then spiritual affairs which make you so sorrowful?

Simon: It relates to my soul! The true forgiveness of sins.

R. Prossnitz: Now is not this the Day of Atonement, must we not believe assuredly that all sins will be forgiven us on this day? Is it not said in Scripture **כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם וכו'**?

Simon was silent here. But R. Prossnitz saw that he had something to object, but that he was timorous, and therefore he proceeded and said to him: [fol. 12] Have you something to object? Do not be afraid.

Simon: If this was so, that on this day all our sins were forgiven, how is it then that we are in **גלות**? Then we should have been delivered long ago for it is said in Scripture that we by the blood of the **קרבנות** should have a real atonement on this day, and this we have not.

R. Prossnitz: And now then do you believe that Israel has no atonement at all? Is there then no way left by which we can have an atonement? If so we should be then quite lost.

Simon: It is even this that confounds me. It must not be with Israel as it should be. Something quite different must be in the matter.

R. Prossnitz: What may, then, according to your thoughts, this be?

Simon: In this respect, I am too weak to pass a judgment upon it. But I believe we are not attentive enough to the promise of the **נביאים**. Perhaps we hope for things which are long performed.

R. Prossnitz: How? Are you doubtful in your faith upon the **גאולה**?

Simon: The Scripture itself makes one so, and even on this account I pray for the assistance of the **רוח הקודש** who shall lead me in the right way.

R. Prossnitz: What do you understand by the **רוח הקודש**?

Simon: Even the same which ye understand. What stands in the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures רוח א-להים.

R. Prossnitz: Why, that is the doctrine of the Christians that would even lead to the belief of a Trinity. However, do not be afraid. Tell me your meaning. You have not the least reason to be afraid. Do you also believe in a Son?

Simon was silent and would not answer the last. R. Prossnitz asked him about the place of his birth and soon discovered that he was his relation by Rabbi Chayim Ashkenaas. He asked him whither he was going, and when heard to Hamburg, he held his peace, left him, and wrote the whole conversation to Rabbi Jonathan. Simon came to Hamburg and was soon taken into the house of Rabbi Jonathan. And although Rabbi Jonathan was already very sick, he however laboured upon him in an unobserved manner, intimated always the doctrine of the Trinity, because this is the hardest point for a Jew. He had also very good hopes of Simon and even at his death, at which Simon was present alone with Rabbi Porios, as Rabbi Jonathan ordered that no stranger might be [fol. 13] admitted till he was dead, Rabbi Jonathan did nothing but repeat the Holy Trinity and that in the following words: אחד יחיד ומיוחד המתיחד בשרש הנעלם ברזא דאין סוף. After the death of Rabbi Jonathan, Rabbi Porios laboured upon Simon but he was obliged to take a journey⁶ to Nickolsburg in Moravia. He recommended him to the care of one Rabbi Levi. There we must leave Simon and relate of his 2 brothers.

His younger brother Mair, was sent to Prague to the ישיבה and there privately (so as on all the בחורים there is done) his soul was laboured upon, and it was soon discovered that it struck root in his heart. He was then belaboured and within the space of 6 months he was baptized and soon after admitted to the Holy Communion. As soon as he achieved this, he would absolutely go home to convert his brother, but this was forbidden to him. But he soon wrote for his brother Baruch. He came. Mair laboured diligently upon his soul, but he was in the beginning a wretched blasphemer, but his brother did not desist day or night. It lasted a whole year before he would hear any thing of Christianity. The superabundant mercy of the redeemer supported him. He was at length converted, baptized, and three months after invited to the Holy Table of the Lord. Mair, who saw the extraordinary

⁶ The German original adds: *nach sein Heimat* (back to his native land).

blessing on his brother would be no longer hindered, he must go home to convert his father, but was so incautious, that he spoke to every Jew on the road. It came at length to pass that he was complained of to the Ober Landrabbiner of Moravia and being convicted was put under the ban. But he told the Ober Landrabbiner to his face, "I will not like Peter deny my Master before the High Priest. The crucified Jesus is He; pray to him for deliverance." The Ober Landrabbiner ordered his servant and had him beaten, but he said: "I forgive you. Behold this is the Doctrine of him ye blaspheme." In brief, we will not assert that he acted rightly, but so it was. He was under the ban and could not get a night's lodging. He was at last obliged to go to his father's house where he spoke several times to his father. But he [i.e., Mair—SZL] died after a visit of 3 weeks. We cannot relate what kind of death this poor man died. It is said in the Holy Scriptures, "Judge not that ye not be judged," but according to all circumstances he was poisoned. In that day it will be cleared up. Simon during this time wrote to his brother Baruch that he should come to him to Hamburg. He had something of importance to tell him. But on the other hand Baruch would have him come to him in Prague [fol. 14] but it came to pass that Baruch became a witness of a baptism, and according to the regulation was obliged to leave Prague and he resolved to go to Hamburg. But before he put his resolution in practice, Simon was over head and ears quarreling with the Chief Rabbi of Hamburg (as he also did here, [in] Amsterdam, afterwards). He then could not get his livelihood, and resolved to travel to Amsterdam. Rabbi Levi, an upright soul, who had the special care of him wrote to Rabbi Morena concerning him, in consequence of which persons were appointed to labour upon him as soon as he came here. Baruch came to Brunswick, where he heard that Simon was gone to Amsterdam. Winter was just at hand, and he was glad to be taken into the family of Alexander as writer. This we allow of, but not that they shall be informers to the Jews. Baruch with his usual prudence laboured upon sundry souls in this house, but without fruit. It is true he affected something on one of the sons of Alexander whose name was Hertz, who about 8 or 9 months ago acceded openly to Christendom. But he is a miserable man. He did it chiefly that he might hold a place under the government, and it is said that he has bought a place for which he gave 10,000 dollars.

Simon and Baruch who knew nothing of each other's minds touching the religion, and corresponded long about whether Simon should come to Brunswick or Baruch to Amsterdam, but it was soon

discovered when our Brethren went through Brunswick to Leipzig these knew already how Simon was disposed, and would try to labour upon Baruch but they soon found what an upright soul he possessed for the Lord, and by this means we got acquainted with Baruch who could correspond plainly with Simon. Now to turn again to Simon, the Brethren who were appointed to instruct him and edify him, found that their labour was attended with an uncommon blessing. The best signs of the labour of the Holy Ghost appeared in him. He mourned and cried day and night to be received into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, till he, through the testimony of the Brethren who converted him, was baptized on Good Friday 1768. Two of them left Amsterdam according to our custom; but the one who was to converse yet farther with him, found to our painful surprise, that it went worse and worse daily with him after his baptism. He turned to corrupted philosophy, got acquainted with one Hertz Wessel who led him into [fol. 15] ruin. He instructed young people in the Talmud contrary to his baptismal oath, disputed publicly about the Christian religion, touching which he can probably to this day show but little, he came into a state of extreme persecution, and was every day more miserable. The Brethren forsook him entirely, and we were under the greatest apprehensions of being discovered every day. We informed Baruch of his wretched condition. Poor Baruch came hither, found him in the greatest confusion, even doubting about the Holy Trinity. He however brought him into a somewhat better disposition, promised him also to go to his father and to labour upon the child; and at length set off from here and came home according to his uprightness and faithfulness. Simon was obliged to leave soon after and went to London. But again contrary to his oath betook himself to the instruction of youth, and at length he went so far as, contrary to his oath to open himself to a clergyman, discovered his Brother's name, who laments about it day and night, as he on that account can no more be admitted to the meetings of the Brethren. (The rest of the persons whose names are in this letter are already gone into eternity.) Now worthy Sir, you will conceive how great our apprehensions were, we might expect that Simon would either act so ungodly as to plunge himself into eternal perdition, deny his baptism and be re-baptized, or else discover his baptism and occasion the greatest mischief. Might he not as easily have fallen into the hand of his unconverted preacher? Now it is true that since he has conversed with you, he has always wrote that he was much edified by your conversation and has incessantly entreated us, that we should

confide in you, and open the whole secret to you, as you are a true disciple of our Saviour. But tell us yourself, could we build anything upon his word, although it was not in our power to do as he desired. But whereas we ourselves received a blessing from your letters, and as we heard that you spent so much time and money by the entreaties of our dear Baruch and also partly because [fol. 16] you have some hopes of Simon, we therefore resolved to weigh it with our Brethren in other places, and at length, as you see here, we trust this secret with you as with the only person in Christendom. And now if you find Simon in such a situation that you can take him to the Table of the Lord, and there is no danger in his being admitted to it publicly (viz. that you have no occasion to give any one an account, where or by whom he has been baptized) or that he can go to the Holy Communion with you unnoticed, as another Christian who goes to the Communion for the first time, you may do it in God's name. But should you think that anything might be produced by it tending to a discovery, then it would certainly be better that he got it in private. But this now entirely in your hand, do as you shall weigh it and resolve before the Lord, as we can do nothing more in this affair, for we must act according to our regulation, tho to our greatest pain, break off all connection, as we have discovered the whole affair, and consequently we must break all connection with our dear Baruch, who is now discovered as a Christian and have no correspondence with Simon. On this condition we have been allowed to open this important secret, that we break off all connection.

Now worthy Sir, weigh it before the throne of Grace how you are to act in this affair. Do you find it good to drop all connection with Simon do it in God's name. In the mean time, we believe that he can be in your undertaking for the Society very useful. It is true, we are very unwilling to give him up, but only consider in what distress he has brought the whole company at several sundry times. Yea we have reasons to be afraid that if he comes into want, he will confide in an unknown preacher, or even let himself be re-baptized, as no one can prove that he has been baptized. Therefore it would be most agreeable to prudence, better if you could employ him without any detriment to yourself, or give him some little matter as you have already spent so much upon him. Whatever we can do for him under the hand or by way of commission, we will not be wanting in it. [fol. 17] Baruch and his circumstances are now known to you. He will spare no pains and care for the child, he will put it in Latin school. He, Baruch, stays

at home and marries a sister out of Eisenstadt, for what can the poor man do in a strange place. He cannot live as a Christian, he dare not instruct the young people of the Jews, where he is at present he can earn his bread. Would not you yourself have advised him so to do, if you had known his circumstances sooner? The poor Brother melts away for shame on your account; but consider the circumstances yourself, and particularly when Simon's father lived, what a dangerous step did Simon take. Praised be God that the affair turned out as it did. We commend ourselves to the love in our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Blessed be his name. We shall meet eternity when Christ will glorify himself on us. Amen, Hallelujah! ברוך י-הוה לעולם אמן ואמן.

Most dear Sir, we have opened the whole affair to you, and we shall be glad to correspond farther with you, if we can possibly obtain leave from our Brethren; the reason why they at present will not allow it is because you travelled as a missionary among the Jews. We will at least labor upon it. In the meantime, we entreat you for love's sake, that if you see any danger which might arise thro' Simon or if you have anything of importance to say, that you would write to me under the address of Israel Heilwunsch. Our Brethren will be very thankful for it. But as we cannot know as yet when we can write unto you, we must for the sake of love propose something to you. God grant that it may tend to salvation and blessing.

Our Brethren look upon the Society established in London as a work of Grace. It is just a period in which it might bear much fruit in the kingdom of Jesus. (They then mention the edict of the King of Prussia by which all the Jews who are not worth 1000 Dollars each should leave his new acquired territory in Poland. In this part of Poland are 39 Jewish Congregations out of which near 2000 poor Jews will be expelled. They add, perhaps Israel will, by means of the new plague, turn to their Redeemer. Perhaps even in this circumstance there is a direction of our most gracious Saviour. Therefore, it is the best time to pay attention to them.) Our thought was that this godly Society should turn particularly to the Jews in new Prussia, make an address to them. We believe that it would be with little trouble that we could send 100 or 200 families to the new colonies in America. Propose it to the Society. Make [fol. 18] a pathetic address to the expelled Jews in Poland. Simon, who is certainly the best Hebraist of our times (presupposing that you will continue to have a farther connection with him) will be able to do it very well. These Jews have still some months respite. They believe that they shall by means of the Jews here and at London by

means of the Prince of Orange and the King of England to effect something. The Jew congregation in Berlin have wrote about it to a certain Jew called Frank in London. The Jews have collected 100,000 gulden to this end. This affair is indeed of great weight. Should the godly Society take the affair publicly in hand, there might be with the assistance of Grace, perhaps a great deal effected. Perhaps it will be the will of God that the Society should even in this period take the affair in hand. Lay it in prayer before the throne of Grace and then propose it to the Society. It is true that some families out of worldly views might publicly accede to the Christian religion, but notwithstanding this, what salvation might not spring from thence to the children, or how many souls might not attain to true salvation and blessing, and should it be even but to one single soul. There is more joy in heaven if only one single sheep is found. And this we will at the conclusion propose to you, but consider it is for the sake of the kingdom of Christ.

We cannot refrain to the conclusion to say yet a word about Simon. We really pity him. We cannot possibly take him again hither. First, because he is too much known here. Secondly, because now his baptism is discovered, and thirdly because during this time many Christians have certainly seen him in your house. We had thought he could go home to Baruch, but even this cannot be for the present, because it is not in the power of Baruch to maintain him and his child. Should he turn his back to his people, that would be too hard for him. How might one baptized fall if he must go again among the enemies of his Redeemer. It would at the same time be attended with the greatest danger to the brotherhood, should we entirely desert him. He could fall into sundry temptations, as he is much too weak. Indeed, he causes us much concern. We therefore pray you weigh it well. We will under the hand help him to something by which he can, now and then, earn something without his knowing from whence it came. Help therefore reverend teacher and faithful servant of our Saviour to care for him, and do with him and for him what you may conclude upon before the Lord. We also pray you for love's sake that you answer us soon, as we shall be very uneasy until we know that this letter is come safe to your own hand. It will be a proof for us that you still love us. Add also a few comfortable words and admonitions to it for our weak souls; it will be the strongest proof of your love. [This] letter shall be sent to our Brethren even as far as Prague. Let us also hear your resolution touching Simon. The Saviour's grace be with you. The Lord preserve us all in grace, spread his blessing over all the nations of the earth that

soon the word may be fulfilled: **זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְ-הוָה אֶל זְרֹוּבָבֶל**
לֹא בַחִיל וְלֹא בַכַּח כִּי אִם בְּרוּחִי אָמַר יְ-הוָה צְ-בָאוֹת אֲמֵן וְאֲמֵן.

*

In 1988, Yehuda Liebes published a groundbreaking study of the documents published by Dalman;⁷ it remains the point of departure for all subsequent discussion. Well aware of the mythic character of the history of the sect (e.g., R. Nathan Spira, author of *Megalleh 'amukot*, was born in 1585 and died in 1633; he could not have been the founder of a Jewish-Christian sect in 1680 or later), Liebes correctly identified the Sabbatian origin and character of the alleged sect. Essentially, he argued that when the sect became disillusioned with Sabbatianism, especially with the death of its hero—R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz—in 1764, it adopted Christianity. Whereas previously the sect had been outwardly Jewish and secretly Sabbatian, now it was outwardly Jewish and secretly Christian. For Liebes, these documents prove the existence of the sect, not merely as a local society in Amsterdam but as a sect that existed throughout much of the eighteenth century in Holland, Bohemia, Moravia, Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Turkey, as claimed by the documents themselves.

In contrast to Liebes, Paweł Maciejko has claimed (without citing evidence) that the “Herrnhut documents are a contemporary eighteenth-century forgery.”⁸ If Maciejko is right, it follows that there was no Jewish-Christian sect, for other than the Herrnhut documents, there is no evidence for the existence of such a sect. Maciejko has promised a thorough investigation of the Herrnhut documents, “which I am hoping to analyze in a separate publication.”⁹ Until the results of Maciejko’s investigation appear in print, it is surely hazardous for others to reach ironclad conclusions. Indeed, a recent study by Lutz Greisiger—which provides important background material for the setting of the Herrnhut documents—cautiously concludes: “Ob diese Sekte heimlicher Apostaten tatsächlich existierte oder die Erfindung

⁷ Yehuda Liebes, “’Al kat sodit Yehudit-Notzrit she-mekorah ba-Shabbeta’ut,” *Tarbiz* 57 (1988): 349–384. The essay was reissued in Liebes, *Sod ha-’emunah ha-Shabbeta’it* (Jerusalem, 1995), 212–237. See the much-abridged summary entitled, “Über eine geheime judenchristliche Sekte mit Sabbatianischem Hintergrund,” *Hebraische Beiträge zur Wissenschaft des Judentums* 6 (1990): 138–158.

⁸ Maciejko, “A Jewish-Christian Sect,” 96.

⁹ Paweł Maciejko, “Christian Elements in Early Frankist Doctrine,” *Gal-Ed* 20 (2006): 13–41, esp. p. 29.

ausserordentlich gut informierter und geschickter Fälscher war, bleibt eine offene Frage.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, the following should be noted, if only provisionally:

1. Regarding the current existence of these documents, Liebes wrote: “I do not know if, or where, these documents can be found today.”¹¹ In fact, the documents today are exactly where Dalman left them in 1890, i.e., in the central archive of the Moravian Brethren in Herrnhut. More importantly, it turns out that Dalman offered an abridged and (unintentionally a) skewed version of the documents in 1890. Liebes was misled, in part, by his reliance on Dalman (see below). One needs to examine the original, fuller versions of the documents in order to assess them properly.¹²

2. Precisely because Liebes did not examine the original documents, several of his identifications can no longer be sustained. Thus, for example, regarding the two persons allegedly present at the deathbed scene of R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz, Simon and Rabbi Porios (above, fols. 12–13), Liebes identified them (with due caution) as Simon Buchhalter of Pressburg and Gabriel Porges of Prague—the latter a card-carrying member of the Frankist sect.¹³ But, as our text makes clear, Simon is none other than the Jewish-Christian central figure of our story. Similarly, the original German text of the history of the society indicates that Rabbi Porios was a native of Nikolsburg in Moravia and was still living there in 1764. This eliminates the candidacy of Gabriel Porges, who was a native of Prague in Bohemia and was still living there in 1764.¹⁴ Almost certainly, Rabbi Porios is to be identified with a disciple of R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz, R. Moses Isaiah b. R. Judah Porios, who served as *dayyan* (rabbinic judge) of Nikolsburg and was a vigorous defender of his teacher during the Emden-Eibeschuetz controversy.¹⁵

3. Burgmann and Latrobe were pious and devoted Protestant missionaries who genuinely sought to convert Jews to Christianity. They

¹⁰ Lutz Greisiger, “Jüdische Kryptochristen im 18. Jahrhundert?,” *Judaica* 60, no. 3 (2004): 204–223, and 60, no. 4 (2004): 325–339, esp. p. 339.

¹¹ Liebes, “’Al kat sodit,” 354.

¹² For a fuller (but not complete) listing of the Herrnhut materials relating to the Jewish-Christian sect in Amsterdam, see Maciejko, “A Jewish-Christian Sect,” 96.

¹³ Liebes, “’Al kat sodit,” 374.

¹⁴ See Nathan M. Gelber, “Di zikhroynes fun Mozes Porges,” *Historishe shriftn* 1 (1929), column 255, n. 4.

¹⁵ See Jonathan Eibeschuetz, *Luhot ’edut* (Altona, 1755), 22b–24a.

were men of integrity; neither of them was considered a forger or a dissembler. Whatever documents they wrote, signed, or handed over to the authorities in Herrnhut were executed in good faith, so far as they were concerned. (Thus, Maciejko's claim that the "Herrnhut documents are a contemporary eighteenth-century forgery" should not be applied to the many letters authored by Burgmann and Latrobe that were deposited in the archive at Herrnhut.) Burgmann had served as a missionary to the Jews in Amsterdam prior to his assuming the post of pastor at St. Mary's German Lutheran Church in London in 1768.¹⁶ Thus, it was no accident that Simon of Amsterdam came to Burgmann for aid. Burgmann left London for a position in Mülheim, Germany, in 1774 (Simon accompanied him there for a short while) and died in Mülheim in 1795, only fifty years old at the time. Similarly, Latrobe was head of the Moravian Church in London from 1755 until his death in 1786.¹⁷ Latrobe played a crucial role in our story. He took over where Burgmann left off; Simon became his client. Latrobe gathered together the documents from Burgmann, Simon, and others, translated some of them into English, and annotated them. He visited the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam in 1775. Other than an arranged meeting with an acquaintance of Simon, a Jewish woman who harbored Christian teachings in her heart, he found no traces of a Jewish-Christian sect in Amsterdam.¹⁸

4. In the history of the society (above, fol. 5), R. Chayim Ashkenaas is mentioned as a hero who won over many converts to the sect. The text adds that he later served as rabbi of Kreutz in Hungary. Liebes writes: "I have not succeeded in identifying this person."¹⁹ But the records of Deutschkreutz (Hebrew and Yiddish: **צעהלים**) have come

¹⁶ On Burgmann, see Gustav W. Pieper, *Züge aus dem Leben des Johann Gustav Burgmann* (Bielefeld, 1851). Cf. Susanne Steinmetz, "300 Years of St. Mary's German Lutheran Church in London: 1694–1994," in *St. Mary's German Lutheran Church, London, 1694–1994* (London, 1994), 129–132. A portrait of Burgmann appears opposite the title page of his *Practische Reden* (Mülheim am Rhein, 1780).

¹⁷ On Latrobe, see Joseph Edmund Hutton, *A History of the Moravian Church* (London, 1895), 252–256. Cf. John Taylor Hamilton, *A History of the Church Known as the Moravian Church* (Bethlehem, PA, 1900). A portrait of Latrobe appears in the Hamilton volume, opposite p. 160.

¹⁸ UA, R. 16.6, Latrobe report entitled "About the Jews," dated December 15, 1775.

¹⁹ Liebes, "'Al kat sodit," 376.

down to us.²⁰ R. Hayyim b. R. Jacob Ashkenazi of Prossnitz served as chief rabbi of Deutschkreutz from 1710 until 1748. It is not known when or where he died. The terms of his rabbinate were the subject of a ruling signed by R. Meir Eisenstadt in 1734. More importantly, R. Hayyim Ashkenazi was the grandfather of Simon. Dalman did not mention this and therefore Liebes could not know this. But the full version of the history of the society (above, fol. 5) notes this clearly and prominently. Its significance will become apparent momentarily.

5. We shall examine one other passage omitted by Dalman, probably because he considered it unimportant. In the history of the society (above, fols. 11–13), we are informed that Simon left Hungary and came to Schwerin in Mecklenburg. In Schwerin, he met with the chief rabbi on the eve of Yom Kippur and confessed to him that he had secret Christian leanings. The chief rabbi was sympathetic and advised Simon to visit R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz. Before taking leave of the chief rabbi of Schwerin, Simon learned that his name was Prossnitz and that he was a relative of Simon's grandfather, R. Chayim Ashkenaas of Prossnitz. Here, too, it is possible to check the record books. The chief rabbi of Schwerin in the 1760s was R. Meir b. R. Jacob Prossnitz, a disciple of R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz. According to R. Jacob Emden, R. Meir Prossnitz was a notorious Sabbatian who belonged to the circle of Wolf Eibeschuetz. Indeed, Emden placed R. Meir Prossnitz under the ban in 1766.²¹

6. The upshot of these (and other) passages from the Herrnhut archive, it seems to me, is that the history of the Jewish-Christian society was authored in 1773.²² The central figure of this document is

²⁰ See Shlomo Spitzer, *Die jüdische Gemeinde von Deutschkreutz* (Vienna, 1995), 73–74. Cf. Moshe A. Kunstlicher and Shlomo Spitzer, *Kehillat Tzelem va-hakhameha* (Bnei Brak, 2000), 75–76 (which includes a reproduction of R. Hayyim Ashkenazi's autograph).

²¹ See Jacob Emden, *Sefer hit'avkut* (Altona, 1769), 131a–133b.

²² While Latrobe's translation of the society's history bears no date, other documents in the Herrnhut archives indicate that the original letter reached London in the summer of 1773. See especially UA, R.16.6, letter from Amsterdam, dated August 24, 1773; and the report of Latrobe to the elders of the Moravian Brethren, dated September 10, 1773. See also Greisiger, "Jüdische Kryptochristen," 208, n. 23. The precise date when the letter was written can be determined from the first paragraph of the original German text of the letter, which Latrobe chose not to translate. There, the author of the letter indicates that while he had promised to write by June 11, for a variety of reasons he was not able to do so until fourteen days later. Thus, the letter was written on June 25, 1773. For the original German text of the letter, see Jan Doktor and Lutz Greisiger, "'Wielka tajemnica'. List amsterdamskich judeochrześcijan

neither R. Megalle Amukkoth, nor R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz, but Simon. Any event involving Simon is told at length, in great detail, and with accuracy at least with regard to place and date. Any event that predates Simon is strewn with error. Regarding the alleged international sect, its early history is replete with anachronisms and is clearly imaginary. What about its later history in the 1760s and 1770s? In the entire archive at Herrnhut, only three credible names of living members of the international “sect” are mentioned. They are Simon, and his brothers Baruch and Mair, all of whom hailed from the same small village in Hungary. What this suggests is not a sect, but a saga. It is a saga about a particular family. Note that Simon and his grandfather appear prominently in the history of the society. The author of the history of the society could not possibly have known about R. Hayyim of Ashkenaz, or about the extensive conversation Simon had with the chief rabbi of Schwerin, or about who was present at the deathbed scene of R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz, unless he heard it directly from Simon. Much, then, depends upon his credibility. This, of course, also raises the possibility of fraud. Simon, perhaps exposed either as a Sabbatian or as a Christian, left Amsterdam for London. In order to endear himself to the Lutheran Church—and in order not to renounce his Judaism—he may well have forged all the letters from Amsterdam to London or have arranged for an associate in Amsterdam to do so. Simon presented himself as a brave soul willing to go public with his Christianity at the expense of being ostracized by his brethren in Amsterdam. But there was a price that would have to be paid by his newly won Christian colleagues: financial support for Simon. Indeed, Burgmann and Latrobe provided that support, as is made amply and painfully clear by the documents in the Herrnhut archive. If there was fraud here, it originated with Simon and Simon alone. Burgmann and Latrobe may have been the victims of a fraud, but nothing in the documents that I have read suggests that they were perpetrators of a fraud.²³

do pastora Johanna Burgmanna z 1773 roku,” *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2005, no. 4: 577–592. (The English summary, appended to the end of the Doktor and Greisiger essay, mistakenly dates the letter to January 25, 1773.)

²³ It is important to note that the letters from the “sect” in Amsterdam stress the significance of the conversion of all Jews to Christianity, almost as a *sine qua non* for the full redemption of Christians everywhere. Basically, the “sect” was telling Burgmann and Latrobe exactly what they wanted to hear. Note that the founding father of the reconstituted Moravian Brethren, Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), wrote as follows: “We believe in general, that the Time of the Heathen is not yet come.

7. Since there was no international Jewish-Christian sect in eighteenth-century Europe, it is not very likely that R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz served as its head. Regarding the claim that he personally was openly Jewish and secretly Christian, the testimony of Solomon Duitsch, an almost perfect parallel to Simon, is worth mentioning here.²⁴ Duitsch was born in Temeshvar, then located in Hungary, in 1734. In 1747 he moved to Prague, spending some seven years in the yeshivah there, after which he was ordained. From 1761 on, he began harboring Christian beliefs while outwardly remaining a Jew. In 1762 he met one of the leading rabbis in Germany, who comforted him by informing him that he, too—the chief rabbi—harbored such beliefs. That chief rabbi was neither Eibeschuetz nor Prossnitz. But in 1763, Duitsch, in fact, met Eibeschuetz. Duitsch writes:²⁵

On the 10th of February, I arrived safely at Hamburg and Altona, at which last place that eminent and learned Rabbi, Jonathan Eibeschuetz, was still alive. This man had been educated in my great-grandfather's house, at Nicolsburg, in Moravia, and there, as a poor orphan, had received many great favours.²⁶ At my going from Hamburg to Altona, to look for a convenient inn in which to take up my lodging, I had to pass near his house, and he, being then at his window, saw me going by. I had scarcely entered the inn when his servant came and enquired for the stranger who was just arrived there. The people of the house directed

For it is believed in our Church that the Conversion of the Jews, and of all Israel must needs [*sic*] go before, ere the proper Conversion of the Heathen can go forward." See William C. Reichel, ed., *Memorials of the Moravian Church*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1870), 116. Cf. Christiane Dithmar, *Zinzendorfs nonkonformistische Haltung zum Judentum* (Heidelberg, 2000), *passim*. Latrobe sensed that the sect's history and teaching seemed to parallel the history and teaching of the Moravian Brethren. In his notes to the sect's history (UA, R. 16.6.4), Latrobe writes: "This also [*is*] peculiar, that it [*i.e.*, the sect] should take its rise chiefly in Poland, Moravia, and Bohemia, as though it should indicate a connection with the Brethren of our Lord among us. And that the time of its coming to some kind of consistency be pretty much the same with ours."

²⁴ On Duitsch, see Jacob Haitsma, *Christian Salomon Duijtsch* (Leiden, 1993). Cf. Gesine Carl, *Zwischen zwei Welten?* (Hannover, 2007). I am indebted to Elisheva Carlebach for calling my attention to the Carl volume.

²⁵ Solomon Duitsch, *The Wonderful Conversion to Christianity of Solomon Duitsch, A Jewish Rabbi*, trans. James H. Collins (Leeds, 1818), 62–64.

²⁶ In the Dutch original (which presents a fuller and more interesting text), Duitsch identifies his great-grandfather as R. Mordecai of Nikolsburg. See Christian Salomon Duitsch, *De wonderlyke leidinge Gods omtrent eenen Blinden leidsman der Blinden* (Amsterdam, 1768), 106–111. It is important to note that Burgmann translated Duitsch's Dutch account into German (London, 1770) and English (London, 1771), adding a preface and annotations. His comments provide important background material relating directly to the issues discussed in this essay.

him to me. He presented me with his master's compliments and an invitation to go with him directly to his master's house, who desired to speak with me. Several Jews were gathered about me, who gaped with surprise. At the same time, the devil tortured my mind with inexpressible anxiety, suggesting that this Rabbi had been informed of my case, and that consequently, I was now in great danger of my life.... The Rabbi received me with extraordinary civility, and enquired of me concerning my relations. He expressed very great satisfaction when I told him the very person who had given him his education was my great-grandfather. He gave me my board at his table, and recommended me to the other Jews. So that during my stay at Altona, I wanted none of the necessities of life.

Clearly, Duitsch did not think that Eibeschuetz was a secret Christian, nor had he heard from anyone else that Eibeschuetz was a secret believer in Christianity. Quite the contrary—he was frightened to death that Eibeschuetz would see through the thin veneer of his outwardly expressed Judaism and expose the Christian proclivities harbored deep in his heart. This was in 1763, Eibeschuetz's last active year. He was bedridden for the last twelve months of his life, died in September 1764, as a Jew, and was buried with honors in the rabbinic section of the Koenigstrasse cemetery in Altona.

In sum, Liebes has set the table for all future discussion of the topic. He is surely right in identifying the Sabbatian character and identity of Simon and the alleged sect. Where we differ is whether there ever was a Jewish-Christian sect in the eighteenth century that was openly Jewish and secretly Christian (and genuinely so, as depicted in the history of the society) that spread across Europe into Holland, Germany, Bohemia, Moravia, Poland, and Turkey. The claim of the Herrnhut documents can hardly be considered evidence that this was the case. If such an international Jewish-Christian sect existed, it would not have gone unnoticed in the Jewish and Christian sources of the eighteenth century. There certainly was a Sabbatian sect in the eighteenth century; it is recorded in Jewish and Christian sources. There certainly was a Hasidic sect in the eighteenth century; it, too, is recorded in Jewish and Christian sources. But not a word appears about an eighteenth-century Jewish-Christian sect that was openly Jewish and secretly Christian. In a predominantly Christian world, this in fact would be an absurdity. Note, too, that the eighteenth century was the age of R. Jacob Emden. No heresy eluded this man; he thrived on exposing Jewish sects. Yet he knew nothing about such a sect, not even in Altona and Hamburg, where the alleged head of the sect resided! I do not doubt for a moment that in all periods there were individual Jews, as distinct from sects,

who, while outwardly Jewish, inwardly and secretly harbored Christian beliefs. A handful of such Jews may have resided in Amsterdam in the eighteenth century.²⁷ Ultimately, such tension would usually be resolved by either conversion to Christianity or reversion to Judaism and not by the creation of a Jewish-Christian sect.

²⁷ Aside from the failure of Burgmann, Latrobe, and Dober to locate such a “sect” in Amsterdam in the 1760s and 1770s, it is interesting to examine the testimony of two earlier missionaries to the Jews in Amsterdam.

1. “In the year 1743, a Brother of the Seminary, Otto William Hasse, resided among the Jews of Amsterdam, and seemed to meet with blessing, but soon departed this life. Several baptized Jews came about this time from other places to the Congregation, and afforded some hopes that a time would come, when a *Kehille*, or congregation of them, would be seen for a blessing to their nation. But it appeared that the proper time of their visitation was not yet come.”

2. “[In 1759] Jews came in great numbers to hear the Rev. Samuel Lieberkühn, who was minister here [in Zeist, a town near Utrecht, in central Netherlands, that served as a major outpost for the Moravian Brethren – SZL]. He, out of love to them, had formerly lived in Amsterdam, and still frequently visited them. And they, out of a particular regard for him, used to call him Rabbi Schmuël. There were seen some traces which gave room to believe that these endeavours left some blessed impressions upon them. About the same time, a baptized Jew of Herrnhut made a visit in Poland and Russia to see what ground there was in the report of a stir among the Jews, and of their having declared themselves in favour of the Christian religion. But it was found that the hour of their visitation was not yet come.”

See David Cranz, *The Ancient and Modern History of the Brethren*, trans. Benjamin Latrobe (London, 1780), 315, 462–463. On Lieberkühn’s activities in Amsterdam, see Gustav Dalman and Adolf Schulze, *Zinzendorf und Lieberkühn* (Leipzig, 1903), esp. pp. 63–75. In an assessment done by one of the elders of the Moravian Brethren in the late 1770s (see “Brief Narrative of the Labours of the Brethren’s Church among the Jews between the Years 1733 and 1764,” in *Periodical Accounts Relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren* 12 [1831]: 345–350), we are informed regarding Lieberkühn (d. 1777): “Though not much fruit appeared at the time to result from his long continued and self-denying labours, we may yet believe that some souls were benefited and saved by his ministry.” The impression one gets from these and similar passages is that in eighteenth-century Amsterdam there was a cadre of Jewish converts to Christianity who at times struggled to form their own “congregation,” without much success. This is hardly evidence of a sect, even in Amsterdam.