

Zeitschrift: Judaica : Beiträge zum Verstehen des Judentums
Herausgeber: Zürcher Institut für interreligiösen Dialog
Band: 37 (1981)

Artikel: Luigi Chiarini : a case study in intellectual anti-semitism
Autor: Ages, Arnold
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-961283>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 30.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

LUIGI CHIARINI

A CASE STUDY IN INTELLECTUAL ANTI-SEMITISM

*by Arnold Ages **

Luigi Chiarini (1789-1832) must be considered in any study of the forces of reaction and anti-Semitism which animated Europe and especially France in the nineteenth century. There are several paradoxes associated with Chiarini's role in the dissemination and anti-Jewish sentiments during the period in question.

First, Chiarini considered himself a friend of the Jewish people and saw his participation in various projects as having beneficial ends for Jews, especially in Poland. Second, he is known primarily for a work which he considered only a prolegomena to a much broader and important enterprise — which never completely saw the light of day because of his untimely death at age forty-three. Third, although his fame rests upon a work which he published in French, and which had its greatest impact in France, Chiarini was not French; moreover he spent most of his life away from the centre of French culture in Warsaw, Poland. (1)

Chiarini's position in the development of European intellectual history derives from his activities as professor of Oriental and Semitic languages at the University of Warsaw during the early years of the nineteenth century. During his tenure of office he became involved in a project to ameliorate ostensibly the condition of Polish Jews. This led him eventually to write a book entitled *Théorie du Judaïsme* (1830) and to begin an even more ambitious project — translating the Babylonian Talmud into French. (2) The reverberations of Chiarini's two-volume essay on Judaism echoed during a large portion of the nineteenth century in France where mischievous minds, anxious to reverse the civil rights obtained by Jews in the wake of the Napoleonic Sanhedrin, found in Chiarini's treatise an arsenal of arguments which they used to denigrate Jews and Judaism. Chiarini's essay, written with a patina of scholarly pretensions, and in French, permitted access to a tradition of anti-Semitic folklore, legend, and quasi erudition to a significant coterie of French intellectuals, who had hitherto been denied a body of literature available only in Latin and German. It was Chiarini's popularization of anti-Jewish arguments, that fed the hallucinatory and near pathological anti-Semitism of people like Louis Veuillot and Drumont.

In 1825 Chiarini joined a group in Warsaw who took upon themselves the task of «civilizing» Polish Jews. Called the Hebrew Committee, the organization, composed entirely of Christians, received official imprimatur with the granting of an imperial decree ratifying its purposes on May 22, 1825. One of first decisions of the committee was to set up schools for Christian young men in which they would be able to study various aspects of Judaism and Jewish culture. It was believed that a more intimate acquaintance with the teachings of Judaism would facilitate the conversion of Polish Jews — the primordial aim of the Hebrew Committee. To further that end courses were to be instituted in Yiddish as well since it was the vernacular of Poland's Jewish population.

Chiarini suggested that a major contribution to the work of the Committee should be a translation in French of the Talmud. His reasons were manifold. Since this was a major religious literature for Jews, and since it was available only in Hebrew and Aramaic, a translation was necessary in order for members to appreciate better the religious and ideological underpinnings of Judaism. Chiarini who was adept in Semitic languages, felt moreover, that the Talmud was the fundamental source of the incivility which characterized Polish Jewry. The fact that it was to be translated into French rather than German or Polish was a function of the importance of the French language in Europe in the nineteenth century, a period when it had reached its apogee as the language of cultured circles. (3)

It is instructive to note that on announcing his intention to initiate such a project, Chiarini met with a great deal of opposition, especially from ecclesiastical personages. One critic writing in a contemporary journal ridiculed the project scornfully. The major objection seemed to be the wasteful expenditure of energy which had to accompany what was basically an unimportant exercise. Beugnot, the critic in question, writing in the *Revue Encyclopédique*, conceded that were the Talmud an edifying text, its translation might be a genuine contribution. But since that was not the case, its translation would only serve to circulate more efficiently the poisonous doctrines of the rabbis and make them available to impressionable and gullible young minds. (4)

Chiarini's proposal was attacked on other grounds as well. He had argued in his brief that a translation of the Talmud and the concomitant exposé of its pernicious teachings would encourage Jews to repudiate beliefs and practices to which they had become addicted through rabbinic obfuscation and casuistry. Beugnot, in his appraisal, pointed out that the Talmud had *already* been translated into Latin and German by Bartolucci,

Wolfe and Eisenmenger and that these translations had in no way altered the *status quo* of Jews.

Beugnot's opposition was based on a rejection of Chiarini's basic premise, to wit, that Jews would become civilized if they were forced to confront the unhealthy religious influences which their sacred books contained. The outlandish behaviour of the Jews, argued Beugnot, was not a function of their religious texts, but a result of the misery and degradation to which they had been subjected by the forces of the state. Before Jews could be expected to act in a dignified manner, they had to be treated with dignity. «If this nation is plunged in ignorance,» wrote Beugnot, «wallowing in misery and brutalized by long proscription, can it possibly display a readiness to be seduced by a purified philosophy and awake from its torpor in order to rise to the knowledge of true religious principles?» (5) Beugnot answered his rhetorical question by suggesting that kindness towards Jews was the first step in changing their national character. The social status of the Jews had to be improved; hereditary vices could disappear but only after the application of patient instruction commingled with understanding. Only after changes had occurred in the civil status of Jews, would it be possible or advisable to direct Jews to the imperfections in their religious source texts.

Chiarini did not heed the critical response of Beugnot, much to the chagrin of Jewish communities in Europe which, throughout the nineteenth century became the targets of various canards about Judaism dredged up by Chiarini and transmitted by him in French. The economic and social turbulence of the post-Revolutionary period produced a climate in which many people sought to identify the demonic forces which had reversed the destinies of so many of the wealthied classes. Chiarini's demonology of the Jews coincided with various conspiratorial theories involving Jews which were making the rounds in various salons in France. (6)

The original idea which Chiarini propounded was for the creation of a committee of translators who would begin work on the Talmud on a long range basis. Eight years were to be devoted to the production of six folio volumes of one thousand pages each. Only two volumes actually appeared under the title *Le Talmud de Babylone, Traduit en Langue Française et Complété par Celui de Jérusalem et par d'autres Monuments de l'Antiquité Judaïque* (Leipzig, 1831). Chiarini's sudden death in 1832, the result of a cholera epidemic, put an end to the gigantic translation project.

While his translation of parts of the Talmud lapsed into relative obscurity, the introduction to the work called *Théorie du Judaïsme*,

gained considerable notoriety and received a blistering response from two German-Jewish scholars, Jost and Zunz, both of whom called Chiarini a thoroughly incompetent researcher whose materials were based largely on plagiarism. (7) Chiarini's essay was subtitled *appliquée à la réforme des Israélites*, which conveys the thrust of the work. Published in 1830 in two volumes the *Théorie* contains three major parts; the first deals with the problems inherent in understanding the true character of Judaism; the second contains Chiarini's theoretical apparatus in appraising Judaism and the third treats of the author's program to reform Judaism and rid it of the encrustations of the rabbis.

Chiarini's thesis is an especially bold and dramatic one coming as it does less than twenty years after Napoleon's council had decided to accord Jews civil rights. Chiarini's position is simply that the social estrangement of Jews from the European body politic has nothing to do with the segregated conditions of Jewish living nor with the alleged discrimination and persecution of Jews in Christian society. For the author, these are the *consequences* of the Jewish condition, not the *cause*. The main reason for the religious, psychological and social deformities which affect Jews, is, according to Chiarini, the Jewish religion, and, more particularly, its contemporary incarnation — Talmudic Judaism. (8)

In order to justify this assertion Chiarini proceeds to an investigation of the Talmudic dialectic — which he disparages for a long list of reasons. What perturbs him notably in the Talmud is the perceived violation of western modalities of logic, inference and deduction. The coexistence within the Talmudic framework of mutually contradictory and even exclusive views is for Chiarini a demonstration of the utter senselessness of rabbinic discourse on the one hand and the excessive reverence paid to the rabbis on the other. In his approach Chiarini refuses categorically to view the Talmud as an assemblage of debating notes, historical musings, Biblical exegesis and folklore, choosing rather to judge it by the canons of contemporary standards of literary coherence and cogency. What he finds especially offensive in the corpus of the Talmud is the way in which the rabbis are seen to have arrogated to themselves a quasi divine stature. Thus the rabbinic maxim *eiylu v'eiylu divrei elohim ḥaim* (both these views and those views are the words of the living God) constitutes for Chiarini ipso facto evidence that the rabbis considered their own words on a par with Scripture and divine inspiration. «Talmudic doctrines are like two opposing currents,» says Chiarini «which flow into each other... and because of this their influence is all the more dangerous.» In opposing what he deems to be a danger Chiarini engages in flinging ungracious

epithets at the compilers of the Talmud as he charges them with the sins of pride, disputatiousness, bigotry and hypocrisy.

The first part of the *Théorie du Judaïsme*, far from trying to illuminate the nature of Judaism, is little more than a windy polemic against the rabbinic mind. Chiarini attributes to the rabbis the possession of arcane knowledge which they have deployed in order to reinforce the filiation they posit between their own human views and God's revelation. This esoteric wisdom, says Chiarini is derived from three secret alphabets *Atbach*, *Albam* and *Athbasch* in addition to the Kabbalistic exegetical sciences *Gematria*, *Notarikon* and *Temurah*. The rabbis of the Talmud, asserts the author of the *Théorie*, validate their own quasi divine stature «on the authority of their *midrashim*, which assures them that the Talmuds of Jerusalem and Babylon were present with God even before the creation of the world... along with everything that has been written to this point and which will be written in the future.»

From the outset Chiarini takes upon himself not the exposition of Judaism but the rabbinic infrastructure of the Jewish religion, which he claims to be an artificial construct not in consonance with Biblical Judaism. On the basis of this perception Chiarini proceeds to an analysis and critique of the Oral Law, the fruit par excellence of the rabbinic dialectic. He disputes the premise that Talmudic jurisprudence derives from Biblical norms and ridicules the rabbinic claim that the six different orders within the Talmud were ordained by the prophet Isaiah (33:6) in his admonition: «And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation...» For Chiarini the evolution of the Talmud came about as a result of the conditions of Jewish existence in Palestine after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile. Because of the anemia in Jewish religious life which the rabbis found in the ancestral homeland they began to institute a series of exercises which would strengthen Judaism. One aspect of the resuscitation move was to record for posterity various laws and commentaries which the rabbis had deduced from their study of the Bible. At some obscure point the commentaries themselves became invested with a kind of divine imprimatur which extended to the rabbis themselves. The latter, of course, did nothing to discourage this perception. Thus an innocent restructuring of Jewish religious life during the time of Ezra became within a short period an edifice which bore little resemblance to the Biblical matrix from which it emerged.

After discoursing on the origins of the rabbinic view of the Talmud, Chiarini attempts to categorize the major doctrines found in the work.

Refracted through his prism (not always a distorted one) the Talmud is seen to teach *inter alia*, a belief in angelology, love of one's neighbours, original merit (in contradistinction to original sin) and the binding nature of *Halakha*, religious law. In surveying these doctrines Chiarini is unable to refrain from editorializing. Jewish teachings regarding the merit of the fathers, *z'khut avoth*, are reported by Chiarini to be at the basis of Jewish arrogance. Presumably he felt that only the doctrine of original sin could inculcate the values of humility.

A rather bizarre aspect of Chiarini's exposition resides in his disquisitions on the currency of schismatic doctrines in the Talmud. Because the latter echoes views held by Essenes, Herodians and Therapeutae, Chiarini holds this to be authoritative Jewish teachings.

Because he refuses to accept the fragmentary nature of the Talmudic text, Chiarini expatiates at length in his treatise on the incomprehensibility of Talmudic syntax, and the eccentricities of rabbinic Aramaic, which because of its lack of vocalization, engenders a host of linguistic ambiguities. These strictures are quite mild, however, when contrasted with Chiarini's abusive tone in his comments on the rabbinic mind. For the author of the *Théorie* fanaticism and subtlety are the symbols of the Talmudic discourse. The natural sophistry of the rabbis, Chiarini informs his readers, became even more pronounced with the unexpected triumph of Christianity. This occasioned the alteration of major Biblical texts for polemical purposes against Christianity. «Indeed, there are at least twenty passages in the Gemara,» asserts Chiarini, «which attack the memory of Jesus Christ and the character of Christians, compared to one or two passages of the same kind which you find in the Mishna...»

The major problem with the rabbinic approach is not the result, according to Chiarini, of some strategic maneuver or some defensive tactic. It derives from the corrupt nature *per se* of the rabbinic mind. At this juncture Chiarini disengages from stylistic analysis and enters the realm of racial diagnosis — a generation before Gobineau and two before Drumont and the *Libre Parole*. Chiarini advances a novel argument to substantiate his claim regarding the innate immorality of the Talmudic personalities. Citing internal evidence in which Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph is depicted as the principal source for many Talmudic doctrines, Chiarini then goes on to quote passages from three tractates, *Nedarim* (50,1), *Yevamoth* (62,2) and *Hulin* (7,1) in which it is asserted that the same Rabbi Akiva, far from being a paradigm of probity and integrity, was a conniver and a perjurer who obtained his wealth through unscrupulous means. His own disciples, reports Chiarini, perished in the thousands because they

failed to learn elemental lessons about honour — a rather sober indictment of the man who was supposed to be their mentor in things of the spirit. Chiarini produces his trump card in assailing the rabbis when he quotes a verse from the tractate *Yoma* (22,2,23) to the effect that: «The scholar who does not seek vengeance or who does not nourish the desire to avenge himself like a serpent, does not merit the name scholar.» Chiarini does not, of course, cite many other texts which present a more felicitous view of the scholarly vocation.

The *Théorie du Judaïsme* contains a remarkably informed section on the distinctions within the Talmudic strata between *Agada* and *Halakha*, the former being concerned with non doctrinal matters, the latter with legally binding injunctions. Chiarini indicates that he is aware of statements within the Talmud which deprecate attempts to invest *Agada* with authority, including one which warns the faithful against lending credence to statements found in the *Agada* at the risk of forfeiting one's life in the world to come. In his analysis of the Talmudic dialectic, however, Chiarini charges the rabbis with having falsified, for polemical reasons, the true nature of *Agadic* discourse. The testimony of the Talmud itself, argues Chiarini, indicates that the so-called *Agada* was also considered to be religiously authoritative, a source for apprehending truths not recognizable in conventional ways. The author asserts that the rabbis used *Agada* to confirm principles enunciated in *Halakha*. «Thus... in the first page of the Talmud the Halakha says that the obligation to recite the Sh'ma lasts until daylight and the Agada confirms this teaching with the example of the sons of Rabbi Gamaliel, who having admitted to returning late from a banquet without saying the Sh'ma, were warned by their father that if the morning star had not risen they were still under an obligation to recite it.» For Chiarini this pericope is clear evidence that in the Talmud itself the *Agada* is to be considered obligatory and binding on Jews.

For confirmation of this assertion Chiarini cites the opinions of Maimonides on the nature of *Agada*. The latter had defined three aspects of *Agada*; a literalist view which saw it as a direct expression of divine truth, a humanistic one which viewed it as divine subject matter filtered through the rabbinic mind, and an allegorical phenomenon in which the *Agada* was considered to be the repository of esoteric and hidden doctrines. For Chiarini the divergences of interpretation do not affect the larger rabbinic consensus on the binding aspect of teachings derived from the *Agada*.

The reason for which Chiarini insists on the doctrinally binding nature

of the *Agada* is not readily apparent until the author of the *Théorie* moves on to the next level of analysis in which he seeks to evaluate the morality of that segment of the Talmudic corpus. Taking as an example of the dubious morality of the *Agada* he cites the well known text in *Sanhedrin* (39,2) where angels are described as preparing to sing a hymn to God on the occasion of the drowning of the Egyptians. In the pericope in question God chides the angels, saying: «My creatures are perishing and you want to sing hymns to me!» Chiarini observes that apologists for Judaism frequently point to this passage as an example of the tolerance in Jewish tradition. Those who do so fail, however, to mention the passage which follows in *Sanhedrin*, namely, that while God does not rejoice at the misfortune experienced by his creatures it is perfectly permissible for man to do so. Says Chiarini in a spirit of vindictiveness: «He permits the Jews... to rejoice at the misfortune of the Gentiles and when He permits the Gentiles to rejoice at the misfortune of the Jews... he does so in order to have the opportunity to punish them for having rejoiced at the latter.»

This posture, Chiarini sees as symbolic of the essential misanthropy of rabbinic Judaism. He is not, of course, concerned with historical or contextual reasons why such views are found in the Talmud. Chiarini begins with a *parti pris* against Judaism and then find copious documentation to confirm his presuppositions. One of the latter deals with the image of Gentiles in the rabbinic tradition. For Chiarini the Talmud is a repository of hatred towards the latter and much of the *Théorie du Judaïsme* is taken up with the author's divagations on this theme. His technique is to assemble a digest of those passages in the Talmud which deal with Gentiles. Thus isolated and «explained» by Chiarini they become a litany of hatred towards Gentiles.

What are the anti-Gentile teachings which Chiarini discloses from his research? Jews are instructed to refrain from commerce with Gentiles three days before celebrating festivals. They are enjoined to attend funerals for the *goyim* for the sake of peace but not from spiritual motives. They are forbidden to profane God's name in public but permitted a free reign of their passions in other circumstances. «These formulas, as well as others in the Talmud... indicate intolerance towards Gentiles, but because of the servile conditions in which Jews now live, they have had to hide the misanthropy of their laws in order not to break openly with the people who have accorded them asylum.»

The Talmud then in the Chiarini optic is the source of Jewish incivility and uncouthness, not to speak of obsequiousness. When the Talmud commands the Jew to greet both Jewish and non-Jewish kings, reports

Chiarini, the idea is not to inculcate respect for Gentile monarchs but rather the need to adopt outwardly conformist positions for reasons of strategy. Paraphrasing the Talmud, Chiarini explains that the purpose of such a salutation is to teach the difference between Jewish and Gentile kings so that Jews will be ready to welcome the King of kings, the Messiah. Chiarini also sees in the famous rabbinic dictum *dina d'malkhuta dina* (civil law takes precedence over religious law) as another example of Talmudic sophistry since the injunction in question applies only to those civil laws which are not at variance with Jewish ones. According to Chiarini the Talmudic tradition forbids Jews who appear in gentile courts «to ever reveal the secrets of their unjust and intolerant laws, such as those which declare the goods belonging to Gentiles as fair game.»

Rabbinic salvation theology is another area in which Chiarini seeks to expose the duplicity of the Talmud. He cites as a classic text the one in which the righteous of all nations are assured a place in the world to come. The real meaning of this passage, he claims, hinges on the meaning of the word «righteous.» According to the author of the *Théorie* the rabbis meant to exclude from their salvific vision Muslims and Christians because the latter were considered idol-worshippers — hence intelligible for the world to come. Chiarini argues that «righteous» in context refers only to the proselytes already domiciled in Palestine.

Asserting that the Talmud views Christians as indistinguishable from idol-worshippers, Chiarini continues with his exposition of the most notorious maxim in the rabbinic literature «tov she bagoim leharog.» (The best among the gentiles merits death.) Without any attempt to assess the historical matrix from which this dictum originated, Chiarini launches into a diatribe against rabbinic morality. «Our of about five hundred passages in the Talmud which recommend morality and toleration,» states the Italian priest, «four hundred and ninety are applicable only to the morality which Jews are supposed to practise towards fellow Jews; the tolerance that Jews are asked to display towards gentiles is merely for show. If perchance there is a valuable maxim which genuinely expresses tolerance for others, such as Beruri's teaching about the need to destroy the sin, not the sinner, that maxim is completely altered by the later rabbis before it has time to sink in.»

At this juncture in the exposition of the Talmud, Chiarini departs from text analysis to engage in political disquisitions. Having established to his own satisfaction that rabbinic literature preaches outward conformity in order to allay the hostility of gentiles, Chiarini extrapolates from this datum that the Jewish notables who participated in the Napoleonic

Sanhedrin of 1806-07, falsely appended their imprimatur to the decisions regarding Jewish views on marriage, divorce, citizenship and other questions of personal status. Chiarini charges that the principles to which the Jewish representatives subscribed were diametrically opposed to Talmudic doctrines and to the actual practices of Jews in the lands of dispersion. Political expediency dictated the decisions of the Sanhedrin, Chiarini alleges, and is an example of the cynicism of the political arena. Had genuine Jewish beliefs been enunciated before the Paris Sanhedrin, the results would have been calamitous for French Jews. Anxious to secure entry into French society, and conscious of the fact that the masses of French Jews would ignore their declarations, the participants in Paris had no compunctions about engaging in deception with regard to the real teachings of the Talmud.

After this foray into the political sphere, Chiarini returns to his prime objective — the creation of a plan to reform Jews so as to make them better citizens. There is only one solution in the Chiarini optic. The Jews must be weaned away from the pernicious and corrupting influence of their rabbinic leadership. That is the only true emancipation, according to the author of the *Théorie*; the narrow corridor of Talmudic jurisprudence has virtually enslaved the Jews. Political emancipation such as that envisaged by the French authorities is incompatible with Judaism in its present form, asserts Chiarini. Freedom, in the sense that word is used in modern discourse, runs counter to the rabbinic experience. The fact that Jews themselves have not rhapsodically embraced the ideals of emancipation constituted *ipso facto* proof that Judaism cannot survive a confrontation with western concepts of freedom. «Mirabeau was not able to hide the remarkable fact,» he argues, «that the Jews themselves were not unanimously in favour of the naturalization act passed in England in the year 1753. The zealous factions immediately saw that the probable effect of the bill would be to weaken the influence of the religious doctrine of the children of Moses, to disperse wealth, to isolate the poor and to recruit Christians at the expense of the Jews and to the great detriment of the faith...»

Chiarini is quite aware of the controversy regarding Jewish emancipation which sprang up after the French Revolution. He does not, however, share the felicitous views of Grégoire, Mirabeau, and Thiéry regarding the possibility of regenerating Jews. He is ready to concede that there is a human dimension to the problem but rejects as chimerical the view that it is possible to purify the social mores of Jews through some kind of instructional program. The prejudices run too deep and are too wide-

spread among Jews for any reform to be possible on a strictly educational level.

Not content to remain within the past with regard to Jewish iniquity, Chiarini departs from the canons of theological view-points, to embark upon a projective summary of the dangers of a future Jewish emancipation. To permit the amalgamation of Jews into the gentile body politic would not only be injudicious; it would be suicidal. Chiarini predicts that the patterns of deception practised by Jews (and derived from the Talmud) would permit them to take over society and eliminate the gentile. The hatred of gentiles inculcated by the rabbinic mind would induce the most unscrupulous behaviour towards non-Jews.

In his indictment of Jewish sins, Chiarini quotes copiously from medieval and contemporary writers (not always with source attribution) such as Buxtdorf, Eisenmenger (author of *Entdecktes Judentum* (1700), Raymond Martin (author of the *Pugio Fidei*), Kidder, Basnage, Michaelis and Moreri — in order to substantiate the major criticisms which he brings to bear on Jews and Judaism. His indictment includes: deicide, parochialism, misanthropy, false self pity, chicanery, exaggeration, criminality, usury, distortion of Scripture, perverse education, linguistic obfuscation and villification of gentiles.

Since he is very much aware of the learned discussion surrounding the emancipation debate in France, Chiarini does not hesitate to explore, and, inevitably to refute the arguments of such people as Grégoire, Mirabeau, Malo and Bail — eloquent supporters of Jewish rights who, while recognizing the culpability of Jews in historic crimes, pleaded with enlightened men to treat Jews with kindness rather than vindictiveness. In his response Chiarini disposes of the argument that Jewish incivility stems from Christian harassment and cruelty towards Jews. The decadence of Jews, he affirms, derives from Judaism and not from any external factors. From this unshakable premise Chiarini argues that a regeneration of Judaism can only come about by purifying Judaism from the dross element in which it is submerged, namely Talmudism. Contemporary Judaism is, according to him, distant from the religion of the Old Testament. The Mosaic code has been corrupted by the pernicious doctrines of the rabbis. Permitting Jews free entry into modern western society, in Chiarini's eyes, is inappropriate without some initial reform of Judaism from within. Otherwise the root causes of Jewish marginality and estrangement from gentiles would be unaffected.

Luigi Chiarini attempted in his *Théorie du Judaïsme* to compose a prolegomena to his translation of the Talmud. What began as a scholarly

enterprise became transformed in a remarkably short time into a traditional exercise in anti-Semitic apologetics. Written two decades after Napoleon had granted civil rights to French Jews, and before those rights had been extended to central European Jews, the *Théorie du Judaïsme* was not seen as an esoteric theological essay but as a socio-politico tract militating against Jews.

There is little original material in Chiarini's treatise. German scholars of the period documented the priest's wholesale plagiarism. Yet in Chiarini's case there was originality in the sense Pascal used the word when he said: «Let no one say I am original; the order is new.» Chiarini was the first among nineteenth century conservatives to use an international vernacular to calumniate Jews and Judaism by retailing information culled from obscure medieval treatises in order to validate preconceived views which he held about the intrinsic decadence he claimed to find in Judaism.

Chiarini's influence in the spread of anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century can only be imperfectly gauged. What is certain is that he moved the debate over Jewish rights from the rarified arena of theological debate to the concrete world of social and political discourse. It is no accident that later French anti-Semites such as Louis Veuillot and Drumont found almost limitless inspiration in Chiarini's divagations against the Jews. (9)

NOTES

* Department of French University of Waterloo, Ontario (Canada).

- (1) Luigi Chiarini was born in 1789 at Acquaviva in the Chiana valley to indigent parents. A precocious youth, he was sent to the seminary of Montepulciano for the priesthood and subsequently studied oriental languages at the University of Pisa. In Pisa he taught for a short period at the teacher's college of the city but because of budgetary problems at the school he was soon reduced to giving private lessons. Because of his impoverished status Chiarini welcomed the invitation from Emperor Alexander for Italian scholars to come to his states and spread learning. Chiarini was one of many Italian scholars to leave their native land; he settled in Warsaw where he enjoyed the largesse of Emperor Nicolas and a handsome budget for the editing and publishing of his theological works.
- (2) Although Chiarini's fame (or notoriety depending on one's perspective) rests principally on his translation into French of the Talmudic tractate *Beraḥot* and his *Théorie du Judaïsme* he was the author of many other works including creative and critical forays into Italian poetry (*Essai de poésies italiennes* Pisa, 1818), learned treatises on oriental astronomy, a study of Champollion's decipherment techniques (*Paléographie orientale et occidentale*), and, a dissertation in 1824 on the origins of the fable.

- (3) The history of Christian attacks on the Talmud is a most unfortunate story going back to medieval times. The original thrust of the polemic concerned allegations that the Talmud contained admissions that Jesus was the Messiah. This was the subject of the debate in Paris in 1244 between Nicholas Donin and Yehiel of Paris. A similar confrontation took place in 1263 in Barcelona between Moses ben Nahman and Pablo Christiani. The major source text for the Christological interpretation of the Talmud is Raymundus Martini's *Pugio Fidei* (1278). The question of the Talmud as a repository of Christian truths has been explored by A. Neubauer in «Jewish Controversy and the «Pugio Fidei»» in *Expositor* 3rd series Vol VIII pp. 81-69; Vol. IX pp. 180-197). By the time of the disputation at Tortosa in 1413 a shift had occurred in the assault on the Talmud. It was now indicted as a work of calumny against Christians. Through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries various papal decrees prevented publication of the Talmud. Censorship of allegedly offensive materials was another technique used by the Church. A particularly virulent attack on Talmudic morality and the rabbinic view of gentiles came with Johannes Eisenmenger's *Entdecktes Judenthum* (1700) a German treatise which brought together different strands of Talmudic opinion arranged so as to present rabbinic Judaism in the least favourable posture. In French up until the time of Chiarini relatively little source material was available. In the eighteenth century Dom Augustin Calmet had published his *Lettres de l'auteur du Commentaire littéral sur la Genèse* (1710) in which he discoursed superficially on the rabbinic dialectic. See my «Calmet and the Rabbis» in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* Vol. LV, No. 4 April 1965 pp. 340-349) Both Pierre Bayle and Denis Diderot, a precursor of the *philosophes* and a *philosophe* respectively, wrote of the rabbinic tradition in an uncomplimentary fashion. See my *French Enlightenment and Rabbinic Tradition* (Frankfort, 1970) None of the French sources on the Talmud were based on primary knowledge of texts cited. Chiarini's treatise was the first scholarly treatment of the subject in French.
- (4) Chiarini's work evidently precipitated a storm of controversy on its publication. Articles and brochures appeared in Poland, Saxony and Bohemia attacking the author's thesis on several grounds including the assertion that an aberration found in the corpus of rabbinic literature should not lead to a generalization about the whole Talmud just as the eccentricities of certain casuists should not lead to the blanket condemnation of Catholicism. Chiarini was also attacked with regard to his plan to translate the Talmud — an idea that went contrary to several papal interdictions dating back to the fifteenth century.
- (5) Arthur Beugnot, «Notice sur un projet formé à Varsovie de publier une traduction française du Talmud, précédée d'un essai intitulé : Théorie du Judaïsme appliquée à la réforme des Juifs,» *Revue Encyclopédique* Vo. XXXVIII, p. 28.
- (6) It is instructive to note that in 1830, the same year that saw the appearance of Chiarini's opus, Admiral Verhuell said in the French Chamber of Peers, with regard to recognizing Jewish civil rights that he found it impossible to forgive the Jews for their crime of deicide and for their possession and embrace of the Talmud. For a discussion of the theory of conspiracy involving Jews see my «Bonald and the Jews» in *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, Janvier-Mars, 1974, pp. 32-43; also «Lammenais and the Jews» in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. LXIII² pp. 158-170) Professor Herzberg in his *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York, 1968) deals with this question in the latter part of his book.
- (7) Zunz's critique «Beleuchtung der Théorie du judaïsme des abbé Chiarini» in Leopold Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften* (New York, 1976), pp. 271-298, is a mordant and witty digest of Chiarini's «scholarship» with an emphasis on the latter's derivative approach to Talmudic learning. Zunz presents a chart (p. 295) showing a page by page analysis of the passages in Eisenmenger which Chiarini copied from the *Entdecktes Judenthum*. Says

Zunz: «Einen grossen Theil seiner Theorie hat der Verfasser eingeständlich jenen Autoren abgeborgt. Was bleibt also, nach Abzug einiger aus der Luft gegriffener Hypothesen, als Ergebniss eigener, unbefangener, neuer Forschung? Wir wagen nicht eine kategorische Antwort auszusprechen; aber es scheint uns, das Judenthum — wofern es an demselbigen etwas zu entdecken giebt — war schon am Schlusse des 17. Jahrhunderts entdeckt, oder es ist noch zur heutigen Stunde unentdeckt.» (p. 296). An even more devastating analysis of Chiarini's book came from the German-Jewish historian J. M. Jost in his monograph *Eine freimüthige und unpartheiische Beleuchtung des Werkes Théorie du Judaïsme* (Berlin, 1830). While Zunz traced many of Chiarini's Talmudic quotations back to Eisenmenger, Jost does the same with material «borrowed» by the Italian priest from Buxtdorf, Bartolucci and Martinus. Jost's work is much longer than Zunz's and constitutes what is virtually a page by page by page refutation of calumnies directed at the rabbinic dialectic. Jost's essay is filled with sarcastic references to Chiarini's dependance on secondary authors and his gratuitously ignorant *obiter dicta* on the rabbinic mind.

- (8) The debate over the incivility of Jews became especially acute shortly after the French Revolution. In Germany Dohm's essay, *Civic Betterment of the Jews* (1783) initiated a lively discussion of the social character of contemporary Jews. Dohm argued that historical circumstances had created the Jewish problem. Count Mirabeau echoed many of Dohm's sentiments in *Sur Moïse Mendelssohn et sur la réforme politique des Juifs* (Paris, 1787). The warmest endorsement of Jewish rights came from the abbé Grégoire in his *Motion en faveur des Juifs* (Paris, 1789). Much opposition to integrating Jews into French society came from the abbé La Fare and his colleague Maury. Members of the *Assemblée constituante* including Thiébault and Rewbell, spoke against Jewish emancipation citing Jewish sins not dissimilar to those charted by Chiarini. For the discussion on French Jews see A. Cahen, «L'Emancipation des Juifs devant la Société Royale des Sciences et des Arts de Metz en 1787,» in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, Vol. I, 1880, pp. 80-84); also I. Hersch, «The French Revolution and the Emancipation of the Jews,» in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* Vol. XIX, 1907, pp. 540-542.
- (9) Louis Veuillot, one of the intellectual ancestors and mentors of Drumont quotes copiously from Chiarini in his newspaper *L'Univers religieux*. It is thus possible to suggest a direct filiation between Chiarini, Drumont and the anti-Semitism which plagued France in the Dreyfus affair. See my «Veuillot and the Talmud,» in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. LXIV² pp. 229-260.