20

ABBÉ MAURY

December 23, 1789

Although he came from a family that had been forced to convert from Calvinism to Catholicism by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, Abbé Jean Siffrein Maury (1746–1817) made his reputation as a spokesman for the interests of the Catholic Church, the monarchy's authority, and the established social hierarchy. Here he attacks Clermont Tonnerre's propositions and recapitulates many of the common prejudices of the time.

The exclusion of executioners is not at all founded on prejudice. It is in the soul of every good man to shudder at the sight of him who assassinates in cold blood his fellow man. . . .

Archives parlementaires 10 (Paris, 1878): 754–56.

I go on to actors. The opinion that excludes them is not at all a prejudice; on the contrary, it honors the people who thought of it. Morals are the first law; the profession of acting essentially violates this law, because it removes a son from paternal authority. Revolutions in opinion cannot be as quick as our decrees. Some have always made use of a sophism by saying that men excluded from administrative functions are thereby dishonored; but you yourselves have excluded servants from your constitution. . . .

Let us go on to a subject more worthy of this Assembly. I observe first of all that the word *Jew* is not the name of a sect, but of a nation that has laws which it has always followed and still wishes to follow. Calling Jews citizens would be like saying that without letters of naturalization and without ceasing to be English and Danish, the English and Danish could become French. . . .

The Jews have passed through seventeen centuries without involving themselves with other nations. They have never undertaken anything other than commerce based on money; they have been the scourge of agricultural provinces; not one of them has yet known how to ennoble his hands by driving a plow. The law that they follow leaves them no time to engage in agriculture; in addition to the sabbath they have fifty-six more festivals each year than the Christians. In Poland, they have a large province. And so! The sweat of Christian slaves waters the furrows in which the opulence of the Jews germinates, and they, while their fields are thus cultivated, weigh the ducats [money] and calculate what they can remove from the currency without exposing themselves to legal penalties. . . .

In Alsace they hold 12 million mortgages on the land. In a month, they would become owners of half of this province; in ten years, they would have entirely conquered it, and it would be nothing but a Jewish colony. People feel for the Jews a hatred that cannot fail to explode as a result of this aggrandizement. For their own safety, we should table this matter.

They should not be persecuted: they are men, they are our brothers; and a curse on whomever would speak of intolerance! No one can be disturbed for his religious opinions; you have recognized this, and from that moment on you have assured Jews the most extended protection. Let them be protected therefore as individuals and not as Frenchmen for they cannot be citizens.

It should not be concluded from what I have said about the Jews that I confuse the Protestants with them. Protestants have the same religion

and the same laws as us, but they do not have the same creed; however, since they already enjoy the same rights, I see no reason to deliberate on the section that concerns them in the proposed motion.

21

Letter from French Actors

December 24, 1789

Nothing is known about the actors who banded together to petition the National Assembly. They had heard of the National Assembly's discussion of their situation and hastened to claim their inclusion in the rights of citizenship. The actors adopted an almost servile tone toward the National Assembly, no doubt a sign of their long dependence on the good favor of the king and his court. Here they essentially offer their services to the new government.

Having heard that in some of the opinions pronounced in the National Assembly doubts about the legitimacy of their [the actors'] status have been raised, they beg you, My lord [president of the Assembly], to instruct them whether the Assembly has decreed something on this subject and whether it has declared their status incompatible with admission to posts and participation in the rights of citizenship. Honest men can stand up to a prejudice that the law disavows; but no one can defy a decree or even the silence of the National Assembly on their status.

The French actors, whose homage and patriotic gift you have deigned to accept, reiterate to you, My lord, and the august Assembly, the most formal wish to never employ their talents except in a manner worthy of French citizens, and they would count themselves fortunate if the legislation, reforming the abuses that might have slipped into the theater, would deign to seize upon an instrument of influence on morals and on public opinion.

Archives parlementaires 10 (Paris, 1878): 776.

1685] and where the principles of natural right are still so neglected that we are completely amazed by the tiny dwarf's steps taken in the reform of legislation.

They will be forced to attribute this reticence to something or to someone: and wherever their suspicion settles, neither advantage nor glory can come of it.

I therefore take the liberty, Sir, of imploring you to do whatever you can to reestablish this little phrase. I imagine that one has the intention of making Protestants a bit satisfied; for what is the good of a law if it proves to them that one has sought to assure the peace of mind of the ministers of government but not the peace of mind of the Protestant ministers. . . . I would not abuse your good will, Sir, if I was not entirely convinced that, without this article, one has accomplished almost nothing and that absolute silence on this matter will outrage the Catholics themselves and all of Europe. Thus, for the honor itself of the government, I will take care to say it again and again to the end of my strength; for, once the moment has passed, one would regret having refused such a simple request.

I beg your pardon, Sir, for the liberty that I continue to take until the moment when I will have nothing else to importune you with than the testimonials of an immortal recognition.

I am with profound respect, dear Sir, your humble and very obedient servant,
Rabaut Saint Etienne

5

ZALKIND HOURWITZ

Vindication of the Jews

1789

In 1789, forty thousand Jews lived in France, most of them in the eastern provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. In some respects, they were better treated than Calvinists under the laws of the monarchy; Jews could legally practice their religion, although their other activities were severely restricted. They had no civil or political rights, except the right to be judged by their own

Apologie des Juifs, en réponse à la question: Est-il des moyens de rendre les Juifs plus heureux et plus utiles en France? (Paris: Chez Gattey et chez Roger, 1789).

separate courts, and they faced pervasive local prejudice. The major Jewish communities—in the city of Bordeaux in the southwest and the regions of Alsace and Lorraine in the east—essentially constituted separate "nations" within the French nation (and nations separate from each other since their status differed in many ways).

In 1787 and 1788 the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences of the city of Metz in eastern France set up an essay competition on the question "Are there means for making the Jews happier and more useful in France?" Its two thousand Jews gave Metz the single largest Jewish population in the east. Among the three winners declared in 1788 was Zalkind Hourwitz (1738–1812), a Polish Jew. His pamphlet rapidly earned him a reputation in reformist circles, even though by today's standards its language seems moderate, if not excessively apologetic. The excerpt here represents what might be called the "assimilationist" position, that is, that granting rights to the Jews would make them more like the rest of the French. At times the author's own arguments sound anti-Semitic to our ears because in his concern to counter all the usual stereotypes about the Jews, he repeats many of them and gives them a kind of credit. As a follower of the Enlightenment, Zalkind Hourwitz disliked the extensive powers exercised by Jewish leaders over their communities, and he even held out the possibility of encouraging conversion to Christianity. The inclusion of such a suggestion and the defensive tone of the recommendations for improvement highlight the many difficulties and prejudices faced by the Jews.

The means of making the Jews happy and useful? Here it is: stop making them unhappy and unuseful. Accord them, or rather return to them the right of citizens, which you have denied them, against all divine and human laws and against your own interests, like a man who thoughtlessly cripples himself. . . .

To be sure, during times of barbarism, there was no shortage of ways of oppressing the Jews. Yet we are hard pressed even in an enlightened century, not to repair all the evils that have been done to them and to compensate them for their unjustly confiscated goods [hardly to be hoped for], but simply to cease being unjust toward them and to leave them peacefully to enjoy the rights of humanity under the protection of general laws. . . .

The simplest means would be therefore to accord them throughout the kingdom the same liberty that they enjoy in [Bordeaux and Bayonne]; nevertheless, however simple this means appears, it is still susceptible to greater perfection, in order to render the Jews not only happier and more useful but even more honest in the following manner.

1. They must be accorded permission to acquire land, which will attach them to the fatherland, where they will no longer regard themselves as foreigners and will increase at the same time the value of the land.
2. They must be permitted to practice all of the liberal and mechanical arts and agriculture, which will diminish the number of merchants among them and in consequence the number of knaves and rogues. . . .
4. To make their merchants more honest, they must be accorded the freedom to exercise every sort of commerce, to keep their stores open, to carry any product, and to live among the other citizens. Then being more closely allied with the other citizens, more at their ease and with their conduct more exposed to the inspection of the police, having moreover to manage their credit, their reputation and especially their regular customers, they will have in consequence less inclination, less necessity, and less facility in cheating and buying stolen goods.
5. To better diminish this facility in cheating, they must be forbidden, on pain of annulment of the transaction, the use of Hebrew and German [Yiddish] language and characters in their account books and commercial contracts, whether between themselves or with Christians.
6. It is necessary therefore to open the public schools to their children, to teach them French, which will produce a double advantage: it will make it easier to instruct them and to make them familiar from earliest infancy with Christians. They will establish with the Christians bonds of friendship which will be fortified by living near to each other, by the use of the same language and customs, and especially by the recognition of the freedom that they will be accorded; they will learn from these bonds that the Christians worship a Supreme Being like themselves, and as a result the fraud that the Talmud authorizes in dealings with pagans will no longer be permitted.
7. To better facilitate these bonds, their rabbis and leaders must be severely forbidden from claiming the least authority over their coreligionists outside of the synagogue, from prohibiting entry and honors to those who cut their beards, who curl their hair, who dress like Christians, who go to the theater, or who fail to observe some other custom that is irrelevant to their religion and only introduced by superstition in order to distinguish the Jews from other peoples. . . .

We could add that the freedom of the Jews is the best means of converting them to Christianity; for, once putting an end to their captivity, you will render useless the temporal Messiah that they expect, and then they will be obliged to recognize Jesus Christ as a spiritual Messiah in order not to contradict the Prophets, who predicted the arrival of some kind of Messiah. . . .

Are so many verbiages and citations necessary to prove that a Jew is a man, and that it is unjust to punish him from his birth onward for real or supposed vices that one reproaches in other men with whom he has nothing in common but religious belief? And what would the French say if the Academy of Stockholm had proposed, twelve years ago, the following question: "Are there means for making Catholics more useful and happier in Sweden?"

Antislavery Agitation

6

ABBÉ RAYNAL

From the *Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*

1770

Abbé Guillaume Thomas Raynal (1711–1796), known by his clerical title [abbé = *French for Father (a priest)*], *first published his multivolume history of European colonization anonymously in French in 1770. Today many sections of it seem almost quaint and hopelessly detailed, for Raynal and his collaborators (among them Diderot) gathered every*

Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies, revised, augmented, and published, 10 vols., by Abbé Raynal. Newly translated from the French, by J. 0. Justamond, F.R.S., 8 vols. (London: W. Strahan, 1783). Excerpted from vol. 5, bk. XI: 292–96, 302–4, 307–10. This edition appears to be a translation of the 1780 Geneva edition in French, whose passages on slavery sounded a more combative note than those found in the original 1770 edition.

22

Petition of the Jews of Paris, Alsace, and Lorraine to the National Assembly

January 28, 1790

When the Jews of Paris and the eastern provinces presented their case to the National Assembly, they leaned heavily on the precedent of granting full rights to the Protestants and on the language of human rights philosophy. They insisted that the Jews should be treated no differently from anyone else and refuted one by one all the customary prejudicial arguments used against the Jews, such as their reliance on making loans with interest (usury). Their petition shows the power of the language of rights; "all men of whatever religion . . . should all equally have the title and the rights of citizen." Despite their pleas, the National Assembly held off on granting full political rights to Jews until September 1791.

A great question is pending before the supreme tribunal of France. *Will the Jews be citizens or not?*

Already, this question has been debated in the National Assembly; and the orators, whose intentions were equally patriotic, did not agree at all on the result of their discussion. Some wanted Jews admitted to civil status. Others found this admission dangerous. A third opinion consisted of preparing the complete improvement of the lot of the Jews by gradual reforms.

In the midst of all these debates, the National Assembly believed that it ought to adjourn the question. . . . This adjournment was based on the necessity of further clarifying an important question; of seeking more positive information about what the Jews do and what they can be; of knowing more exactly what is in their favor and what is not; and finally, of preparing opinion by a thorough discussion for the decree, whatever it may be, that will definitively pronounce on their destiny.

It was also said that the adjournment was based on the necessity of knowing with assurance what were the true desires of the Jews; given,

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Pétition des juifs établis en France, adressée à l'Assemblée Nationale, le 28 janvier 1790, sur l'ajournement du 24 décembre 1789 (n.p., n.d.), 3–11, 13–14, 34–36, 39–40, 96–97.

it was added, the disadvantages of according to this class of men rights more extensive than those they want.

But it is impossible that such a motive could have determined the decree of the National Assembly.

First, the wish of the Jews is perfectly well-known, and cannot be equivocal. They have presented it clearly in their addresses of 26 and 31 August, 1789. The Jews of Paris repeated it in a *new address* of 24 December. They ask that all the degrading distinctions that they have suffered to this day be abolished and that they be declared CITIZENS.

But moreover, how could it be supposed that the legislators, who trace all their principles to the immutable source of reason and justice, could have wanted to turn away in this matter from their accustomed manner of proceeding to seek what they should do, not in what should be, but solely in what is asked of them? . . . It is not therefore because it was believed important to know exactly what the desires of the Jews are, that the question was adjourned, but because it was judged worthy of a thorough investigation.

Their desires, moreover, as we have just said, are well known; and we will repeat them here. They ask to be CITIZENS.

And the right that they have to be declared such; the disadvantages that would result from a decree opposed to their wishes; all these grounds, and others still, will be set forth in this writing, with the energy suited to men who demand, not a favor, but an act of justice.

Finally, none of the objections made by their adversaries, or rather by the adversaries of their admission to civil status, will remain without response. . . .

If they only had to prevail upon justice, they would have little to say. But they have to combat a prejudice, and this prejudice is still so present in so many minds that they will always fear not having said enough. People argue, moreover, from their religion, their customs, their laws, as if they knew perfectly all these subjects; and it is important to draw attention to errors, which are in this regard widespread, accredited, and which perpetuate the prejudice that oppresses the Jews.

Here is, then, the plan of their memoir. They will begin by establishing the principles which require the right of citizens for the Jews. They will prove, next, that France itself would benefit from according this right to them. They will recall and combat the objections used to deny them civil status. Finally, they will demonstrate that the right of citizens should be accorded to the Jews without restriction and without delay; that is, that it would be at once unjust and dangerous to want to prepare them to receive citizenship by gradual improvements. . . .

[Then begins a detailed examination of the various charges against the Jews.] In truth, [the Jews] are of a religion that is condemned by the one that predominates in France. But the time has passed when one could say that it was only the dominant religion that could grant access to advantages, to prerogatives, to the lucrative and honorable posts in society. For a long time they confronted the Protestants with this maxim, worthy of the Inquisition, and the Protestants had no civil standing in France. Today, they have just been reestablished in the possession of this status; they are assimilated to the Catholics in everything; the intolerant maxim that we have just recalled can no longer be used against them. Why would they continue to use it as an argument against the Jews?

In general, civil rights are entirely independent from religious principles. And all men of whatever religion, whatever sect they belong to, whatever creed they practice, provided that their creed, their sect, their religion does not offend the principles of a pure and severe morality, all these men, we say, equally able to serve the fatherland, defend its interests, contribute to its splendor, should all equally have the title and the rights of citizen. . . .

[The Jews] are reproached at the same time for the vices that make them unworthy of civil status and the principles which render them at once unworthy and incompetent. A rapid glance at the bizarre as well as cruel destiny of these unfortunate individuals will perhaps remove the disfavor with which some seek to cover them and will show if it is right to make them all the reproaches that have been addressed to them.

Always persecuted since the destruction of Jerusalem, pursued at times by fanaticism and at others by superstition, by turn chased from the kingdoms that gave them an asylum and then called back to these same kingdoms, excluded from all the professions and arts and crafts, deprived even of the right to be heard as witnesses against a Christian, relegated to separate districts like another species of man with whom one fears having communication, pushed out of certain cities which have the privilege of not receiving them, obligated in others to pay for the air that they breathe as in Augsburg where they pay a *florin* an hour or in Bremen a *ducat* a day, subject in several places to shameful tolls. Here is the list of a part of the harassment still practiced today against the Jews.

And they would dare to complain of the state of degradation into which some of them can be plunged! They would dare to complain of their ignorance and their vices! Oh! Do not accuse the Jews, for that would only precipitate onto the Christians themselves all the weight of these accusations.

The vices of some of them are the work of the peoples who have given them shelter; the degradation of others is the fruit of the institutions

that surround them. To say everything in one word, it is not at all the degradation and vices with which they are reproached that has attracted the harassment which overwhelms them but rather these harassments have produced their degradation and their vices. . . .

Let us now enter into more details. The Jews have been accused of the crime of usury. But first of all, all of them are not usurers; and it would be as unjust to punish them all for the offense of some as to punish all the Christians for the usury committed by some of them and the speculation of many. For a great many years now, moreover, the courts have heard fewer and fewer complaints about usury by the Jews. And, often, the Christians who accused them have given up their complaints.

Reflect, then, on the condition of the Jews. Excluded from all the professions, ineligible for all the positions, deprived even of the capacity to acquire property, not daring and not being able to sell openly the merchandise of their commerce, to what extremity are you reducing them? You do not want them to die, and yet you refuse them the means to live: you refuse them the means, and you crush them with taxes. You leave them therefore really no other resource than usury; and especially, you leave only this resource to the most numerous class of these individuals, for whose needs the legitimate interest from a modest sum of money is far from being sufficient. . . .

Everything that one would not have dared to undertake, moreover, or what one would only have dared to undertake with an infinity of precautions a long time ago, can now be done and one must dare to undertake it in this moment of universal regeneration, when all ideas and all sentiments take a new direction; and we must hasten to do so. Could one still fear the influence of a prejudice against which reason has appealed for such a long time, when all the former abuses are destroyed and all the former prejudices overturned? Will not the numerous changes effected in the political machine uproot from the people's minds most of the ideas that dominated them? Everything is changing; the lot of the Jews must change at the same time; and the people will not be more surprised by this particular change than by all those which they see around them everyday. This is therefore the moment, the true moment to make justice triumph: attach the improvement of the lot of the Jews to the revolution; amalgamate, so to speak, this partial revolution to the general revolution. Your efforts will be crowned with success, and the people will not protest, and time will consolidate your work and render it unshakable.

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