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## Heralds of Duty: The Sephardic Italian Jewish Theological Seminary of Sabato Morais

Arthur Kiron

University of Pennsylvania, [kiron@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:kiron@pobox.upenn.edu)

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## Heralds of Duty: The Sephardic Italian Jewish Theological Seminary of Sabato Morais

### Abstract

The institutional history of the Jewish Theological Seminary has mostly been told in relation to the emergence of the Conservative movement of Judaism in the United States and in relation to the Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar after which it was named, founded by Zecharias Frankel in 1854. The biography and religious outlook of the first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary, a Sephardic Italian Jew named Sabato Morais (1823-1897), are mined as sources for exploring an alternative account. This essay argues for ideological and institutional discontinuity between the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), founded in 1886 and the re-organized seminary incorporated under the name "The Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA) in 1902.

Morais's program of rabbinical education was not solely a response to American conditions of religious reform and insular orthodoxy; nor was it a moderate compromise between the two. Morais's Seminary was consistent with the educational program of enlightened observant Sephardic and Italian Jewish traditions in which he was raised and which he had taught throughout his nearly half-century ministry in Philadelphia (1851-1897). In articulating the character of the JTS, Morais placed the values of duty and humility at the core of his rabbinical training program. His program, its historical and religious specificity, may be contrasted with other Jewish orthodoxies during his time. The afterlife of Morais's religious outlook is then explored via JTS's two most famous graduates, Joseph Hertz, chief rabbi of the British Empire and Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism

### Keywords

Jewish, Theological, Seminary, Sabato, Morais, Sephardic, Italian, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstruction, Humility, Martyrdom, Duty, Piety, Religious, Education

### Disciplines

Jewish Studies | Library and Information Science

# Heralds of Duty: The Sephardic Italian Jewish Theological Seminary of Sabato Morais

ARTHUR KIRON

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA is well known as the institutional home of the Conservative movement of Judaism. Its history has been told many times.<sup>1</sup> The standard narratives date its origins to 1886 when a group of rabbis and lay leaders met in New York to plan a seminary. They were resisting changes promoted by Reform Jews and

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1. See Herbert Parzen, "The Early Development of Conservative Judaism," *Conservative Judaism (CJ)* 3.4 (1947): 12–17; Moshe Davis, *The Shaping of American Judaism* (Hebrew; New York, 1951), 239–77; Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in Nineteenth Century America* (Philadelphia, 1963), 231–82; Abraham J. Karp, "The Origins of Conservative Judaism," *CJ* 19.4 (1965): 33–48; Karp, "The Conservative Rabbi—Dissatisfied but Not Unhappy," *American Jewish Archives (AJA)* 35.2 (1983): 194–203; Robert E. Fierstien, "From Foundation to Reorganization: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America [*sic*], 1886–1902," (D.H.L. thesis, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1986); Fierstien, *A Different Spirit: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America [*sic*], 1886–1902* (New York, 1990); Fierstien, "Sabato Morais and the Founding of the Jewish Theological Seminary," in *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America*, ed. M. Friedman (Philadelphia, 1993), 75–91; Hasia Diner, "Like the Antelope and the Badger: The Founding and Early Years of the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1886–1902," in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, 2 vols., ed. J. Werthheimer (New York, 1997), 1:3–42. Most recently, see Michael R. Cohen, "The Travails of Early Jewish Theological Seminary [*sic*] Graduates: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Challenges of the Emergent Conservative Movement, 1902–1913," *American Jewish Archives Journal (AJAJ)* 63.2 (2011): 1–23. Cohen argues against previous scholarship that "frequently suggested that the movement was defined by a distinct ideology that always separated it from both Reform and Orthodox Judaism" (19). Cf. his *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement* (New York, 2012) for his expanded argument that the modern Conservative movement did not begin with Schechter. My thanks to Michael Meyer for calling this work to my attention.

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aiming to help a mass migration of Eastern European Jews fit into American society while remaining loyal to traditional Judaism. The purpose of the seminary would be to train a new generation of American Jewish religious leaders to accomplish these dual tasks. In religious orientation, the founders were mostly moderates, flexible in some areas of ritual practice while resisting both Reform innovations and Orthodox isolationism. This early history is then woven into the institutional and ideological development of Conservative Judaism in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

The role of the seminary's first president, Sabato Morais, has mostly been downplayed in this account. Historians have circumscribed Morais's involvement by casting him as an institution-builder rather than as a significant intellectual leader. In this essay, I explore the biography and religious orientation of this Italian-born Sephardic minister as sources for revisiting the standard narratives. I will show that Morais's story is at odds with the subsequent history of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA) and the positive-historical intellectual roots of the Conservative movement of Judaism that developed there. I then will conclude by reflecting on the legacy of the original JTS after its demise in 1902 when it was incorporated under a new name (JTSA, i.e., *of America*) and a different religious ideology.

The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) under Morais's leadership was not solely a response to American conditions of religious reform and insular Orthodoxy; nor was it a moderate compromise between the two or a precursor to the Conservative Judaism that grew out of it. And though nominally related to the Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar founded by Zecharias Frankel in 1854 in Breslau in Prussian Silesia, the primary model for the program of religious education taught at the JTS in New York came from a different source. Morais's seminary, I argue, was one among many efforts by him throughout his nearly half-century ministry in Philadelphia to teach the Sephardic and Italian Jewish traditions in which he was raised as a basis for religious Americanization for all Jews, Sephardim and Ashkenazim.

#### A SEPHARDIC ITALIAN INHERITANCE

Sabato Morais was born in the port city of Livorno, on the western coast of Tuscany, in April 1823. Livorno, or Leghorn, as English sailors called

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2. For an early criticism of Moshe Davis's thesis of a "Historical School" that anticipates the modern Conservative movement of Judaism, see Charles S. Liebman, "Orthodoxy in Nineteenth-Century America," *Tradition* 6.2 (1964): 132–40. See Karp, "Origins of Conservative Judaism," for his response to Liebman's critique of Davis. For a review of this debate, see Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Resisters and

it, was the Italian home of a historically distinct Iberian émigré culture dating from the late sixteenth century, when Ferdinand I issued a charter of toleration known as the *Livornina*.<sup>5</sup> The charter, written to attract merchant trade to compete with the thriving ports of Ancona, Genoa, and Venice, promised Jewish merchants freedom of religious observance, the right to print Hebrew books, freedom of movement, and unfettered transport of goods, as well as protection from the threat of inquisition.<sup>4</sup> The city, which never suffered a Jewish ghetto, subsequently functioned as a safe haven during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for Iberian conversos who wanted to live openly as Jews without fear of *auto da fé*.<sup>5</sup> In the seventeenth century, Jewish privileges based on the *Livornina* were reaffirmed, and in the eighteenth century they were enlarged in scope to allow for greater Jewish political participation in the running of Livorno's local government under the absolutist rule of the Habsburg monarchy. Napoleon and his troops brought the revolutionary principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity to the Italian peninsula beginning in 1796. With Napoleonic France's surrender in 1814 and the ratification the following year at the Congress of Vienna of a new balance of powers by Europe's imperial states, a period of simmering discontent ensued.<sup>6</sup>

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Accommodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886–1983," *AJA* 35 (1983): 162–63.

3. One of three known extant copies is viewable online at SCETI (Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image, University of Pennsylvania Libraries): [http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/pages/index.cfm?so\\_id=3611&sequence=22770](http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/pages/index.cfm?so_id=3611&sequence=22770).

4. For the formative period, see Cooperman, "Trade and Settlement," esp. chaps. 3–4, and Renzo Toaff, *La nazione ebrea a Livorno e a Pisa (1591–1700)* (Florence, 1990), 17–51. Also, see Benjamin Ravid, "A Tale of Three Cities and Their *raison d'état*," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6.2 (1991): 138–62.

5. On the conversos of Livorno, see Bernard D. Cooperman, "Trade and Settlement: The Establishment of the Jewish Communities of Leghorn and Pisa" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1976), 273, and Cristina Galasso, *Alle origini di una comunità: Ebrei ed ebrei a Livorno nel Seicento* (Florence, 2002). My thanks to Professor Galasso for kindly sending me a copy of her work.

6. On Jews and the Risorgimento, see the much criticized but still valuable study by Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy* (Philadelphia, 1946); Mario Rossi, "Emancipation of the Jews of Italy," in *Emancipation and Counter Emancipation*, ed. A. G. Duker and M. Ben-Horin (New York, 1974), 205–35; Salvatore Foa, *Gli ebrei nel Risorgimento italiano* (Assisi, 1978); Andrew M. Canepa, "Emancipation and Jewish Response in Mid-Nineteenth Century Italy," *European History Quarterly* 16.4 (1986): 403–39; Dan V. Segre, "The Emancipation of the Jews in Italy," in *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, ed. P. Birnbaum and I. Katznelson (Princeton, N.J., 1995), 206–37; and Carlotta Ferrara degli

Morais grew up in Livorno during this post-1815 period of revolutionary ferment that culminated in the Risorgimento, a movement to liberate the Italian peninsula from foreign control and unify it under republican rule.<sup>7</sup> Morais's father Samuel and his paternal grandfather Sabato, after whom he was named, both passionately supported the revolution and suffered the consequences, as when Samuel was arrested on charges of plotting against the government.<sup>8</sup> The Morais home served as a meeting place for radicals to gather;<sup>9</sup> their son Sabato joined the Italian Freemasons as a teenager and by his own testimony fraternized with the revolutionaries.<sup>10</sup> The liberal republican views Morais expressed later in the United States about controversial issues, including the institution of slavery, the death penalty, women's suffrage, Native American and Asian immigrant rights, concern for the poor, orphaned, sick, and disenfran-

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Uberti, *La 'Nazione Ebraica' di Livorno dai privilegi all'emancipazione (1814–1860)* (Florence, 2007).

7. On Livorno and its Jewish community in the nineteenth century, see Sabato Morais (SM), "History of the Jewish Congregation at Leghorn," *Menorah Monthly (MM)* 11.6 (1891): 353–56, based in part on his friend Raffaello Ascoli's, *Gli ebrei venuti a Livorno* (Livorno, 1885), 37. For recent scholarship, see Michele Luzzati, ed., *Ebrei di Livorno tra due censimenti (1841–1958)* (Livorno, 1990), and in particular the scholarship of Liana Elda Funaro, to whom I am greatly indebted, including "Il Ruolo degli ebrei livornesi: Due percorsi individuali su uno sfondo mediterraneo," in *I laboratori toscani della democrazia e del Risorgimento*, ed. L. Dinelli and L. Bernardini (Pisa, 2004), 79–98; Funaro, "Percorsi dell'emancipazione nella Università israelitica livornese: Isacco Rignano fra comunità e città," in *L'emancipazione ebraica in Toscana e la partecipazione degli ebrei all'unità d'Italia*, ed. D. L. Bemporad (Florence, 2012), 63–82, and other works by her.

8. See Salvatore De Benedetti, *Parole di S.D.B [Salvatore De Benedetti]: Lette in nome di lui il 12 Giugno 1862 nell'occasione dei funerali di Samule Morais, morto il di 27 Maggio 1862*, SM-LKCAJS, box 17, FF27, 2. This document and subsequent primary sources cited here, unless otherwise noted, are held in SM-LKCAJS [= Sabato Morais—Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania].

9. Liana Funaro has studied a selection of the Italian-language correspondence between Morais and his family and friends in Italy in her "'Home and Friends': Ritratti di Ebrei Italiani Dell'Ottocento nelle Pagine di Sabato Morais," *Materia Giudaica* 15–16 (2010–11): 281–305.

10. For Morais's Freemason certificate, see SM-LKCAJS, box 17, FF40, and Max Samuel Nussenbaum, "Sabato Morais: Champion of Orthodoxy" (D.H.L., Yeshiva University, 1964), 32. On Livornese Jews and Italian Freemasonry, see Liana Elda Funaro, "Massoneria e minoranze religiose nel secolo XIX," in *La Massoneria: Dal Settecento alla Repubblica*, ed. F. Conti (Florence, [n.d.]), 343–416, and 387–89 about Morais.

chised, are traceable in part to his family background and to the impact of this revolutionary environment on his political thinking.<sup>11</sup>

Morais's father was a poor butcher who descended from Portuguese conversos; his mother, Buonina Wolf, traced her family roots to Ashkenaz. Although Morais was genealogically both a Sephardi and an Ashkenazi, he grew up praying according to the Sephardic liturgical custom. Looking back on his childhood, Morais recalled:

I grew in the love of the observance of Judaism in the fond attachment for the Sephardic Minhag, the only ritual existing in my native city. The very melodies, especially those of the New Year and the Day of Atonement had a charm which the softest of musical strains cannot surpass.<sup>12</sup>

Livorno's Sephardic community, one of three ethnically distinct Jewish populations—Italian, Sephardic, and Ashkenazic—in the city, was marked by its own vernacular, local customs, and religious liturgy. The Sephardic *minbag* (liturgical custom) differed from other Italian Jewish communities that kept the “Ashkenazic,” “Italian,” or “Roman” Jewish custom. The persistence of Portuguese as the language of commercial transactions well into the nineteenth century, the near sacred status Spanish held among many of the city's Jewish residents, the “giudaico-Livornese” or *bagitto* dialect, a mixture of Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and Hebrew, spoken in Livorno and in which the Jewish community's records were kept—all reflected the *Comunitá*'s distinctive historical formation.<sup>13</sup>

Abraham Barukh Piperno, the city's *Ḥakham* (Sephardic rabbinical

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11. On SM's political activism, see Arthur Kiron, “Dust and Ashes: The Funeral and Forgetting of Sabato Morais,” *American Jewish History* (AJH) 84.3 (1996): 164–67; Alan D. Corre, “Sabato Morais and Social Justice in Philadelphia, 1858–1897,” in *The Quest for Social Justice: The Morris Fromkin Memorial Lectures*, ed. A. D. Corre (Milwaukee, Wisc., 1992), 19–35.

12. SM, “The Ritual Question,” *Jewish Record* (JRec), November 5, 1875, 4. This can be found also in the Sabato Morais Ledger (Ledger), Sabato Morais Collection, Archival Collection 8, LKCAJHS, viewable in its entirety online at: <http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/morais/> (here at Ledger, 76).

13. See Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (3rd ed.; New York, 1959), 327–28. See also Roth, “The Role of Spanish in the Marrano Diaspora,” in *Hispanic Studies in Honor of I. Gonzalez Llubera*, ed. F. Pierce (Oxford, 1959), 299–308; Guido Bedarida, “Il Gergo Ebraico-Livornese,” *Rivista di Livorno* 7 (1957): 77–89; Vittorio Marchi, *Lessico del livornese: Con finestra aperta sul bagitto* (Livorno, 1993), 257–351.

authority), headed the rabbinical college that Morais attended. The training Morais received there mirrored what Piperno had undergone as a young man.<sup>14</sup> The curriculum emphasized Hebrew Bible, grammar, commentaries, moral/religious teachings, such as *Pirke avot*, which was learned by heart, and medieval Jewish philosophy and poetry. Works taught included Saadia's tenth-century *Sefer emunot ve-de'ot*, Bahya Ibn Pakuda's eleventh-century *Hobot ha-lebabot*, Judah ha-Levi's twelfth-century *Sefer ha-kuzari*, Maimonides' twelfth-century *Mishneh torah* and *Moreh nebukhim*, and Joseph Albo's fifteenth-century *Sefer ha-'ikarim*.<sup>15</sup>

This medieval Sephardic rationalist tradition strongly rejected anthropomorphic and immanentist understandings of God. Morais inherited this hostility for Jewish magical and mystical teachings. In a biographical sketch he published about Elias del Medigo, for example, Morais introduced his readers to del Medigo's fifteenth-century ethical treatise *Behinat ha-da'at*. He praises its author for his rationalist approach in the tradition of Maimonides, credits del Medigo for transmitting this legacy to Italian Jews, and then explains that in the second part of *Behinat ha-da'at*

[del Medigo] sees no evil equal to that which the sect of Kabbalists perpetrates. He conceives that all must agree in calling it mischievous. Literalists and traditionalists, philosophers and logicians can but scout the idea of fastening upon the Scriptures a meaning foreign to them, contrived through numerical combinations or the initials of some words in the text. Reason, moreover, is shocked by the ideas set forth, touching the Sephirot, or emanations, which have been variously regarded as Divine Powers and mediators. And del Medigo, determined to overthrow the bulwark of Kabbalism, attacks the Zohar, arguing from internal and external evidences that it is a spurious work.<sup>16</sup>

On numerous occasions in print and in oral addresses, Morais defended this rationalist tradition, spoke forcefully against kabbalistic

14. On Piperno and Morais's rabbinical training, see SM, "The Death of Haham Piperno," *Occident and American Jewish Advocate (OCC)* 21.8 (1863): 266–70, and the serialized biography of Piperno by Morais's childhood friend Raphael E. H. Ascoli, which Morais translated from French into English and published, with a preface of his own, as "Abraham Baruch Piperno; His Life, Times and Writings," in *JRec*, July 6, 1883; July 13, 1883; July 20, 1883 (Ledger, 204–6).

15. See Alfredo Toaff, "Il Collegio Rabbinico di Livorno," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel (RMI)* 12.7–9 (1938): 184–95, and 187–89 regarding the curriculum.

16. SM, *Italian Hebrew Literature (IHL)*, ed. J. H. Greenstone (New York, 1926), 55–56.



doctrines, and once singled out the contemporary Hasidic followers of the Rizhiner Rebbe of Sadagora for explicit criticism.<sup>17</sup>

According to his rabbinical ordination certificate, Morais studied and achieved proficiency in Hebrew Bible with medieval rabbinic commentaries, the Babylonian Talmud (*talmud gadol*), and in the authoritative codes of Jewish law of Maimonides and Yosef Karo. Piperno, accompanied by two other local rabbis, Moshe Curiat and Isaac Hayim Nunes Alveranga, signed the document that conferred the degree of *maskil ve-navon*, the equivalent of a teacher's certification, on Morais in 1846.<sup>18</sup>

In need of employment, Morais then left Livorno for London to teach at the Jewish Orphan School attached to the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Sha'ar Shamayim at Bevis Marks.<sup>19</sup> During his five-year stay, Morais befriended many of the Italian nationalists living there in exile, including Giuseppe Mazzini, the intellectual leader of the Risorgimento.<sup>20</sup> This circle included Italian Jews, one of them the "famous Sarah Roselli Nathan, who consecrated her large means," according to Morais, "to the spread of Mazzinian views and works."<sup>21</sup> In 1851, Morais reluctantly departed London to apply for the vacant position of cantor at Philadelphia's Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Mikveh Israel. Before he crossed the Atlantic, Morais entrusted his Italian passport to Mazzini, for whom an arrest warrant had been issued, in order that his friend might return to Europe under an assumed name.<sup>22</sup>

17. For Morais's antagonism toward Kabbalah, see *IHL*, 10–11, 53, 56, 87–88, 213–16; *Jewish Messenger (JMess)*, April 12, 1867 (Ledger, 30); *Philadelphia Press*, April 29, 1867 (Ledger, 31). For his contemptuous view of the Rizhiner Hasidim, see *IHL*, 213.

18. For Morais's rabbinical ordination certificate, see SM-LKCAJS, box 13, FF38.

19. I am indebted to Miriam Rodrigues-Pereira, archivist of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation in London, who located, deciphered, and transcribed a number of pertinent documents relating to Morais's tenure at the Orphan School.

20. On Mazzini and the Italian Jewish émigré circle in London, see Alessandro Levi, "Amici israelitici di Giuseppe Mazzini," *RMI* 5.12 (1931): 587–612; Dennis Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 21–48, 49–76.

21. *IHL*, 174.

22. For the account of Morais giving his passport to Mazzini, see Henry S. Morais, *Sabato Morais: A Memoir* (New York, 1898), 12–13; Leon Elmaleh, *Commemoration of the Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of The Reverend Doctor Sabato Morais by the Congregation Mikveh Israel in the City of Philadelphia, Wednesday Evening, April 18, 1925* (Philadelphia, 1925). In November 2012, Arnold and Deanne Kaplan donated to the Penn Libraries a passport that belonged to SM. It is now part of the Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica at Penn. Issued by the Italian consulate in London in 1854, this document indicates that SM no longer had a passport when it came time to return home, implicitly confirming this account.



2972



In Nome di Sua Altezza Imperiale e Reale  
**LEOPOLDO SECONDO,**  
 PRINCIPE IMPERIALE D'AUSTRIA, PRINCIPE REALE  
 D'UNGHERIA E DI BOEMIA, ARCIDUCA D'AUSTRIA,  
**Gran-Duca di Toscana, &c. &c. &c.**  
 NOI GIACOMO CRISTIANO CLEMENTE BELL  
CAVALIERE DELL' ORDINE DEL MERITO SOTTO IL TITOLO DI S. GIUSEPPE DI TOSCANA

**PASSAPORTO, No. 1443**

Invitiamo tutti i Ministri di Guerra e di Giustizia incaricati di conservare l'ordine negli Stati di Sua Altezza Imperiale e Reale, e tutti gli Uffiziali Civili e Militari degli Stati Esteri, nei quali converrà all' infrascritto di transitare e fermarsi, e lasciare liberamente passare *Sig. Sabato Morais* di condizione } *Cristianesimo* di professione }  
 nativo di *Livorno*  
 domiciliato in *Londra con gli anni*  
 che parte da *Londra*  
 per recarsi a *Livorno per la via di Francia*  
 e a prestargli ajuto e protezione in caso di bisogno.

Il presente Passaporto vale per un anno.

FATTO IN LONDRA *li 22 Giugno 1854*  
*Giac. C. Bell*  
 IL CONSOLE GENERALE

CONNOTATI.

Di anni *ventisette (27)*  
 Statura *Media*  
 Capelli *Scuri*  
 Fronte *Alta*  
 Occhi *Scuri*  
 Naso *lungo*  
 Bocca *Regolare*  
 Mento *Largo*  
 Barba *Scura*

SEGNII PARTICOLARI

FIRMA DEL LATORE  
*S. Morais*




Figure 2. Italian passport issued to Sabato Morais by the Italian Consulate in London, June 22, 1854. The Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica, Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania.

Morais brought his profound attachment to Sephardic liturgical, philosophical, and cultural traditions, his Italian republican politics, and his newly gained mastery of the English language from London to Philadelphia in 1851.<sup>23</sup> He arrived into a firestorm. The previous year, the board of Mikveh Israel had dismissed its minister, Isaac Leeser—an editor, translator, and voice of enlightened observant Judaism in the United States before the Civil War—over a salary dispute, and for insubordination. The board elected Morais to succeed Leeser; thus from his first days in the United States he was forced to learn to mediate among competing interests and difficult personalities. Nonetheless, his tenure at the congregation from his election on April 13, 1851, until his death forty-six years later on November 11, 1897, was, along with that of Isaac Mayer Wise, the leader of the Reform movement of American Judaism, one of the two longest, uninterrupted Jewish ministries in the United States in the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

As early as November 1851, just months after he arrived in Philadelphia, Morais began promoting the golden age of medieval Jewry in Muslim Spain, and the cultural transfer of that legacy to the “Italian schools” after the expulsion, as the model for the youth of his congregation to imitate:

Religious and secular lore flourished among [Andalusian Jewry], poetry, the most stirring poetry which speaks to the heart and breaths pious sentiments was cultivated in their academies. No knowledge, however abstruse, no philosophy, however profound, was neglected by the luminaries of our nation.<sup>25</sup>

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23. For Morais’s career in the United States, see Arthur Kiron, “Golden Ages, Promised Lands: The Victorian Rabbinic Humanism of Sabato Morais” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1999), and subsequent publications, available via Penn’s Scholarly Commons: <http://repository.upenn.edu/do/search/?q=kiron%2C%20arthur&start=0&context=19929>. Important pioneering studies include Ruth Alpers, “Traditionalism, Americanization, and Assimilation: The Struggles of Sabato Morais, 1851–1897” (Rabbinical thesis; Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1994); Moshe Davis, “Sabato Morais: Selected and Annotated Bibliography of his Writings,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Association (PAJHS)* 37 (1947): 55–93; Nussenbaum, “Champion of Orthodoxy”; Corre, “Sabato Morais and Social Justice in Philadelphia,” 19–35.

24. Isaac Mayer Wise’s nearly forty-seven year ministry at Bene Yeshurun in Cincinnati (April 26, 1854, until his death on March 26, 1900) was a few months longer than that of Morais.

25. SM, “Sermon Delivered on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> 1851. . . .,” *Asmonean*, December 12, 1851, 18 (Ledger, 2).

Morais subsequently engaged in systematic, programmatic efforts to translate and transmit this legacy to his American audiences. His students also took part in this project of translation and cultural transmission.<sup>26</sup> One of them, Solomon Solis-Cohen, the Philadelphia physician and disciple of Morais who helped him establish the JTS, translated into English and published the medieval Hebrew poetry of Moses Ibn Ezra. In an essay about the poetry of Judah ha-Levi published in the *Menorah Journal* almost twenty years after Morais's death, Solis-Cohen further elaborated on this medieval Sephardic heritage: "Neo-Hebraic literature was born of two dissimilar but kindred parents: Arabian culture and Hebrew tradition . . . The child of these parents was—an Arabian Jew. In garb, often in feature, generally in speech—Arab; in life, in thought, in sentiment, in spirit—Jew."<sup>27</sup>

On the one hand, the medieval Arab-Jewish synthesis provided a positive cultural model for imitation. On the other hand, translation of its sources also served a defensive, polemical purpose. In order to counter those calling for religious reform, for example, Morais translated into English and published serially in the contemporary American Jewish press Maimonides' twelfth-century *Treatise on Resurrection* and his *Letter to Yemen*. Maimonides' teachings were meant to serve as an intellectual antidote against deniers of essential Jewish messianic teachings, widespread missionary pressures, and otherwise were intended to inspire hope and allegiance.<sup>28</sup>

In 1867, Isaac Leeser established Maimonides College in Philadelphia. Though not unprecedented in conception, it was the first functioning, Western-style rabbinical seminary in the United States.<sup>29</sup> Naming the college after Maimonides, however, was emblematic of his importance on both side of the Atlantic as a symbol of an enlightened faith that harmo-

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26. For additional discussion, see Arthur Kiron, "Varieties of Haskalah: Sabato Morais's Program of Sephardi Rabbinic Humanism in Victorian America," in *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From al-Andalus to the Haskalah*, ed. R. Brann and A. Sutcliffe (Philadelphia, 2004), 121–45.

27. Solomon Solis-Cohen, "Judah ha-Levi" *Menorah Journal* (February–March, 1916): 79–90, 154–59.

28. The original MSS are located in SM-LKCAJS, box 13, FF35 (*Treatise on Resurrection*) and box 13, FF36 (preface) and FF37 (translation of *Letter to Yemen*). They appeared in serialized form, respectively, in *JMess*, September 15, 1854, and *JMess*, September 15, 1876.

29. On the history of Maimonides College, see Bertram Wallace Korn, "The First American Jewish Theological Seminary: Maimonides College, 1867–1873," in *Eventful Years and Experiences: Studies in Nineteenth Century American Jewish History* ed. B. W. Korn (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1954), 151–213.

nized the claims of Jewish and general culture.<sup>30</sup> Morais served as professor of Bible at the college from its inception until its demise in 1873 for lack of funds and national support. During his tenure, he helped his students publish a weekly newspaper, the *Jewish Index*. In it, he translated into English from Italian the “Lessons in Moral Theology” by Samuel David Luzzatto, the renowned teacher and scholar of the Collegio Rabbinico founded in Padua in 1829. Luzzatto had written these lessons to impress upon his students at the Padua rabbinical seminary the type of religious leader he wanted to cultivate: an educated individual committed to traditional observance, opposed to reformist innovations on the one hand and Spinozist thinking on the other, and at home in the general culture around him.<sup>31</sup> At the JTS, Morais again translated into English additional works of Luzzatto and published them in the seminary’s proceedings.<sup>32</sup>

Beginning in January 1886, shortly before the establishment of the JTS, and continuing on an almost weekly basis throughout the first year while he was rallying financial support for the seminary project, Morais delivered a series of lectures about Sephardic and Italian Jewish thinkers, focusing on the biographies of leading rabbis from medieval Spain and Italy about whom he had been teaching, lecturing, and writing for some

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30. On the image of Maimonides in the early Haskalah and in the nineteenth century, see James H. Lehman, “Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and the Me’asfim,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book (LBIYB)* 20 (1975): 87–108, and Jay Harris, “The Image of Maimonides in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Historiography,” *PAAJR* 54 (1987): 117–39.

31. Morais’s positive view of Maimonides occasionally is at odds with that of Samuel David Luzzatto, who condemned (Maimonides) for what Luzzatto in general referred to as “Atticism.” See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Derekh erets, o atticismum: Il falso progresso* (Hebrew and Italian; Padua, 1879); and Luzzatto, *Penine Shadal/Scelta di scritti sparsi ebraica di Samuel David Luzzatto*, ed. E. Gräber (Przemysl, Poland, 1888), chap. 30, “On Arabic Aristotelian Philosophy and (that) of Maimonides: Selected Works” (Hebrew), 410–21; see 417–20 for Luzzatto’s anti-Maimonidean comments.

32. For SM’s serially published translations of Luzzatto’s works, see his “Lessons in Jewish Moral Theology” in the *Jewish Index*, October 2, 1872–January 1, 1873, Ledger, 48–58; *Critical and Hermeneutical Introduction to the Pentateuch* in the *JRec*, serialized from December 8, 1876, through February 23, 1877 (Ledger, 95–100, 103–5; reprinted in *IHL*, 93–152); “Autobiography,” in the *JRec* between August 3 and October 26, 1877 (Ledger, 113–24); “Oheb Ger,” a critical commentary on the Aramaic paraphrase of the Bible by the early rabbinic proselyte Onkelos, in *JRec* January 4 and February 15, 1878 (Ledger 126–30); *Prolegomena to a Grammar of the Hebrew Language*, as the appendix to (fifth) *Proceedings of the Biennial Convention of the Jewish Theological Seminary Association (Proceedings)* (1896).

forty years. In these lectures, Morais discussed, among others, Sabbatai Donnolo, Nahmanides (Ramban), Solomon Ibn Adret (Rashba), Hasdai Crescas, Joseph Albo, and Isaac Abravanel. Most tellingly, perhaps, were his remarks about the rabbis of his own time at the rabbinical college at Padua, Samuel David Luzzatto, Lelio Della Torre, and the principal founder of the Paduan college, Isaac Samuel Reggio (Yashar). Nonetheless, Morais's contemporary role models were not limited to non-Ashkenazim. Morais was not a Sephardic chauvinist and rejected the view among some Sephardim of their superiority.<sup>33</sup> The figures Morais most admired shared his values. For example, in 1868 when pondering who might serve as a chief rabbi of the United States, Morais spoke of Solomon Yehudah Rapaport (Shir), the chief rabbi of Prague, as "my ideal of a rabbi. Exceedingly learned yet exceedingly meek. Rigidly attached to the traditions of the fathers, but willing to concede when yielding nothing sacred was surrendered."<sup>34</sup>

During the 1870s, Morais had published in the local and nationally distributed Jewish press a series of biographical sketches of Italian Jewish figures including Sabbatai Donnolo, Natan ben Yechiel, Immanuel of Rome, Elijah del Medigo, Azariah dei Rossi, and David Nieto. These sketches would serve as the basis for an essay he published a decade later in the second *Proceedings* of the JTS under the title *The Jew in Italy*. The public presentation of this material once again in the 1880s, in print and through oral addresses, provides clear evidence of the kind of educational model in whose image Morais envisioned American rabbis should be

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33. SM, "On the Appellation Properly Belonging Our People," SM-LKCAJS, box 14, FF1, 6–7; SM, "Hebrew, Israelite, or Jews?" *Philadelphia Ledger and Transcript (PLT)*, February 2, 1892 (Ledger, 235): "You may have heard persons assert that the Sephardim, or Spanish and Portuguese, reckon their pedigree from the tribe of Judah, and the Ashkenazim or German and Polish from that of Benjamin. The absurdity is too glaring, to deserve the least consideration. I [will?] not dispute to a Don Isaac Abarbanel the honor to which he aspired, and if he did profess authority for believing that the blood of the royal house of David flowed in his veins, I shall not say aught to the contrary. But it is very presumptuous, as it is ludicrous in some Jews to pride themselves on a higher, more aristocratic extraction than their fellow believers."

34. SM, in the course of his eulogy to Isaac Leeser, his predecessor at the Philadelphia congregation Mikveh Israel. See the *Philadelphia Inquirer* February 13, 1868 (Ledger, 35). See also SM, "Solomon L. Rapaport," *OCC* 26.3 (1868): 118–27 (Ledger, 262); *OCC* 26.5 (1868): 266–73 (Ledger, 264); *OCC* 26.7 (1868): 314–21. Note also SM's translation of the introduction to "Rapaport's Encyclopedia," [*Erekb milin*, a talmudic lexicon], published in the *JMess*, November 12, 1869, 4–5; November 26, 1869, 2; December 17, 1869, 1.

trained: the rationalist Sephardic and Italian heritage.<sup>35</sup> In the printed curricula of the JTS, we similarly find that the “Senior Department” studied medieval Sephardic philosophers, including Saadia, Maimonides, Yehuda ha-Levi, and Joseph Albo, medieval Islamic Jewish history from the Geonim, including the tenth-century North African talmudic commentator Ḥananel ben Ḥushiel (Raḥ) of Kairouan to Shemuel ha-Nagid, the twelfth-century Hebrew poet and statesman.<sup>36</sup> In short, Morais sought to equip the seminary’s students with a historically grounded compass to guide them in their religious vocation. The subject of the essay and the curriculum was entirely consonant with Morais’s life’s work up until that time as a teacher, public lecturer, and translator.

#### THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF MORAIS’S SEMINARY

Contemporary critics of the newly established seminary were not sure what to make of the religious orientation of the institution. Morais took pains in his first presidential report to respond to

opponents of the Jewish Theological Seminary who still clamor for a definition of that purpose while ignoring the fact that the institution has set it forth unequivocally. Well, let me tell it once again, as the chosen spokesman of my colleagues on the Advisory Board, so that not a shadow of doubt concerning it may linger in the minds of American Israelites. At the basis of our Seminary lies the belief that Moses was in all truth inspired by the living God to promulgate laws for the government of a people sanctified to [carry out] an imprescriptible [*vic*] mission; that the same laws, embodied in the Pentateuch, have a local and a general application . . . [requiring] in all ages an oral interpretation . . . The traditions of the fathers are therefore coeval with the written statutes of the five holy books . . . [and that] these truths have not been denied by any of the prophets who succeeded Moses.<sup>37</sup>

35. SM, “Nahmanides,” *JRec*, January 8, 1886 (Ledger, 348); “Solomon Ibn Adret (Rashba),” *JRec*, January 22, 1886 (Ledger, 349); “Salomon Leone,” *JRec*, February 5, 1886 (Ledger, 350); “Crescas and Albo,” *JRec*, March 26, 1886 (Ledger, 356); “Abravanel,” *JRec*, April 6, 1886 (Ledger, 359); “Rabbis of Italy,” *JRec* August 13, 1886 (Ledger, 359). Also, note the article by SM, “Bible and Italian Literature,” *American Hebrew*, September 3, 1886 (Ledger, 366), and SM, *The Activities of a Rabbi: A Course of Lectures delivered under the auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary, February–May, 5652* (New York, 1892).

36. “Jewish Theological Seminary Association” bulletin (n.p., n.d.), 3–4, SM-LKCAJS, box 13, FF33.

37. See SM, “The Synod Question and Rejoinder,” *JRec*, September 4, 1885, 4; Nussenbaum, “Champion of Orthodoxy,” 77–82; Davis, *Emergence*, 200–208.



Above all, Morais concludes “the founders of the Jewish Theological Seminary hold as their *Credo* . . . that our sainted seers laid the greatest stress upon moral injunctions, simply because ceremonial observances were mistakenly regarded by many of their contemporaries as an exemption from principles of social rectitude.”<sup>38</sup>

Morais was not alone in articulating publicly the nature and “Credo” of “historical Judaism.” Henry Pereira Mendes, minister of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, where the seminary was first established, in a speech delivered at the 1893 Columbia Exposition of the World’s Religions, defined “historical Judaism” in terms of Maimonides’ thirteen principles recited in the traditional daily Jewish liturgy. Mendes’s declaration was made to not only American Jews but representatives of all the world’s religions. In turning to Maimonides’ thirteen principles, Mendes delivered a firm, clear statement of essential principles around which adherents of “historical Judaism” could unite.<sup>39</sup>

Just as in Morais’s time opponents of the seminary accused the founders of lacking a clear theological stance, contemporary scholars still speak of the seminary’s “adamant refusal to make definitive pronouncements on specific matters of doctrine.”<sup>40</sup> The phrase “specific matters of doctrine” is itself a vague formulation, however, that forces the question: specifically about what? In fact, Morais on many occasions spoke out on a number of doctrinal issues (such as the existence and unity of God, the nature of creation, the Sinaitic revelation—written and oral—Jewish nationhood and election, the purpose of the mitzvot, reward and punishment, messianism, death and the afterlife, the historicity of the biblical accounts, and miracles) and about ritual questions (on such topics as liturgical reform, the introduction of an organ, Sabbath observance, marriage and divorce laws, circumcision, head-coverings, burial practices, standards of kashrut and ritual slaughtering), and politically charged issues like Jewish restoration to the Land of Israel and political Zionism. He publicly and regularly defined his position on the controversies of his

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38. SM, “Report of the President of the Faculty,” (First) *Proceedings* (New York, 1888), 18–19.

39. Henry Pereira Mendes, “The Relation of Historical Judaism to the Past, and Its Future,” in *The World’s Congress of Religions . . .*, ed. J. W. Hanson (Philadelphia, 1894), 162–71. On Mendes, see Eugene Markowitz, “Henry Pereira Mendes: Architect of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 55.3 (1966): 364–84.

40. Diner, “Antelope and the Badger,” 15.

time, particularly those he considered inimical to his understanding of Judaism.<sup>41</sup>

#### ABNEGATION AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT THE JTS

The seminary under Morais's guidance sought to produce moral and religious soldiers of piety and humility, "exceedingly learned yet exceedingly meek," prepared to inspire allegiance and combat the forces arrayed against them. In his first report as president of the JTS faculty, Morais declared that "enlightened faith must be our trenchant weapon" to fight those who would abandon the divinely commanded mitzvot, question the inviolability of the Sacred Scriptures, and otherwise cast skeptical doubt upon the traditions of "genuine Judaism."<sup>42</sup> Morais's outlook and its precise, indeed militant, vocabulary reflected a long-standing fusion of ideas among Livornese Jews rooted in their collective memory of crypto-Jewish martyrdom and in the radical sacrifices made for the creation of the Italian republic. Morais was born into both martyrological traditions, the first historical, the second contemporary, both national in character. Morais's parents fervently raised their children in this republican *tradizione di civile virtù* in which religious piety and republican politics formed a unity of thought and feeling.<sup>45</sup>

We find Morais publicly articulating these principles as early as three years after leaving Livorno, when he came to London to teach at the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Sha'ar Shamayim's Orphan school in the Bevis Marks section of London. In a sermon delivered in 1849 in front of the congregation, "at the request of the parnassim of [Sha'ar Shamayim]" who had come to recognize his gift for oratory as his English improved, Morais defended ritual observances as necessary

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41. See, e.g., his sermons in SM-LKCAJS, boxes 9, 10, 12, FF1–2; box 13, FF10–15. For a selection of Morais's halakhic viewpoints, see Nussenbaum, "Champion of Orthodoxy," 170–96. For Morais's general views on the necessity of ritual observance, see, e.g., "SM, Ceremonialism Essential to Judaism," *Jewish Exponent*, October 3, 1890 (Ledger, 442).

42. Morais, "Report of the President of the Faculty," (First) *Proceedings*, 20.

43. For the language of "civile virtù," see "Parole di S.D-B," SM-LKCAJS, box 17, FF27. On the Sephardic dimension of this "rhetoric of republicanism," see Miram Bodian, "Biblical Hebrews and the Rhetoric of Republicanism," *AJS Review* 22.2 (1997): 221. For an analysis of the distinctively "civic humanist" character of Morais's political thinking, see Kiron, "Livornese Traces in American Jewish History: Sabato Morais and Elia Benamozegh," in *Per Elia Benamozegh*, ed. A. Guetta (Milan, 2001), 45–66, where the idea of civic humanist republican thought is tied in with Morais's emphasis on humility.

to preserve the religion of Israel intact and undiminished, since the remembrances enjoined [were] kept up from generation to generation . . . handed down from father to son through the thirty-three centuries elapsed since the delivery out of Egypt, was better transmitted by mean of those rites (especially of the Passover) than by any other mode of inculcation.

The keeping of mitsvot, according to Morais, not only ensured the survival of the Jewish people. It was the Jewish foundation of what he called “religion and virtue.” Morais concluded his sermon by considering “the comfort, consolation, and happiness afforded by the law and God’s holy religion in seasons of prosperity, adversity and martyrdom.”<sup>44</sup> In a Hanukkah sermon delivered in early 1850 at the Orphan school, the twenty-six-year old Morais expanded on the profound connection between religious duty and the history of Jewish martyrdom. After commenting on Proverbs 21.31 and Mishnah *Sanhedrin*, chapter 2, and the meaning of the Hasmonean revolt, Morais said: “Let then, my dear pupils the recital of the Haphtorah produce the desired effect; let it not be a mere repetition of nonmeaning [*vic*] words, but let it remind us that we are the descendants of those illustrious men who instituted it, of those brave men who ventured their lives to transmit to us unity of religion and freedom of conscience.”<sup>45</sup>

In the United States, Hanukkah became a favorite occasion for Morais to champion this spirit of sacrifice.<sup>46</sup> The link to the purposes of the seminary is not insubstantial. In 1884, in the aftermath of the so-called Trefya Banquet uproar the previous summer—when a variety of reputedly non-kosher foods were served at the ceremonial dinner honoring the first graduating class of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati<sup>47</sup>—and following several months of weekly polemical exchanges with Isaac Mayer Wise, Morais used Hanukkah as the occasion to call for the creation of an alternative “seminary of learning” to defend the practices of “enlightened orthodoxy.”<sup>48</sup> In a sermon he delivered in February of 1886 in Baltimore

44. Summarized in the (London) *Jewish Chronicle*, April 27, 1849, 230–31.

45. SM, quoted in the (London) *Jewish Chronicle*, January 4, 1850, 100.

46. For the history of Hanukkah in the United States, see Dianne A. Ashton, *Hanukkah in America: A History* (New York, 2013), and 48–49 regarding Morais.

47. See Lance J. Sussman, “The Myth of the Trefya Banquet: American Culinary Culture and the Radicalization of Food Policy in American Reform Judaism” *AJAJ* 57.1–2 (2005): 29–52 and esp. 49, n. 2.

48. *American Hebrew*, December 19, 1884, 84; Fierstien, *Different Spirit*, 25.

at Congregation Chizzuk Emunah to rally support for the proposed seminary, Morais stated unequivocally:

Lest I be charged at any period hereafter with having agreed to en-tangling compromises, I acknowledge that as far as it lies in *my* power,<sup>49</sup> the proposed seminary shall be hallowed to one predominating purpose—to the upholding of the principles by which my ancestors lived and died. From that nursery shall issue forth men whose utterances shall kindle enthusiasm for the Holy Writ but whose everyday conduct will mirror forth a sincere devotion to the *tenets* of Holy Writ.<sup>50</sup>

When he died in November of 1897, only a few weeks before Hanukkah, the importance of the holiday for him was not lost on the trustees of the JTS. Earlier that year, before Morais's death, the trustees had decided that "Seminary Day" would be held on the "Sabbath Chanuka of each year." Following his death, they found it particularly fitting to use its first observance "to pay tribute to the memory of the lamented founder and guide of the institution, the late Dr. Sabato Morais."<sup>51</sup>

The principle of sacrifice occupied a central place in Morais's thinking about not only one's duty toward one's people but also the true nature of the worship of God. In address he delivered in 1859, shortly before Shavuot, on the occasion of his Philadelphia congregation's consecration of a new synagogue building, Morais argued that physical edifices do not preserve Judaism; rather Judaism's survival depended historically on the willingness of Jews to make supreme sacrifices for the sake of their faith. After the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem, Morais declared, "Judaism lived not through the blood of slaughtered animals but through that spilt by its martyrs."<sup>52</sup> The occasion demanded an acknowledgment that the true purpose of a sanctuary is the worship of God, a religious duty for which Jews have willingly suffered martyrdom.<sup>53</sup>

49. Emphasis in the original. In the course of the (printed) sermon, Morais rhetorically repeats this phrase (as far as lies in *my* power) three times in successive paragraphs for emphasis, already signaling his awareness of the tensions that would come in building a coalition of supporters.

50. Emphasis in the original. See SM, "The Jewish Theological Seminary" (sermon delivered, at Baltimore, before the Chizzuk Emunah Congregation), *American Hebrew*, February 19, 1886, 19–20.

51. [*American Hebrew?*], December 17, 1897, [n.p.], clipping in the Charles J. Cohen Collection, LKCAJS, box 1, FF16.

52. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 25, 1860. On temple sacrifices, see Davis, *Emergence*, 307–8.

53. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 25, 1860, reprinted in *JMES*, June 1, 1860, 165.

The concepts of duty and sacrifice were not only pedagogical and theological in nature. They also grew out of the historical contexts Morais personally experienced. The quest for unity constituted the highest value worth dying to achieve in the face of the soul-sundering conflicts that Morais had seen divide his native Italy and his adopted home in the United States. Speaking in Philadelphia in 1863 at the height of the Civil War, Morais gave voice to his Italian understanding of the meaning of unity as the price for which one must be ready to fight and die:

And the aspirations of Dante, the inspiring songs of Petrarch, the longing of every good and true Italian, have they not ever been for the unity of the Italian peninsula . . . Why have the dungeon and the gibbet proved fruitless, and the brothers Bandiera<sup>54</sup> run to martyrdom as to a festive board, but because the idea of a united Italy kindled the hearts of her children?<sup>55</sup>

Morais believed in the idea of unity as an essential principle: God's unity, the unity of the truth of God's revelation recorded in the Bible, national unity, and the unity of all humanity created in the image of God. In a Passover address delivered sometime before 1881, while he was still seeking reconciliation with the reformers, Morais declared: "Union in worship . . . union in training the young to prize the language of the Holy Writ . . . union in Sabbath observance . . . Let me tell it without any ambiguity. I long for a union which will wisely retain all which tends to strengthen our conviction in the immutability of God's essence."<sup>56</sup> He explicitly defined his views on unity and union as an Italian, an American, and a devout Jew.

Morais declared the principle of humility to be the basis of the JTS the day before its founding in a Sabbath sermon he delivered at Shearith Israel in New York City on January 30, 1886: "The basis of [the seminary] shall be humility, not hostility, its sustaining pillars, steadfastness of purpose and fealty to ancestral traditions, not boastfulness and vain-

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54. Attilio and Emilio Bandiera were Milanese nationalists killed during the revolution of 1848 who were dramatically memorialized by Mazzini in a speech he delivered in Milan that same year.

55. SM, "A Sermon," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 2, 1863 (Ledger, 23). See Edgar Holt, *Risorgimento: The Making of Italy, 1815–1870* (London, 1970), 22.

56. See, e.g., SM, "Unity of God," *JMews*, February 24, 1871, 4 (Ledger, 46); SM, "The Union," *JRec*, July 4, 1879 (Ledger, 146); SM, "An Address Delivered on Passover," [n.d.], reprinted in the *American Jewish Pulpit: A Collection of Sermons by the Most Eminent American Rabbis* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1881), 14.

glory."<sup>57</sup> Maimonides had assigned primary importance to humility in his ethical writings, even violating his own golden rule of moderation to allow for overzealousness in its practice.<sup>58</sup> Clearly, Morais had taken this teaching to heart. Throughout his ministry, Morais consistently and repeatedly propounded the concept of humility as an essential ethical-religious principle. Humility was the theme he stressed in his first Sabbath sermon delivered at Mikveh Israel in 1851 to characterize the nature of true worship; it was the theme he stressed in his first thanksgiving lecture in Philadelphia as a defining principle of practical conduct; and he returned to this theme throughout his writings and in his teachings, particularly as a basis for the moral and religious education of young people. With the establishment of the seminary, the principle again occupied center stage. In his annual presidential address delivered in 1890, Morais, explicating the seminary's motto, which he chose in 1886 ("ללמוד ולעשות" — "to learn and to teach, to observe and to do"), declared that

the knowledge imbibed in our Theological Seminary shall tend to qualify believing Jews to go forth as heralds of duty; not such as is woven into a laurel of a self-glorification, neither such as is forged into a lever to raise up high one's material interests, but a knowledge free from egotism, fruitful of humanizing and soul-elevating results.<sup>59</sup>

Morais drilled the values of duty and humility into the core of his program of religious education and continued to do so when it came time to formulate the character of rabbinical training at the seminary.

In explicating Morais's theological-political thinking about humility, thus, we find an unparalleled seminary model yet one clearly traceable in its fusion of Bible-centric moral and religious teachings, Sephardic his-

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57. SM, "The Jewish Theological Seminary. Sermon Delivered Last Sabbath in the Shearith Israel Synagogue of New York," *JRec*, February 5, 1886, 4 (Ledger, 350).

58. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, hilkhhot de'ot* 2.3; Maimonides, *Mishnah 'in perush rabenu Moshe ben Maimon*. On *Pirke avot* 2.1 and 4.1. On Maimonides in his Judeo-Islamic Mediterranean context, see the recent, authoritative study by Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton, N.J., 2009).

59. SM, "Address by Rev. S. Morais, L.L.D.," (Second) *Proceedings* (New York, 1890), 27. The phrase comes from the *abavah rabab*, the second benediction before the *shema'* in the daily prayer service. The *Shema* is the Jewish daily affirmation of God's singularity and historically is associated with the declaration of faith at the point of martyrdom. It also served as the motto on the cover of the first issue of Leiser's *Occident*, in April 1843.

tory and the legacy of martyrdom, and a faith in Mazzinian republican virtues that called for the subordination or outright sacrificing of individual interests to the needs of the nation. These ideas were also expressed in a technical vocabulary. One such term is the Italian *abnegazione*, the notion of duty to God and the profound willingness to sacrifice one's material interests and even suffer martyrdom in the service of one's religious principles. *Abnegazione* was a familiar trope in the context of the Risorgimento. Morais embraced the idea and brought the term with him to the United States. The translated English equivalent "abnegation" recurs in Morais's extant writings. In a Thanksgiving address delivered before a Philadelphia Masonic order, two years after arriving in the United States, Morais unmistakably drew upon this language and its Mazzinian resonances:

Virtue founded upon religion will elevate America to the pinnacle of that glory for which heaven has surely destined her . . . The freedom that [America] enjoys and liberally proffers is the strongest refutation against the baneful doctrine of "the divine right of Kings," and the day is not perhaps far distant when people that now can, but in the secret of their hearts, admire and revere the patriotism, the abnegation,<sup>60</sup> and wisdom of the founders of the constitution, will publicly thank their posterity that have preserved unscathed a model so worthy of imitation. But to reach so high (a station) and deserve the commendation of all mankind, she must be virtuous, that is to say, she must be religious; for virtue disconnected from religion is a word void of sense; it is but a mask to conceal ambition or avarice. She must be religious by exercising those virtues which the Bible inculcates.<sup>61</sup>

The same word appears a decade later in a eulogy delivered by Morais's childhood teacher and friend Salvatorre De Benedetti who singled out Morais's father Samuel for his *abnegazione*—his patriotic zeal and willingness to sacrifice himself during the Risorgimento. In a Hanukkah sabbath sermon Morais delivered in December of 1887, during the seminary's

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60. Cf. Di Benedetti, "Parole di S.D.B.," 2, SM-CJS, box 17, FF27, for the comment about Morais's father's "abnegazione." Cf. Gaetano Salvemini, *Mazzini*, trans. I. M. Rawson (Stanford, Calif., 1957), 45–47, and 47: "Virtue is sacrifice," and 172, speaking of Mazzini's views on the "spirit of abnegation, of sacrifice, without which friendship, life, virtue cannot exist."

61. [SM], "An Address. Delivered by a member [Morais] of the Masonic Order on the 24th of November, it being the thanksgiving," (Philadelphia) *Mirror and Keystone*, December 7, 1853, 3 (Ledger, 3).

first year of operation, Morais again spoke of “abnegation—the regard for duty before life” as a religious paradigm for imitation.<sup>62</sup>

It is critical to understand that Morais, while accepting the yoke of divine obligations upon himself, was under no illusion that he could force or otherwise coerce other Jews to adopt the same commitments. In London, he witnessed the divisive effects of debates between traditionalists and reformers over liturgical and synagogue reform, the status of the oral law, and how newspapers, translating, and publishing were used as agents in the polemics to shape public opinion.<sup>63</sup> He knew how the threat to exercise the *herem* (ban) exacerbated tensions within congregations and between the disparate congregations in the city.<sup>64</sup>

Living in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century in a voluntary, open society demanded a different approach. In his mind, how could Jews, given their exceptional conditions of freedom, turn their backs on that for which their ancestors had been willing to die? In this open marketplace of competitive ideas and religious alternatives, Morais did not rely on coercion but rather rhetoric to persuade his coreligionists to train a new leadership cadre.

To implement these values, Morais argued from the particular to the universal. He repeatedly stressed the centrality of action over theory. This approach was evident as early as 1846, when Morais chose as the epigraph to his rabbinical ordination essay (תכונות החכם—Qualities of the Sage) a quotation from *Pirke avot* (1.17, *אלא המעשה, הוא העיקר*; loosely: “action, not talk is what is critical”). He would express similar sentiments throughout his career. In a lecture published in 1877 titled “The Duty of American Israelites,” for example, Morais states:

Faith is an essential in our religion, but unaccompanied by action, it is utterly insufficient to gain salvation. Faith is a propelling force, action is the engine that proves its inherent power. Only that faith which is not disjoined from an active life, from a life carrying out the tenets of Judaism, is demanded of a Jew.<sup>65</sup>

62. SM, “The Jewish Sabbath,” *PLT* December 20, 1887; and see “Dr. Morais on the Question of the Hour,” *Jewish Exponent*, December 23, 1887 (Ledger, 398).

63. A bibliography of these polemical works is found in *Biblioteca Anglo-Judaica: A Bibliographical Guide to Anglo-Jewish History*, comp. J. Jacobs and L. Wolf (London, 1888), 112–13.

64. See Kiron, “Golden Ages, Promised Lands,” 109.

65. SM, “Duty of American Israelites. A Discourse Delivered the First Day of Passover by the Rev. S. Morais,” *JRec*, April 13, 1877, 2–3.



Morais summed up his outlook in a declaration made in 1877: “Believe and work, pray and act.”<sup>66</sup> Strongly echoing the words of his friend Giuseppe Mazzini, who said that “religion was the principle, politics the instrument,” what Morais called “enlightened faith” amounted to a Sephardic Italian version of the *vita activa* in religion and politics.

Taken together, all these elements—piety, humility, duty, sacrifice, national and religious unity, worship, political action—repeatedly surfaced during Morais’s ministry as well as during the seminary era. Morais drew from the prophetic writings of the Bible, rabbinic ethical works like *Pirke avot*, and the medieval Sephardic and Italian rationalist traditions of philosophy, poetry, and science. He infused his speech with a technical vocabulary scarred by the enduring memory of the courage and sacrifices made by a Jewish martyrological tradition from the Maccabees to the Crypto-Jewish victims of the Inquisition to the fallen patriots of the Risorgimento in his own time.<sup>67</sup>

#### COMPETING VISIONS

The character of an institution obviously is not restricted to the declared purposes set out by one of its founders. Morais’s perspective was one among many competing visions for the proposed institution. In 1885, for example, Bernard Drachman, a recent graduate of the Breslau Jüdisches Theologisches Seminar whom Morais recommended to teach at the seminary, proposed that Breslau should serve as the model.<sup>68</sup> Drachman and two other members of the New York seminary’s faculty, Alexander Kohut and Frederick de Sola Mendes, had graduated from the Breslau Seminary and also received doctorates from German universities. The “Breslau” approach promoted by its alumni in New York clearly competed in the shaping of the JTS.

66. The motto appears in SM, “The Dispersed of Judea,” (Philadelphia) *Evening Telegraph*, Monday, January 29, 1877 (Ledger, 102).

67. See, for example, SM, untitled sermon delivered at Congregation Mikveh Israel, March 22, 1851, published in the *Asmonean*, March 28, 1851, 181; SM, Thanksgiving sermon, November 27, 1851, *Asmonean*, December 12, 1851 (Ledger, 2–3). For recurrent descriptions of this aspect of Morais’s personality, see, for example, H. S. Morais, “Unveiling of the Tablet,” *Commemoration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of the Reverend Doctor Sabato Morais by the Congregation Mikveh Israel . . .* (Philadelphia, 1924), 45; Joseph Hertz, “Sabato Morais—A Pupil’s Tribute,” in *The Jewish Theological Seminary of American Semi-Centennial Volume*, ed. C. Adler (New York, 1939), 47; *New York Times*, Saturday, November 13, 1897, 7.

68. Autographed signed letter, Bernard Drachman to SM, December 27, 1885, SM-LKCAJS, box 6, FF13.

The JTSA, reorganized in 1902 and subsequently led by Solomon Schechter, a renowned scholar from Cambridge University, continued the work of training rabbis. Schechter, however, revised the curriculum to bring it more closely in line with the positive-historical Judaism associated with Frankel and Heinrich Graetz at the Breslau Seminary<sup>69</sup> and the critical-historical methods of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.<sup>70</sup> As Ismar Schorsch, the preeminent scholar of the positive-historical origins of Conservative Judaism, explains, Frankel assumed the binding character of the past upon contemporary Jews but saw the evolution of Judaism to be the outcome of a complex, dialectical relationship between the Jewish *Volk*, or people, and the posited, legislated laws of their rabbinic leadership. For Frankel, according to Schorsch, “the ultimate arbiter of the holy, was the Jewish *Volk* itself. As long as the people still possessed a vibrant religious consciousness, it represented a source of indirect revelation.”<sup>71</sup> He goes on, “the Volk constituted the historical source of a society’s legal system. Law, like language, was the spontaneous, unwritten, progressive emanation of a people’s innermost spirit.”<sup>72</sup> In his published works and at the seminary, Frankel showed how Jewish law and legal texts had evolved across history. The Breslau Seminary was the institutional setting for teaching and disseminating this religious ideology.<sup>73</sup>

The early seminary was named after and to some extent influenced by the Breslau school, via Kohut, Drachman, and de Sola Mendes. The stronger claim for the ideological preeminence of positive-historical Judaism in the early years of instruction at Morais’s JTS in New York remains unsubstantiated. Clearly, the early seminary was envisioned as a modern rabbinical seminary in the Western mold and not as an Eastern European yeshivah. But the question is not whether the American JTS

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69. See SM, “On The Death of Leopold Zunz, April 1886,” box 11, FF17. For Morais’s views on Graetz, see SM-LKCAJS, box 14, FF2; SM, *IHL*, 212, and SM, “Review of Dr. Graetz’ Criticism on the Psalms” in the *JRec*, September 14, 1883 (Ledger, 211).

70. On the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and Frankel, see the essays collected in Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, N.H., 1994); Michael A. Meyer, “Two Persistent Tensions within *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,” *Modern Judaism* 24.2 (2004): 105–19. Most recently, see Assaf Yedidya, “Orthodox Reactions to ‘*Wissenschaft des Judentums*,’” *Modern Judaism* 30.1 (2012): 69–94; and for a recent survey of the field, see Kerstin von der Krone and Mirijam Thulin, “*Wissenschaft in Context: A Research Essay on the Wissenschaft des Judentums*,” *LBIYB* 58 (2013): 249–80.

71. Schorsch, “European Origins,” 348–49.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*

was to be a modern seminary in some respects patterned after Breslau, but whether the Breslau Seminary or Zechariah Frankel's outlook is the most important source for understanding the aims and principles of the early seminary founded by Morais and others. Some have concluded that the JTS seminary is primarily based on the Breslau model because of the similarities of the two institutions' respective curricula.<sup>74</sup> But such a comparison of curricula does not take into account that the modern seminaries, from Orthodox to Reform, generally shared a similar set of subjects. In other words, the same material mentioned in various seminaries' printed curricula does not reveal how those subjects were actually taught at any individual institution, the points of emphasis, nor the content of the lessons conveyed.

There is no evidence that the curriculum (explicitly stated or actually taught)<sup>75</sup> of the original JTS was wedded to or dominated by evolutionary theories of law and history. Neither in the original JTS published reports and proceedings nor in the extant unpublished sources is the *Weltanschauung* of the Breslau Seminary offered as the preeminent ideology for the original JTS in New York. The single reference to the Breslau Seminary lists it among a number of Western theological seminaries, including those in Budapest, Padua, and Berlin.<sup>76</sup>

Prior to the reorganization of the JTS in 1902, rumblings of distrust between the Breslau advocates and Morais already were surfacing. In a private letter to Joseph Blumenthal in 1893, Morais expressed his concerns about Kohut's backing of Joshua Joffe to teach Talmud. Joffe had received *semihab* (traditional ordination) from the Volozhin yeshiva in Lithuania and a "modern" ordination from the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (a seminary founded in Berlin by Abraham Geiger, the leading voice of Reform Judaism in Germany), and he also had received historical-critical training at the University of Berlin. Joffe, warned Morais, "desires a thorough transformation in the complexion of the Institution. For that I'm not prepared." He then scornfully added, "You know my views about foreign scholars, and the importance I attach

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74. Fierstien, *Different Spirit*, 80–86.

75. David Ellenson and Lee Bycel, "A Seminary of Sacred Learning: The JTS Rabbinical Curriculum in Historical Perspective," *Tradition Renewed* 2:527 and 2:585, n. 2.

76. Alexander Kohut, in a review of a work on Hebrew criminal law by one of Morais's former students from Maimonides College, Samuel Mendelssohn, faulted him for not quoting and relying more extensively on the works of Frankel. See Alexander Kohut, review of *The Criminal Jurisprudence of the Ancient Hebrews* . . . By S. Mendelsohn (Baltimore, 1891), *JQR*, o.s. 4 (1892): 679.

to big names and highly complimentary documents."<sup>77</sup> In seeking to find someone in New York to take over his teaching responsibilities, Morais confided that "while I remain connected with the seat of learning, gotten up in good faith for the perpetuation of traditional Judaism, I must prevent what will falsify its promises and stultify my whole life."<sup>78</sup> These concerns did not go away. Fearing the seminary might stray from the path he charted, in his last will and testament Morais left his remaining personal library to the JTS on the condition that it continue to uphold the principles he held dear:

I give and bequeath to the Jewish Theological Seminary, wherever located, if conducted according to the principles expressed in its Constitution, all my Hebrew books, and books connected with Hebrew literature except those of a liturgical character which can be used by my children or grandchildren, or be lent to the congregation Mickve Israel of Philadelphia for the use of the attendants at the synagogue.<sup>79</sup>

Yet tensions would surface decisively after Morais's death in 1897. Members of the "enlightened orthodox" wing he had led ultimately chose to disassociate themselves from the reorganized seminary under the leadership of Solomon Schechter as it increasingly departed from the vision and purposes articulated by Morais. Schechter shared the Breslau school's view of the Bible and rabbinic traditions as the embodiment of the evolving spirit of the Jewish people in history. Schechter spoke of a "Catholic Israel" by which he meant "that Judaism has an inner unity which is manifested in the generally accepted sentiment of devoted Jews."<sup>80</sup> As he put it in the introduction to his *Studies in Judaism*, first published serially in England before he came to the United States,

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77. The credentials to which Morais was referring were Joffe's two rabbinical ordinations, one from the Volozhin yeshiva in Lithuania and the other from the Berlin Hochschule. Joffe also apparently received a Ph.D. from the University of Berlin, because Morais referred to him as "Dr. J." For background on Joshua Joffe, his credentials, and his time at the JTS, see Diner, "Antelope and the Badger," 21–23.

78. Signed letter, SM to Joseph Blumenthal, February 26, 1893, SM-LKCAJS, box 6, FF8.

79. Philadelphia Municipal Archives, Death Records, July 1, 1860–June 30, 1915, Morais Estate no. 1710, filed November 22, 1897, Article 4, SM-LKCAJS, box 17, FF22.

80. See *Tradition and Change: The Development of Conservative Judaism*, ed. M. Waxman (New York, 1958), 16, 89–90.

When Revelation or the Written Word is reduced to the level of history, there is no difficulty in elevating history in its aspect of Tradition to the rank of Scripture, for both have then the same human or divine origin (according to the student's predilection for the one of the other adjective), and emanate from the same authority. Tradition becomes the means whereby the modern divine seeks to compensate for the loss of the Bible, and the theological balance is to the satisfaction of all parties happily readjusted.<sup>81</sup>

Schechter thought that since "Tradition" was "mainly a product of changing historical influences, it follows that the center of authority is actually removed from the Bible and placed in some living body, which by reason of its being in touch with the ideal aspirations and the religious needs of the age, is best able to determine the nature of the Secondary meaning." Schechter spoke of this "living body" not in terms of factions but as a "collective conscience of Catholic Israel as embodied in the Universal Synagogue." Consequently, Schechter considered "neither general Scripture nor primitive Judaism, but general custom (to be that which) which forms the real rule of practice."<sup>82</sup>

The ideological rupture that followed Morais's death is perhaps most evident in the bitter criticism Morais's son Henry leveled at the JTSA in an article titled "Professor Schechter and American Jewry" published in the *London Jewish Chronicle* on August 26, 1910:

To-day the Seminary attends in name and loud-voiced proclamation for Conservatism. But we know better . . . The fact remains (and if I am challenged I will prove it by actual events and happenings) that Dr. Schechter's promise, i.e., that the Seminary under his lead would always stand for those fixed principles set by my father, has gone unfulfilled. Hence Judaism has not benefited by that institution as now conducted. The Orthodox Jew trusts it not; he has seen a mongrel crop raised, where a clean, rich blessed harvest was looked forward to. He has seen not a whit of improvement in our religious status but a marked and decided deterioration since the merger of the old and the new Seminary took place.<sup>83</sup>

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81. Solomon Schechter, "Introduction," *First Studies in Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1896), reprinted in *Tradition and Change*, 92.

82. *Ibid.*, 94.

83. Henry S. Morais, "Professor Schechter and American Jewry," *The Jewish Chronicle*, August 26, 1910. I am grateful to Kenneth Wineman for discovering and sending me a copy of this article.

The original seminary essentially collapsed shortly after Morais's death in November 1897. Morais's centrality as the seminary's founder and chief administrator can be inferred from how quickly the institution folded without him. Other seminary leaders, including Morais's friend Henry Pereira Mendes, the minister at New York City's Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel; David Davidson, successor to Alexander Kohut at Congregation Ahavat Hesed (Central Synagogue), and Bernard Drachman, minister at Oheb Shalom, in Newark, New Jersey, and at the time dean of the faculty, all tried to compensate for the leadership vacuum but proved ineffective. With a sharply declining financial base and the death of the president of the board of trustees, Joseph Blumenthal,<sup>84</sup> on March 2, 1901, the institution's fate was sealed.

#### REVISITING THE HISTORICAL SCHOOL THESIS

Moshe Davis, in his classic study the *Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, claimed that the Breslau Seminary was the primary educational model for the original New York JTS. Davis based his conclusion primarily on the fact that three members of the early seminary's faculty, Kohut, Drachman, and de Sola Mendes, had studied at Breslau. The most highly regarded of the three, Alexander Kohut, a brilliant scholar and author of a multivolume work of rabbinic lexicography, is the pivotal figure in this regard for Davis, who states that a "Historical school" coalesced around Kohut in the 1880s in the context of his battle with the leaders of American Reform Judaism, as among them Isaac Mayer Wise, and that "it was Kohut who determined the fundamental character of the Seminary."<sup>85</sup> This claim, however, is declared, not argued. Consider, for example, that Morais was senior to each of the Breslau graduates by a generation. At the time of the founding of the seminary in 1886, Morais was sixty-three years old, while Drachman was twenty-five, de Sola Mendes thirty-six, and Kohut forty-four. To state, for example, that Kohut "became the immediate cause for the crystallization of 'classical Reform' in the United States" and was the principal reason that reformers declared the Pittsburgh Platform in November of 1885 (repudiating the authority of rabbinic tradition), lacks foundation in the chronology of events. In fact, what Davis states about Kohut could be said with greater force about Morais.

Beginning in December 1883—a year before Kohut arrived in America—Morais launched a series of public, polemical challenges to the

84. On Blumenthal, see Davis, *Emergence*, 332.

85. *Ibid.*, 224–25, 231–35.

Reform leadership via the Anglo-Jewish press. The heated debate, mainly about the obligation to observe Jewish dietary laws, arose in the aftermath of the “treifa banquet.” The subsequent polemic, involving Morais and Marcus Jastrow (both of Philadelphia) in one camp, and Isaac Mayer Wise, the editor of the *American Israelite* and founder of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1873) and the Hebrew Union College (1875), Samuel Hirsch, and Kaufmann Kohler, in the other, eventually spilled into the non-Jewish press.<sup>86</sup> Morais led the attack and in particular criticized his old adversary Wise, almost on a weekly basis, about his views on a variety of issues of Jewish ritual observance, including proselytes, intermarriage, dietary laws, ritual slaughtering of animals, theological concepts like salvation, and the status of the oral and written law.<sup>87</sup>

Beginning in June 1885, only a few months before the convening of the Pittsburgh Reform convention, Morais once again engaged in a weekly series of polemical exchanges in the press with Kaufmann Kohler, the main architect of the Pittsburgh Platform. The eight-point platform recast Judaism in the spirit of historical progress; denied Jewish peoplehood; rejected Jewish teachings and ritual practices at odds with modern scientific discovery; rewrote the concept of Jewish chosenness into a universal ethical mission; denied theological doctrines such as bodily resurrection, national restoration to Palestine, and otherwise located the authority for Jewish belief and behavior in reason and historical progress rather than in the revealed, binding teachings of the past.<sup>88</sup>

Evidence of Kohut’s subordinate role at the seminary in relation to Morais is amply evident.<sup>89</sup> Kohut did not participate in the founding

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86. See “Religion and Gastronomics—What the Rabbis of this City Have to Say in Relation to the Mosaic Dietary Laws,” PLT January 4, 1884 (Ledger, 217), recounting the debate that pitted Morais and Jastrow against the reformers I. M. Wise, Samuel Hirsch, and Kaufmann Kohler.

87. See SM, “Treyfa Jewish Banquet,” *American Hebrew* July 27, 1883 (Ledger, 207); “Dr. Wise on Proselytes,” *JRec* Dec. 21, 1883 (Ledger, 215); “Dir. Wise on Intermarriages,” *JRec*, Dec. 28, 1883 (Ledger, 215); “Dr. Wise on Dietary Laws,” *JRec* January 14, 1884; “Dr. Wise on Clean and Unclean Animals,” *JRec* January 11, 1884; “Dr. Wise on The Path of Salvation under the Law,” *JRec* January 25, 1884; “Dr. Wise’s Definition of *Cobanim*,” *JRec* February 8, 1884 (Ledger, 219).

88. For the text of the Pittsburgh Platform, see *Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis* 45 (1935): 198–200.

89. See SM, “Alexander Kohut: A Tribute of Respect,” *Jewish Exponent* June 8, 1894 (Ledger, 465); cf. “Tributes of Affection,” *American Hebrew*, July 6, 1894 (Ledger, 467).

meeting of the seminary at Shearith Israel on January 31, 1886.<sup>90</sup> In the first biennial report, published in 1888, Kohut's official title was vice president of the advisory board of ministers. Only later (in 1891) did he join the faculty in a limited capacity as a weekly lecturer in midrash. He occupied this position until his death in 1894, which means that he was actively involved for only three years.<sup>91</sup> In terms of both administration and overseeing the training of students, Kohut was subordinate to Morais. As Davis himself notes, at the time of the founding of the seminary, Kohut was a "newcomer to America," "had very little experience in local communal affairs . . . was fully immersed in his scholarly work" . . . and was "unable to give practical direction" to the group that eventually formed the seminary. Davis then states that the "mantle of leadership naturally fell upon Morais's shoulders" because of Kohut's situation. It seems clear, however, that the mantle of leadership—far from having "fallen upon" Morais—had been his for quite some time.<sup>92</sup>

The claim that Morais's intellectual sway over the JTS was minor is further contradicted by a large amount and variety of documentary evidence, including official and private correspondence, published seminary proceedings, contemporary press reports, personally annotated newspaper clippings, and the published reminiscences of those associated with the seminary. These sources demonstrate that Morais was not an aloof figurehead removed from the concrete decisions affecting the intellectual character of the institution. He administered, he raised funds, but above all, he taught and supervised instruction. From the founding of the seminary on January 31, 1886, at a meeting in the sanctuary of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City, to the opening of the first classes which were held the following January, until his death in November 1897, and despite his increasingly poor health, Morais regularly traveled by train between New York and Philadelphia to attend meetings and to teach. As the seminarians whom he taught put

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90. See Fierstien, *Different Spirit*, 47.

91. For Kohut's roles as member of the advisory board of ministers and lecturer in midrash, see the *Proceedings* (1888–94), and (Second) *Proceedings*, 23, for a report that "the Rev. Dr. Alexander Kohut has given weekly lessons on Midrash Rabba." Kohut also taught one course titled "Methodology of the Talmud" before his death in 1894. On the latter course, see (fourth) *Proceedings* (1894), 28, cited in Fierstien, *Different Spirit*, 88.

92. On the connection between Breslau and the seminary founders, see, e.g., Fierstien, *Different Spirit*, 80; Davis, *Emergence*, 235, 256, 335 (Drachman), 345 (Kohut), 350 (de Sola Mendes). See also Jeffrey S. Gurock, *American Jewish Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective* (Hoboken, N.J., 1996), 201–31.



it in a letter to Morais, honoring him on his seventieth birthday in 1893 (and implying an awareness of strife during the same year in which Morais had privately voiced his concerns about Joffe):

More than any other man you have the proud satisfaction of looking back upon a past spent in the service of Truth, in the battle for the maintenance of the historic and unalloyed purity of Judaism in this country. To your efforts, and to your efforts alone is due the establishment and direction of our own Alma Mater, founded to carry into effect the Jewish ideals you have ever championed. All of the future success of this Seminary will be but a worthy reward and crown for your unselfish devotion, modest perseverance and self-sacrifice.<sup>93</sup>

The published proceedings of the biennial conventions of the early years establishes Morais's preeminent role as president of the faculty and formulator of the educational goals and aims of the original JTS. In the first issue of the seminary's biennial proceedings, published in 1888, Joseph Blumenthal, president of the seminary's board of trustees, singled out Morais for the "untiring and ceaseless energy with which he has superintended and directed the instruction."<sup>94</sup> Official and private correspondence shows that Morais, as president of the faculty, played a critical role in selecting the teachers and supervising instruction. In a letter to the president and board of trustees of the JTS, dated January 17, 1887, Morais attests that he examined Bernard Drachman, who would become a preceptor, and that he "has my approval. I found that his knowledge of the Bible is extensive and well-grounded, that he is conversant with the Mishnah, and that he understands the grammar and genius of the Hebrew language." In recommending Drachman to the board, Morais applauded "the secular learning which the applicant has already attained, his appearance and bearing and specially the religious views, which, I have reason to think, he holds, and which harmonize with those we wish to see inculcated."<sup>95</sup> Twelve months later, Drachman, in seeking to persuade Morais to support the candidacy of Gustave Lieberman to teach Talmud at the seminary, spoke in the same terms. Understanding the type of teacher Morais sought, Drachman characterized Lieberman as a

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93. Signed letter from the seminarians to Morais on his seventieth birthday, April 16, 1893, SM-LKCAJS, box 6, FF14.

94. Joseph Blumenthal, Report of the President of the Board of Trustees (First) *Proceedings* (New York, 1888), 5.

95. Typescript letter (based on a missing original manuscript) from Bernard Drachman to Sabato Morais, January 17, 1887, box 4, FF4.

“thoroughly cultured gentlemen, entirely abreast of scientific thoughts of the age, a masterly Talmudist.”<sup>96</sup>

NINETEENTH-CENTURY JEWISH ORTHODOXIES  
IN COMPARISON

Morais was not unique in his emphasis on piety and humility as a basis for religious training.<sup>97</sup> His outlook, however, its historical specificity and religious substance, must be distinguished from that of nineteenth-century German Jewish thinkers, for example, the Neo-Orthodoxy associated with Samson Raphael Hirsch of Frankfurt, to whom Morais has sometimes been compared.<sup>98</sup> In his biblical commentaries, for example, Hirsch promoted allegorical and symbolical interpretations of the Bible and Jewish festivals, and in his other writings he minimized the national aspect of Jewish religious existence. By contrast, Morais, in his numerous religious controversies in America, such as those with Isaac Mayer Wise, which date from the 1850s and continued through the period of the establishment of the seminary, consistently relied on the literal (*pesbat*) mode of interpretation and defended the national aspect of Jewish existence as paramount values. Hirsch's notion of *derekh erets*, moreover, posing a coexisting duality between non-Jewish culture and traditional Jewish observance, also can be distinguished from the integrative model of what Morais later called “enlightened faith” or “historical Judaism.”<sup>99</sup> As he put it in the conclusion to his essay “The Jew in Italy”:

96. Signed letter, Bernard Drachman to Sabato Morais, October 28, 1887, SM-LKCAJS, box 4, FF7. Quoted by Diner, “Antelope and the Badger,” 21.

97. Maimonides, *Mishneh torah*, 6 vols. in 7, ed. Y. Kapah (Jerusalem, 1993), *hilkbot de'ot* 2:3; Maimonides, *Mishnah 'im perush rabenu moshe ben maimon*, 6 vols. in 3, ed. Y. Kapah (Jerusalem, 1963–68), commentary on *Pirke avot*, chaps. 2.1 and 4; Bahya ben Joseph ibn Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart* (Hobot ha-lebabot), trans. from the Arabic into Hebrew by J. Ibn Tibbon, English trans. M. Hyamson (Jerusalem, 1986), 2:69–123; Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto, *The Path of the Upright/Mesilat Yesharim*, critical Hebrew edition with translation and notes by Morais's seminary student Mordecai Kaplan (1st ed., 1936; reprint: Northvale, N.J., 1995), 101–6 and 192–211, and *Aspeklaria: Kovets entsiklopedi le-mahshevet bayabadut*, compiled by S. A. Adler (Jerusalem, 1996), 21:213–40.

98. For Hirsch's views, see Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters*, ed. J. Breuer in a new edition based on the translation by B. Drachman (1899; repr. Jerusalem, 1969); and more generally Noah H. Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform: The Religious Philosophy of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Philadelphia, 1976); and Robert Liberles, “Champion of Orthodoxy: The Emergence of Samson Raphael Hirsch as Religious Leader,” *AJSReview* 6 (1981): 43–60.

99. To Luzzatto, the phrase “derekh erets,” connoted an “affected, insincere civility” and “sycophantry for the sake of political gain.” See Marc Gopin, “The

The object of this paper has not been to eulogize individuals. It has principally aimed to convince Jewish youths that the religion in which they were born does not jar at all with broad culture. Important it is that they should clearly see how the two will *harmonize*—aiding and exalting each other—and how their severance is harmful to both. Italy of nearly every century since Titus peopled it with the dispersed of Judah, proved the advantage of an alliance between the teaching of faith and secular education. Poland and Germany of the century immediately preceding Mendelssohn, manifestly showed the mischief arising from their divorce.<sup>100</sup>

For Morais no duality existed between universal culture and living a Jewish life in its particularity; rather, he believed that nothing true can be in conflict because the original source of all that is true and just comes from God and has universal application.

Morais and his enlightened observant coreligionists upheld this outlook in philosophical and scientific terms. As his student, the medical doctor, lay scholar, and seminary supporter Solomon Solis-Cohen asserted in the JTS proceedings of the fourth biennial convention in 1894, “Judaism does not oppose reason, but it transcends reason.”<sup>101</sup> Morais did not see general culture and Jewish religious life as separate realms of existence that in the best of times comfortably and tolerantly coexisted as separate entities; rather they were founded upon a common universal source. This divine source constituted the wellspring of Morais’s rabbinic humanism: an ancient wisdom whose study and practice as taught to the world by God’s holy nation of Israel would lead all humanity, each created in the image of God, to a messianic age of fraternal unity, peace, and harmony as prophesized in the Book of Isaiah.

Even as he asserted the universal meaning of the messianic hope prophesized in the Hebrew Bible, Morais defended the traditional belief that Jews are a chosen people with a specific mission to instruct the world. He did so, however, in opposition to both the Reform thinkers of his

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Religious Ethics of Samuel David Luzzatto” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1993), 14, nn. 32 and 25, n. 58.

100. SM, “The Jew in Italy,” printed in the (second) *Proceedings* (New York, 1890), 48.

101. Solomon Solis-Cohen, (fourth) *Proceeding* (New York, 1894), 32, and see Solis-Cohen’s description of Morais’s views in his memorial address for Morais: “Between science and religion [Morais] found no necessary antagonism. Apparent contradictions he attributed to imperfect knowledge.” Solis-Cohen, “Sabato Morais: Teacher and Leader,” in *Judaism and Science* (Philadelphia, 1940), 225.

time, such as Kaufmann Kohler, who denied the national aspect of Judaism, and to secular political Zionist advocates of Jewish national rebirth. Morais objected to political Zionism not only on religious grounds but for practical and political reasons as well. "Surely it does not require the sagacity of a Bismark," he observed, to want to prevent such an entity from coming into existence. First of all, Morais thought the idea of a Jewish political restoration as unrealistic and "utopian." Second, he feared that even if such an undertaking were to succeed, the creation of a Jewish state would threaten the progress being made by Jews in the diaspora integrating into liberal states and would spark accusations of dual loyalties and anti-Jewish reactions of hatred and fear. Third, encouraging a mass migration to an impoverished land, Morais argued, would only exacerbate strained conditions of "pauperism" that the "wisest" (almost certainly an allusion to the efforts of his friend Moses Montefiore) were already struggling to alleviate. Writing in the aftermath of the Crimean War, Morais also feared the fate of such a state in the turbulent world of imperial politics in which its existence would depend on the good will of the Ottoman caliphate or some other foreign power. Most important, however, was his belief that the desire for land could never supplant the universalist message and religious mission, "as the acknowledged educator of mankind" for which Jews throughout the ages had been willing to die:

Is it indeed in such an issue that the hopes, cherished during ages of suffering, meekly borned for a grand ideal, will find their realization? The very thought is an offense to the memory of the immortal seers. In their illumined vision Israel stood purified seven-fold as the embodiment of a humanizing belief as the acknowledged educator of mankind . . . Not the mere possession of a patch of ground guaranteed by protocols is the aspiration of pious hearts among the remnant of the tribes<sup>102</sup> . . . [Efforts to create a secular political state] would prove worse than a chimera. It would be an absolute evil.<sup>105</sup>

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102. Cf. Peretz Smolenskin: "The foundation of our national identity was never the soil of the Holy Land and we did not lose the basis of nationality when we were exiled. We have always been a spiritual nation, one whose Torah was the foundation of its statehood." Quoted in translation from Peretz Smolenskin, "It Is Time to Plant," (*Et lata'at*), in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. A. Hertzberg (Philadelphia, 1960), 147; David Vital, *Origins of Zionism* (Oxford, 1975), 47.

103. SM, "'The Dispersed of Judea': Is There Any Truth in the Reported Return of the Jews to Palestine? An Interesting Sermon by the Rev. S. Morais,

Morais summed up his unambiguous objection to such plans by returning to the familiar rabbinic prohibition, citing Maimonides, the Talmud, and the prophet Jeremiah against stirring false messianic hopes. In citing Jeremiah's call to "seek the welfare of the city beyond the Holy Land," Morais drew upon the quintessentially quiescent, antimessianic strain in diasporic Jewish thought. Morais's traditional religious understanding of Jewish nationhood contradicted the political Zionist nationalism that Schechter subsequently brought to the JTSA, albeit in a modern religious form.<sup>104</sup>

Morais's concept of abnegation also should not be confused with the otherworldly notion of self-abnegation (*bitul ha-yesh*) found in Hasidic literature<sup>105</sup> or in Israel Salanter's program of ethical self-correction (*musar*). Morais's understanding of *abnegazione*, both in substance and in its genealogy, differed from Hasidic ideas of various degrees of self-annihilation that served a theurgic purpose. Salanter sought to modify the self through psychological practices of self-correction. There was a social dimension to his approach but one that was purely instrumental: to organize those seeking self-correction into religious groups of *havurot* (fellowships) and *musar shtiebls* (ethical houses of worship) to accomplish together what they could not do on their own. Unlike Morais's concepts of piety and humility, which were rooted in historical traditions of martyrdom in the service of a universalist mission, Salanter's approach was neither political nor universalistic.<sup>106</sup>

Salanter promoted ethical practices of self-correction over rabbinics in his curriculum. At Morais's seminary, the Bible, not rabbinics nor *musar*, was the primary constitutive element of the curriculum.<sup>107</sup> The JTS differed in principle from the educational priorities adopted by nineteenth-century Orthodox leaders like Hayim of Volozhin, founder of the Volo-

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at the Seventh Street Synagogue on Saturday," (Philadelphia) *Evening Telegraph*, Monday, January 29, 1877 (Ledger, 102).

104. On Schechter's embrace of political Zionism and its subsequent adoption within the JTSA, see Mel Scult, "Schechter's Seminary," in *Tradition Renewed*, 1:73–74, and 2:872, s.v. "Zionist movement."

105. For an analysis of the difference between Morais's concept of abnegation and the Hasidic doctrine of *bitul ha-yesh*, see Arthur Kiron, "Livornese Traces," 45–66.

106. Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement: Seeking the Torah of Truth*, trans. J. Chipman (Philadelphia, 1993).

107. SM, "Report of the President of the Faculty," (fourth) *Proceedings* (New York, 1888), 19. Cf. Fierstien, "Sabato Morais and the Founding of the Jewish Theological Seminary," 84.

zhin yeshiva and a disciple<sup>108</sup> of the Vilna Gaon, Elijah ben Solomon, wherein Talmud Torah was of supreme importance. For Zecharias Frankel, as founder and director of the Breslau JTS, rabbinics too occupied pride of place. By contrast, for crypto-Jews who lived apart from the schools of talmudic learning common to Central and Eastern Europe during the early modern period, the Bible had served for centuries as the only available portal back to their Judaism. Something of this Bible-centric view of Jewish learning stayed with Morais from his childhood. As he later recalled:

The study of the Hebrew Bible was deemed in days gone by the imperative duty of every Israelite. In Italy, a man professing our religion must, indeed, have been very illiterate, if he was not familiar with greater portion of the inspired pages. For how could it be otherwise? At the schools, its tuition constituted an object of primary importance. In many synagogues and devotional gatherings, its recital and interpretation invariably followed the evening service. At home, the practice of setting a time apart for learning the Law was almost universal. Our unsophisticated predecessors believed that the most effective means to prevent filial insubordination and domestic strife, was to draw the mind to meditation upon God's holy commands.<sup>109</sup>

In a sermon delivered in Baltimore in February 1886, just days after the seminary association had been established, Morais made this priority eminently clear: "As far as it lies in my power, the proposed Seminary shall vindicate the right of the Hebrew Bible to a precedence over all theologi-

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108. On the career of Hayim of Volozhin and his relationship to his teacher and founder of the mitnagdic, anti-Hasidic tradition in Lithuania, Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman Kremer (the GR"A or Vilna Gaon), see Immanuel Etkes, "The Relationship between Talmudic Scholarship and the Institution of the Rabbinate in Nineteenth-Century Lithuanian Jewry," in *Scholars and Scholarship: The Interaction between Judaism and Other Cultures*, ed. L. Landman (New York, 1990), 107–32; Etkes, "Three Religious Leaders Cope with Crisis: A Comparative Discussion of the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, and Rabbi Israel Salanter," in *Jewish Religious Leadership: Image and Reality*, ed. J. Wertheimer (New York, 2004), 2:403–28, and note the corrective offered by Norman Lamm, who stresses the ways in which Hayim departed from the teachings of the GR"A, in Lamm, *Torah Lishma—Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and His Contemporaries* (New York, 1989), 3–58; Shaul Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas of the Nineteenth Century: Creating a Tradition of Learning*, trans. L. Taylor-Guthartz (Oxford, 2012).

109. *IHL*, 79.

cal studies." In 1888, in his first report as president of the faculty, he again emphasized that "the Bible constitutes the primary object of our pupil's tuition; Mishnah and Talmud are studied by them as an indispensable corollary."<sup>110</sup> Morais invested the quest for truth above all in biblical interpretation, not the evolving historical spirit of the Jewish people in time.

By contrast, the intellectual core of the Breslau program was rabbinics: "since law expressed the essential character of Jewish piety, it followed that the study of law constituted the authentic form of Jewish scholarship." If, as Ismar Schorsch has explained, Zecharias Frankel, "boldly proposed to ground loyalty to Judaism in the very force which challenged its integrity: historical consciousness," Morais never took that step. Morais looked to the past for the eternally valid, essential, ancient wisdom revealed in the sacred scripture that addresses all humanity. In the Torah he found authoritative knowledge of what never changes; he could never have accepted an interpretation of revelation as change over time made manifest in the historical consciousness of the Jewish people. He recognized no deep discontinuity, rupture, or evolution between the essential past and the moral present. He sought to divine God's will from the revealed Holy Scripture and received traditions, not from a popular will emanating from below from the people. To that end, he argued, only a properly constituted rabbinical body of sufficiently pious individuals recognized for their character and learning could authorize changes in ritual practices among Jews in America.<sup>111</sup>

#### THE PROBLEM OF NOMENCLATURE

A problem of nomenclature may account for some of the confusion that has beset histories of the JTS. It has often been assumed, for example, based largely on the observation that the two institutions shared the same name, that they shared the same outlook. But this assumption fails, first of all, to take into account the fact that the early seminary was named the "Jewish Theological Seminary" and the second seminary was established as the "Jewish Theological Seminary of America." Both derived their name from the seminary established in Breslau by Zecharias Frankel. Only in the latter did Frankel's "positive-historical" approach to Judaism become preeminent.<sup>112</sup>

110. (First) *Proceedings* (New York, 1888), 19.

111. *Ibid.*

112. On Frankel, positive-historical Judaism, and his importance for the modern American Conservative movement, see Ismar Schorsch, "The European Origins of Conservative Judaism," *Judaism* 30 (1981): 344–54; Uriel Tal, "The Spiritual World of Conservative Judaism" (Hebrew), *Tefusot yisra'el* 4 (1975):

The first occurrence of the name “Jewish Theological Seminary of America,” meanwhile, appears in the act of incorporation of the reorganized JTSA in 1902. This act of incorporation constituted a legal merger of two independent corporations: “The Jewish Theological Seminary Association, which established the Seminary in 1886” and the “Jewish Theological Seminary of America . . . incorporated by a law of the State of New York, approved February 20, 1902.” Two months later, at the Biennial Convention of the “Jewish Theological Seminary Association,” its members voted unanimously to authorize “its Board of Directors to arrange a merger of the two corporations, which in turn was effected April 14, 1902.”<sup>113</sup> Prior to 1902, there was an early “JTSA” but that abbreviation referred to the main fund-raising arm of the original seminary (the Jewish Theological Seminary *Association*) and not to the Jewish Theological Seminary of *America*.<sup>114</sup>

For Morais, however, the name of the institution was a minor issue. As he put it in a letter to Bernhard Felsenthal in April 1889, two years after the seminary began operation:

I care nothing for names, call it a college, a University, whatever people like best—[it is] where the rabbi, in its grammatical, philological,

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esp. 7–9. On the Breslau Seminary, see G. Kisch, ed., *Das Breslauer Seminar* (Tübingen, 1963).

113. The accounts of the legal merger of these two corporations is reprinted and summarized in *The Jewish Theological Seminary of America: Preliminary Announcement* (New York, 1902), 2; *The Jewish Theological Seminary of America: Documents, Charter and By-Laws* (New York, 1903), 5–6; and *The Jewish Theological Seminary of America: Biennial Report, 1902–4* (New York, 1906), 11–12. The distinction between the official names of the seminaries is also pointed out by Scult, “Schechter’s Seminary,” 93, n. 36.

114. On this point, see the subtitle of Fierstien’s work: “The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1886–1902,” and Nussenbaum, “Champion of Orthodoxy,” 118, who claims that at a March 7, 1886, organization meeting the title of the organization was changed from “Jewish Theological Seminary Association of New York” to “the Jewish Theological Seminary Association of America.” He cites an address by Solomon Solis-Cohen delivered in 1918 in support of that claim. The problem with this account is that there is no evidence to confirm that the JTS(A) went by any other name than the Jewish Theological Seminary Association before 1902. Solis-Cohen would not have been alone in projecting back onto to the earlier seminary the later, more distinguished name. So, for example, the “Semi-Centennial” volume of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America appeared in 1939 (to recognize the 1886 founding) and not 1952. See *The JTSA: Semi-Centennial Volume*. See Moshe Davis, *Emergence*, 386–87, for the reprinting of the February 23, 1887, “Certificate of Incorporation of the Jewish



and principally in its spirit, is, in order to raise preceptors for the next generation. A chair in a secular university would not suffice nor could a non-Jewish professor impart all we want. Such are my views, but however I may set them forth before my immediate congregation; or before the public they yield no benefit.<sup>115</sup>

Whatever symbolism the name Jewish Theological Seminary may have held for the graduates of the Breslau Seminary, Morais was more concerned with the substance of the education taught there. Moreover, the idea of the JTS serving in 1886 as the national institution for training American rabbis was no longer credible. Morais had lived through the failure of previous “national” seminary projects such as the short-lived Maimonides College. He had tried to cooperate with the Reform movement and had served as an examiner of the Hebrew Union College’s rabbinical students. Morais’s undertaking in 1886, after his final break with HUC and the Reform leadership centered there, conceded that a national rabbinical seminary was no longer possible. The seminary’s “non-national” name (that is, JTS, not JTSA) implicitly acknowledged the presence of rival institutions, even as it strived to become the “national” representative for training competent representatives of an “enlightened faith.”<sup>116</sup>

#### THE AFTERLIFE OF MORAIS’S SEMINARY

Ultimately, what Morais envisioned for the seminary and its students would not hold up. While the institutional failure can be attributed in part to his own death, there are many possible explanations for the demise of the program of religious education he so passionately tried to secure in

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Theological Seminary Association,” from the “Files of the State of New York, Albany.”

115. Signed letter, SM to Bernhard Felsenthal, April 30, 1889, SM-LKCAJS, box 5, FF2. On Kohut and the naming of the JTS, see Davis, *The Shaping of American Judaism* (Hebrew; New York, 1951), 242; and Davis, *Emergence*, 235. See also Nussenbaum, “Champion of Orthodoxy,” 113, n. 16, on this point as well as his objection to Davis’s claim that Morais wanted to call the proposed institution “the Orthodox Seminary.”

116. See (First) *Proceedings* (New York, 1888), 20. The JTS is officially called in Hebrew the *bet-midrash le-rabanim d-k’k nyu-york rabati* (rabbinical school of [the community of] greater New York) on Mordecai Kaplan’s diploma (fig. 3). It is curious that while the official renaming and legal incorporation of the JTSA (i.e., of America) took place on April 14, 1902, Kaplan’s diploma from the “JTS,” which is dated 27 Sivan 5662 (July 2, 1902)—postdating the incorporation—clearly does not yet use the new title of the institution.

his lifetime. That subject will not be treated here. For now, we might ask more practically what happened to Morais's Sephardic Italian rabbinic humanist legacy?

Joseph Hertz, who later became the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire, and Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, were the most famous graduates of Morais's JTS. The two maintained a warm friendship long after they parted. Hertz continued to espouse an enlightened, observant version of Judaism well suited to the decorous, English-speaking environment in which he worked. Writing in 1938, he declared, "Dr. Sabato Morais has been the most potent religious influence in my life. I have thus early been led to a high appreciation of the Sephardim in the annals of Judaism . . . for one thousand years and more, religion *with* culture has been the characteristic of Sephardi life."<sup>117</sup> The principle of humility is regnant in Hertz's outlook. As early as 1898, while still at the JTS, Hertz published in the seminary's biennial *Proceedings* his study of Bahya Ibn Pakuda's *Hobot ha-lebabot*, the medieval ethical treatise that treats humility as a religious ideal.<sup>118</sup> In matters of biblical interpretation, Hertz's bilingual Pentateuch with commentary became one of the most frequently consulted works in the Anglophone Jewish world. Interestingly, among all the modern commentators Hertz lists in his bibliography, only Samuel David Luzzatto is singled out as "great."<sup>119</sup> Hertz dedicated his *A Book of Jewish Thoughts*, published shortly after the First World War, to Jewish soldiers "who fell in the Great War." He explains that the book, which was distributed throughout the British Empire and to the United States, "brings

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117. Emphasis in the original. For Hertz's relationship to Morais, see Joseph H. Hertz, *Sermons, Addresses and Studies by the Chief Rabbi (Dr. J.H. Hertz)*, 3 vols. (London, 1938), 3:360–63; Hertz, "Sabato Morais—A Pupil's Tribute," 5–6, 46–48; and Hertz, "Bachya and the 'Duties of the Heart,'" *Appendix to the Sixth Biennial Report of the Jewish Theological Seminary Association* (New York, 1898), reprinted in *Sermons, Addresses and Studies*, 3:321–42; cf. *ibid.*, 1:39, 79, 113, 149, 160–61. For SM and Bahya ben Joseph Ibn Pakuda, see SM-LKCAJS, box 12, FF3–6; SM, *IHL*, 135, 235. Miri Freud-Kandel recently drew attention to formative importance of the JTS and Morais on Hertz's religious outlook. See Miri Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1915: An Ideology Forsaken* (London, 2006), 24–28.

118. Joseph H. Hertz, "Bachya, The Jewish Thomas A Kempis," (Sixth) *Proceedings* (New York, 1898), appendix.

119. *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, Hebrew text, English translation and commentary, ed. J. H. Hertz (London, 1981), 1051; and see Harvey Warren Meirovich, *A Vindication of Judaism: The Polemics of the Hertz Pentateuch* (New York, 1998).

the message of Judaism together with memories of Jewish martyrdom and spiritual achievement throughout the ages."<sup>120</sup>

Mordecai Kaplan, meanwhile, went on to become one of the most influential Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century, but along a different path. He taught at the JTSA for over fifty years, served as dean of the JTSA Teacher's Institute from 1909 to 1946, and was the intellectual force that drove the modern Reconstructionist movement into being.<sup>121</sup> After graduating from Morais's JTS, Kaplan served as a pulpit rabbi at two different Orthodox congregations before abandoning his belief in the supernatural foundations of Judaism. He gained notoriety for his radical naturalization of traditional Jewish doctrines with the publication in 1934 of his *Judaism as a Civilization*.<sup>122</sup> In it, Kaplan repudiated Judaism's notion of election and sought to replace it with a new, functionalist program of Jewish sociology and vocation.<sup>123</sup> His teachings engendered strong responses within the JTSA and especially fierce attacks by the organization of Orthodox rabbis Agudath ha-Rabbanim. In 1945, in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, Agudath ha-Rabbanim placed Kaplan under a *herem* and publicly burned a new prayer book he had published.<sup>124</sup>

What is striking about Kaplan's religious ideology is his explicit understanding of what he called "ritual Judaism." The authentic version of traditional Judaism that Kaplan tried to reconstruct bears many resemblances to that which Morais taught at the JTS. For example, in *Judaism as a Civilization*, published just over forty years after he first arrived at the JTS, Kaplan writes:

At the basis of the traditional mode of Jewish life is the assumption that the Torah, whence are derived the laws by which that life is regu-

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120. *A Book of Jewish Thoughts: Selected and Arranged by The Chief Rabbi (Dr. J.H. Hertz)* (London, 1921), vii.

121. For Kaplan's biography, see Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1993), and most recently, Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Bloomington, Ind., 2013). For an overview of Kaplan's significance in twentieth-century American Judaism, see Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, Conn., 2004), 243–49.

122. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York, 1934).

123. Arnold M. Eisen, *The Chosen People: A Study in Jewish Religious Ideology* (Bloomington, Ind., 1983), 73–98.

124. On this notorious incident, see Zachary Silver, "The Excommunication of Mordecai Kaplan," *AJAJ* 62.1 (2010): 21–48, esp. 21 and 28–30, and Scult, *Radical American Judaism*, 7–27.

lated, is of supernatural origin. That assumption is no mere rhetorical flourish. It was intended to lead to practical consequences, the most important of which was that its precepts and ordinances were meant for all time and must be observed at all costs. When the least of them is at stake one should suffer martyrdom than disobey . . . The only way in which the Torah can make itself perceptibly felt in the life of a Jew is by his observance of its ritual precepts.<sup>125</sup>

Kaplan spent eight years at Morais's seminary, from 1893 until he graduated in 1901. Though still unstudied, the supernatural basis of many of Kaplan's reconstructions may be seen in light of his time at the JTS: for example, the urgent need to secure group survival, the importance of keeping ritual observances to accomplish this goal, the spirit of duty and sacrifice, even the idea of God. As Arnold Eisen has shown, Kaplan, maintained a concept of God in terms of unity. God is a process that "renders life worthwhile by furthering the cause of freedom, salvation, social regeneration, the regeneration of human nature, human cooperation, and righteousness. Meaning to life, then, comes from knowing of the perfected unity for which God works and from joining in that work." The direction of Kaplan's thinking, like that of Morais, emphasized actions, moving from the particular to the universal; in so doing, one abnegates oneself to a greater purpose.<sup>126</sup>

Kaplan knew Morais, though there is apparently very little direct documentary evidence of the depth of their relationship. Among the Morais papers at Penn there is one trace: Kaplan's teenage signature, in Hebrew, on a *Rosh ha-shanah* message, dated September 26, 1897, seven weeks before Morais's death, written in Hebrew and signed by fourteen other students, wishing him improved health, both in body and spirit.<sup>127</sup> Nonetheless, whether Kaplan's understanding of "ritual Judaism" came from Salanter via his father or more proximately from the education he received at the seminary, both traditions placed a kind of "ethical orthodoxy" at the core of their understandings of how to live a religious life. Kaplan in turn accepted them as authentic then denuded them of their

125. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization*, 25–26.

126. Eisen, *Chosen People*, 85.

127. Signed letter, written on Jewish Theological Seminary Association letterhead, from Kalonymus Dov Ehrenreich, Yehudah Hillel Greenstein, David Levin, Pinchas Israeli, Mordechai Menahem Kaplan, Hillel Kauvar, Hayim Abramovitsch, Menachem Eichler, Moshe Mendel, Pinchas Drucker (in absentia), Natan Malf, Eliyahu Solomon, Yehudah Elmaleh, and Michael Fried to SM, September 26, 1897. SM-LKCAJS, box 7, FF13.



Figure 3. Ordination certificate of Mordecai Kaplan from the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, 27 Sivan 5662/July 2, 1902. Mordecai Kaplan Papers, The Goldyne Savad Library Center, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Thanks to Deborah Waxman for calling this document to my attention.

supernatural foundation. Reconstituted as such, these core doctrines underlay Kaplan's own program to reconstruct Judaism in his time.

Morais established the Jewish Theological Seminary to train and cultivate religious leaders on the basis of religious principles he considered eternal and unchanging. After his effort to cooperate with the leaders of the American Reform movement ended, Morais needed to articulate a common ground around which enlightened observant Jews in the United States might rally. He did not invent a new ideology; nor did he adapt a new system from German-speaking Central Europe; nor did he want to relinquish American Jewish religious education to the Eastern European Yiddish Orthodox, whose languages he did not speak or read and whose cultural insularity he explicitly criticized. Rather, Morais returned to the sources that had always inspired him, to the Sephardic and Italian Jewish traditions he knew best, and which he had tried throughout the course of his ministry to translate, transmit, and inspire in others. Religious education—through the pulpit, the press, the lectern, and the classroom—was his trenchant weapon in the battle for the hearts and souls of his contemporaries. His failure is only the beginning of the story.