



Covenant in Crisis: Orthodox Reactions to Slavery in Antebellum America

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COVENANT IN CRISIS: ORTHODOX REACTIONS
TO SLAVERY IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA, 1848-
1861

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Silence: The Orthodox and Slavery, 1848-1861

“Let the proud oppressor of the poor, and the hard-hearted avaricious man, who both look upon the distresses of their fellow-beings with indifference; let them, I say, reflect that retribution will come...for He who punished Pharaoh, and the guilty Egyptians, can even now smite the sinner...no matter how much he may have fortified himself by silencing his conscience.” *Isaac Leeser, Passover 1843, Philadelphia (emphasis, added)*.

Silence is sin. This was the message of Isaac Leeser’s 1843 Passover sermon. Leeser employed the ancient Israelite freedom narrative to critique present-day bystanders, who were “indifferent” to oppression. To silence one’s “conscience” means so support the perpetrator. As Leeser explained to the Orthodox congregants of Mikveh Israel in downtown Philadelphia, God “punished Pharaoh” and “can even now smite the [silent] sinner.”

The irony, however, was profound. Leeser was intentionally silent about his era’s most contentious human rights issue. “We do not mean to...take sides with either of the parties who are now engaged in discussion of the lawfulness [of slavery],” he stated in 1857.¹ Leeser’s sermon did not mention America’s “Peculiar Institution,” nor make the connection be-

tween Jewish freedom and Black emancipation. This sentiment was striking since Philadelphia was an abolition stronghold.

Leeser's understanding of Passover further accentuates his silence. "[The Exodus] was the dawning of freedom for every member of the human family, since it is the first on record of the unjust power of tyranny broken," he told his congregation in the 1830s.² Jewish tradition has a second name for Passover: The Festival of Freedom. The narrative affords an obvious religious and Biblical allegory, a launching point to discuss liberation and oppression. Black evangelicals, among other Black and abolitionist Christian groups, recognized the connection. The Exodus story was central to their liberation theology.³ While Leeser vocalized the through-line, he did not realize it through action.

Leeser's silence was typical of the American Orthodox leadership. I demonstrate in this chapter that the emerging Orthodox leadership replicated his stance. I focus on the years between 1848 and January 1861, the period bookended by a major wave of Jewish immigration began and South Carolina's secession from the union, which intensified a nationwide religious reckoning on the morality of slavery. I argue that *Orthodox silence stemmed from fear*. Orthodox leaders were fearful of anti-Semitism, locally and globally. They also emphasized preserving ritual observance within the United States in contrast to the fast-growing Reform Movement, which sought to abandon ancient rituals for universal values more in accordance with "modern" life. These fears muffled Orthodox debates over enslavement. They also bolstered pro-slavery attitudes among Orthodox Jews, a theme that pervades this chapter. Strengthening Jewish security and preserving Jewish tradition led to defending the *status quo*, whether deriding anti-slavery sentiments in the political realm or opposing abolitionist interpretations of scripture in the religious one. Silence protected Orthodoxy.

An Overview of Antebellum Silence

Antebellum Jews largely maintained silence on the issue of slavery. “Their European experiences and religious traditions, their lowly economic and educational backgrounds, and the fear of antisemitic backlash,” argues historian Jayme Sokolow, “made them politically conservative and detached from controversial causes outside the scope of Judaism.” As an immigrant community and religious minority, American Jews were vulnerable politically, economically, and culturally. Conservative politics – or silence on contentious issues – seemed to promise safety.⁴

Leading Orthodox Rabbis rarely, if ever, addressed Black enslavement in recorded sermons, lectures, and editorials before January 1861. Morris Raphall of New York, Bernard Illowy of Baltimore, and Isaac Leeser of Philadelphia – were silent on the issue through much of the 1850s. Samuel Isaacs of New York and Sabato Morais of Philadelphia, the only Orthodox rabbis to express anti-slavery sentiments before the Civil War, were no different. Abraham Rice of Baltimore did not say anything, before or after 1861. His historical record is generally more scant than the others, yet it is unlikely that any statement on slavery would have escaped press coverage.⁵

The Hebrew Bible is replete with stories of enslaved people. Genesis features the concubines of the forefathers. Joseph’s brothers sold him to Ishmaelites. Exodus chronicles the enslaved Jewish nation’s quest for freedom. Given the centrality of enslavement through the 1850s, these passages should have been resources for rabbis and their congregations. Yet, silence was the default – even during the Civil War.⁶

Leading Orthodox newspapers, the *Occident* and *Jewish Messenger*, followed suit. Editors Leeser and Isaacs had two primary personal and professional mandates: preserve traditional Judaism and counter anti-Semitism. Isaac and Leeser published the work of Orthodox rabbis, including Illowy, Morais, Rice,

and Raphall. Subscribers included Jews across the United States and – in the case of the *Occident* – Australia, New Zealand, and the Caribbean. The *Jewish Messenger* was dubbed the “organ” of Orthodoxy.⁷

The *Occident* occasionally reported on American slavery, but of over 7,000 pages of articles published in the *Occident* between 1848 and 1861, the word “slavery” appeared 59 times and the word “slave” occurred 58 times.⁸ Moreover, this term rarely referred to Black enslavement. The main subjects fell into three categories: Biblical themes of enslavement, such as God’s redemption of the Israelites from Egypt; global anti-Semitism, from Roman oppression at the turn of the common era to the contemporary Mortara Affair, when Vatican officials kidnapped a baptized Jewish baby; and religious degradation related to idolatry and atheism, termed “spiritual slavery.” About 75% of the articles found with the term “slave” or “slavery” fit within these categories. Mentions of American slavery were limited to less than 5% of cases, the majority were mere references and did not offer a religious ruling or moral judgement. Prior to 1861, the *Occident* published one article that offered an in-depth, religious treatment of enslavement in the United States. It promoted a pro-slavery viewpoint.

The *Jewish Messenger* mirrored the *Occident*’s near silence despite its slight anti-slavery leanings. Between its founding in 1857 and 1861, it published over 1,630 articles.⁹ The word “slavery” appeared in only 67 instances. Half of all instances including the word “slavery” related to contemporary issues of anti-Semitism, including the Jews of Kurdistan, Russian Jewish Emancipation, oppression in Persia, or other historical explanations. The *Jewish Messenger*’s greater focus on anti-Semitism was not surprising because Isaacs dedicated himself, more so than Leeser, to defending Jews around the world from anti-Semitism. Like the *Occident*, many of the instances also related to Biblical references, such as the Exodus from Egypt, and moral corruption, including references such as “slave of passion.” In total,

Covenant in Crisis

there were seven articles that tackled US slavery head on, many of them anti-slavery. There were also two minor but sympathetic references to abolition, discussed further in *Chapter 3*. Thus, while the *Jewish Messenger* did speak on the issue of enslavement with slightly more frequency than the *Occident* and most leading Orthodox Rabbis, it also predominantly opted for silence.



Isaac Leeser

Examining Scholarly Responses

Historians offer various explanations for this silence. Scholars David M. Cobin, Earl Schwartz and Dorothy Roberts provide two.¹⁰ Ignorance is their first explanation. Orthodox leaders may not have “foreseen” the imminence of the Civil War and slavery as its root cause. The rabbis did not grasp the gravity of the moment and thus did not respond to it.¹¹ These rabbis were too conversant in American politics, however, to have been ignorant of the moment’s intensity and critical im-

portance of enslavement, especially in the months leading up to January 1861 when debates over slavery were white hot. Raphall and Morais were part of New York's political elite. Leeser and Isaacs edited national newspapers. Their silence was not based on lack of knowledge.

The scholars' second explanation is that the rabbis' economic insecurity allowed their congregations the power to silence political statements. In the 1850s, American rabbis received modest salaries and had limited job security. Synagogue presidents and lay boards, historian Jonathan Sarna argues, had significant power in determining the direction of the community and the actions of their rabbi.¹² Four of our six main rabbis, Isaacs, Raphall, Leeser and Morais, were either fired or hired following a congregational dispute.¹³ These rabbis understood that controversial conversations carried significant economic risk.

Cobin, Schwartz, and Roberts argue that Morais must have "felt constrained" by "political forces" in his congregation. Congregants, many of whom were recent immigrants, sought to fit in and avoid controversial topics.¹⁴ Moreover, because Philadelphia (Morais and Leeser) and New York (Raphall and Isaacs) were all port towns, congregants maintained ties and interests that transcended sectional norms. Influential members of Philadelphia and New York synagogues had pro-slavery leanings. Morais was aware of the pro-slavery constituency within his congregation, which would later prevent Morais from preaching for three months in 1864.¹⁵ Morais's offense was a Thanksgiving Day sermon; he brazenly asked his congregants: "What is the Union with human degradation? Who would again affix his seal to the bond that consigned millions to [slavery?]." ¹⁶ Leading New York rabbis faced similar constraints from their congregations. Isaacs limited his pulpit discussions on slavery in deference to his synagogue's board.¹⁷ Thus, any position on slavery would alienate a portion of the congregation. Silence was safer.

We need additional, and perhaps more thoughtful, explanations of Orthodoxy's silence. All six rabbis were trailblazers and nation builders. Some founded congregations, Jewish hospitals, Jewish relief organizations. Isaacs and Leeser had relatively stable financial situations, too. They maintained additional incomes from their publishing services. I argue that *fear dictated silence*. Orthodox leaders decided to compartmentalize external issues, which they considered to be *political* – such as geopolitical divisions over slavery.¹⁸ As Leeser explained in 1863, “our magazine is not a political one, and we shall carefully avoid all matters having such a tendency, unless they have a bearing on religion.”¹⁹ Instead, they focused on defending religious and social goals critical to this young, vulnerable, and growing community.

Passover sermons offer a case study to better understand Orthodox silence. There were dozens of published and recorded Orthodox Passover sermons from 1848 to 1861. None connected Israelite freedom to Black freedom, nor did a single Passover themed article in the *Jewish Messenger* or *Occident*. In this regard, there was no distinction between the anti-slavery of Morais and Isaacs and the pro-slavery of Raphall, Leeser, and Illowy. They all made the same choice. A quantitative analysis of the newspapers' content highlight how two fears, relentless anti-Semitism and the rise of the Reform Movement, eclipsed an Orthodox focus on slavery.

The Socio-Political Fear: Anti-Semitism

There were several high-profile, global incidents of anti-Semitism at the end of the 1850s. Two in particular gained attention within the United States Orthodox press and community. First was the Mortara Affair in 1858. The Papal States abducted a Jewish baby, Edgardo Mortara, after a housemaid secretly baptized him. The local laws at the time, said that anyone baptized was a Christian, and a Christian child could not

be raised by a Jewish family. This led state officials to kidnap the child and place him in a Catholic convent to be raised. The event horrified Italian Jews and alarmed Jewish communities elsewhere. Morais, Isaacs, and other prominent rabbis spoke out about the event and lobbied elected officials to take action. Despite widespread sympathy, even beyond the Jewish community, the United States took no official stand. Second was the forced conversion of Jews in Tangier, Morocco in 1859. These Jews were “most distressingly situated” because local authorities coerced them to “pronounce a profession of the Mahomedan faith,” reported the *Occident* in June and December 1859.²⁰ Spanish diplomats ultimately offered protection to these Moroccan Jews, but their plight also highlighted the intense insecurity of Jewish communities abroad, in stark contrast to the Jewish life in America.

These events captured the attention of the Orthodox leadership much more often than issues of enslavement. For example, Passover 1860 fell between the Republican National Convention in mid-May and the Democratic National Convention in mid-April. Both featured a heated debate on enslavement. Yet, an April 6, 1860 Passover sermon published in the *Jewish Messenger* avoided the issue entirely. It chose instead to focus on Jewish emancipation, noting “the kidnapping of Edgar Mortara” and “the expatriating of our brethren from Tangiers.”²¹ The sermon ultimately the ancient Israelites’ celebration of freedom to the fight for Jewish liberty in the present day, adding that this Passover “our subscribers...will be engaged celebrating the anniversary of *our* Exodus from Egyptian bondage” (emphasis added). “Our” is the key modifier. It narrows the implications of the Biblical Exodus from a universal story about liberation to a commemoration of the Jewish quest for freedom.

Leeser articulated a moving call for action following the Mortara Affair that evoked similarly tribal tones. “We Israelites should not stand idle, but appeal, as becomes freemen,

to our civil rulers, to urge them to aid those who are with us of the same descent and faith,” he wrote in February 1859.²² To him, American Jews must fight against the oppression of Jews abroad because they shared the “same descent and faith.” Global anti-Semitism preoccupied the author of this sermon – and other *Jewish Messenger* Passover sermons.

On March 23, 1861, the Shabbat that preceded Passover, Morais spoke powerfully on the Mortara Affair. “Pharaohs of all ages, those tyrants, whose iron rods scourged our fathers, will present themselves before our vision.” He particularly deemed Pope Pius IX a “pharaoh” as he ultimately directed the kidnapping. Morais added that “not only one has arisen against us, in all ages men have risen against us to exterminate us,” quoting from the Passover Haggadah.²³ Morais set the affair within a long history of Jewish oppression. He felt that the Jewish community was continuously threatened existentially, from ancient days until the present.

This fear of eradication sidelined his discussions of slavery. Nonetheless, his silence is striking. Earlier that month, on March 4, 1861, Lincoln delivered his inaugural address, saying “One section of our country believes slavery is right, and ought to be extended,” he explained, “while the other believes it is wrong, and ought not to be.”²⁴ Tensions over slavery monopolized the national discourse.

Many Orthodox leaders also feared that discussing slavery would promote local anti-Semitism. Samuel Isaacs consistently referred to the debate over slavery as a “controversy.” For example, when Jews began publicly discussing the issue in 1861, he wrote: “we have been called upon to publish [a] reply... but must decline...as we have no desire to take part in a controversy of this nature.”²⁵ Controversy implied danger. For a religious minority and immigrant community, which was already caricatured in the mainstream press and culture, intense socio-political positions would only breed more stereotypes. These fears did, in fact, materialize. When Jewish leaders ultimately did

weigh in on the issue of slavery, the *New York Tribune* “unsuitably [held] the Jewish community responsible for the opinions of individuals,” wrote Leaser. He added, “Israelites, as Israelites, have no politics.”²⁶

The Theological Fear: Rise of Reform Movement

The Orthodox had a second fear. The Reform Movement was gaining influence and followers in America. Orthodox leaders fought back. They derided Reform’s disregard for tradition and called reformers arrogant. “Shall we continue to worship God, as our fathers have worshipped him,” asked Morais, “or shall we follow the bend of our minds, and introduce into the Synagogues customs foreign to its origin and purposes?”²⁷ He believed that Reform leaders did not respect the generations of Jews who worshiped, ate, studied, and lived according to traditional Jewish law. “The reform element... is always actively at work to undermine the principles of Judaism,” Morais argued.²⁸ Raphall agreed. He called Reform leaders and laypeople “innovators” who endangered Jewish tradition.²⁹ Isaacs and Raphall wrote a letter “to the Jewish public,” calling innovators “destroyers of all that is sacred.”³⁰ Illowy argued that Reform Rabbi Isaac Meyer Wise had “sinned” in the “sight of Israel” with his book *History of the Israelitish Nation*. Wise rejected the importance of traditional rituals and prophecy. Leaser published Illowy’s critique in May 1854 in the *Occident*.³¹ He did the same for many other anti-reform writings.

These leaders were often on the defensive. “There is no doubt that in the next generation Reform Judaism will gain the upper hand and that Judaism will be transformed,” predicted European-Jewish reporter I. J. Benjamin in 1862 – a correct prediction.³² Rabbi Abraham Rice of Baltimore lived through this transformation first-hand. His son-in-law, Joseph Leucht, went from being Rice’s cantor at Orthodox Congregation Nidche Israel to directing Congregation Bnai Jeshurun in Newark,

Covenant in Crisis

New Jersey towards the Reform Movement.³³ In 1872, just ten years after Rice's death, Nidche Israel became a Reform temple, and in 1878, Raphall's synagogue, Bnei Jeshurun, also affiliated with the Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Samuel Isaacs's *Jewish Messenger*, once the organ of Orthodoxy, switched to supporting Reform Judaism by the turn of the twentieth century. The Orthodox leadership's concentration on this trend prevented attention on other timely matters, including slavery.



Abraham Rice

A study of the *Occident* and *Jewish Messenger* provides a quantitative substantiation of this preoccupation. The *Occident* spoke of the Reform Movement 329 times between 1848-1861.³⁴ The *Jewish Messenger* mentioned the Reform Movement 126 times during the time period.³⁵ The dominant tone of both papers was similar: articles derided the Reform Movement as a danger to Judaism.

Antebellum Passover sermons exemplified this trend of fear. Isaac's 1857 sermon included an overview of different

forms of Passover observances, arguing that “real orthodoxy [must be] distinguished from that spurious article, which is passed off as current, but is in reality but a miserable counterfeit.” Isaacs did not simply critique what he saw as mistakes in ritual observance. To Isaacs, Reform Judaism was a threat to the preservation of true Jewish observance. He followed a similar script during in 1860, once again demonstrating how defense against Reform Judaism displaced discussions of slavery.³⁶

Leeser made comparable remarks in 1843. He, too, focused on explaining and defending the ceremonial aspects of the holiday. The sermon started by recounting the Biblical command to relate the events of the exodus to children. He explained the importance of the rituals: “To keep this event fresh in the memory of all, particular ceremonies were instituted.” Their “peculiarity” aims “to arrest the attention of the young” and induce inquiry regarding the “meaning of what they see.” Leeser argued that idiosyncratic rituals made the past “fresh.” In fact, Leeser contended, without ancient rites, there would be no collective Jewish memory, nationhood, or theology. The ceremonial rituals, “link Israel together in all...of their dispersion” and “perseveres” the “doctrines of the revelation on Sinai.”³⁷ Defense of the rituals left no room to discuss modern instances of slavery and how ancient Jewish memory may (or may not) demand a response. The word “slavery” itself did not appear in this Passover sermon. The threat of the Reform Movement was everything.

Morris Raphall of New York followed suit with his own Passover sermon on the topic. He cast American religious freedom as a double-edged sword, a blessing and a curse for traditional Judaism. In contrast to many severe religious restrictions across Europe, the “modernity” and liberalism of the United States opened up space for Orthodoxy to flourish. “Here we can keep the Passover...as it was instituted.” Yet, this openness bred assimilation. “Let us not be carried away from the land-marks of our faith, and adopt every new road that may be

pointed out to us as leading to Heaven.”³⁸ Raphall worried that the freedoms of this “modern” society threatened to modernize Judaism.

Abraham Rice: The Epitome of Orthodox Silence

Abraham Rice never spoke publicly about slavery. Born in Bavaria, Rice (1802-1862) studied in leading Orthodox academies and received rabbinical ordination from Abraham Hamburger and Abraham Bing. Impoverished and without university credentials, Rice emigrated in America in 1840 to “establish a pure Orthodox belief in this land.” Rice represented the “fervent Orthodoxy” end of America’s spectrum of Jewish life, contends historian Jonathan Sarna. His focus was decidedly blinkered. He was a warrior against Reform Judaism. He railed against Jews who violated Sabbath rules, dietary restrictions, prohibitions against intermarriage, and more. Obstinacy against assimilation and new ideologies demanded the majority of his professional energy. For instance, he resigned from his Baltimore pulpit in 1849 because his congregation rejected his strict adherence to traditional Jewish law, and he would not compromise his beliefs. It was his “rabbinic responsibility,” he argued, “to teach the right path of our religion, regardless of the consequences.” He continued to stay active in the city’s Jewish life, albeit, in a private fashion. His resignation demonstrated the limits of economic and congregational pressures. When Rice disagreed with certain positions, he spoke against them. The threat of losing his pulpit, apparently, did not intimidate Rice from advancing his anti-Reform mission and his inflexible traditionalism. In fact, Rice gained respect and renown for these actions.³⁹

So why did Rice omit slavery, the most pressing moral issue of his day? Fear. Preoccupations with assimilation and anti-Semitism are the keys to his insular approach, which underlay his silence on Black enslavement.⁴⁰

Covenant in Crisis

Notes:

¹ He further noted that the debate of slavery “has lately agitated so violently the public mind in England and America.” See: Isaac Leeser, “A Survey of the Field,” *The Occident*, January 1, 1850. From the National Library of Israel, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/occ/1857/01/01/01/article/1/?srpos=41&e=-1848--01-1861--en-20-occ-41-byDA-img-txIN%7ctxTI-slavery-----1>.

² Isaac Leeser, *Discourses, Argumentative and Devotional, on The Subject of the Jewish Religion. Delivered at the Synagogue Mikeveh Israel, in Philadelphia, in The Years 5590-5597* (Haswell and Fleu: Philadelphia, 1837), 210.

³ “Many [Black evangelicals] who were enslaved gravitated with expectation to Old Testament stories of emancipation rather than to New Testament stories of redemptions,” argues Charles Irons. See: Charles Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008), 5. See also: David Kling, *The Bible in History: How the Texts Have Shaped the Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 193-230; Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 11-80.

⁴ Sokolow, 126.

⁵ Moshe Davis argues a similar point in *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, a study that includes many from our cast of characters, including Raphall, Illowy, Leeser, Isaacs, and Morais. He argues that not a single “ordained Jewish clergyman” offered a pro-slavery argument before Morris Raphall on January 4, 1861, when President Buchanan declared a national fast day. According to Davis, Raphall was an exception among an otherwise largely anti-slavery Jewish landscape. This is not supported by a closer historical analysis, especially of newspaper archives. Clergymen did convey pro-slavery sympathies, albeit in abbreviated form, before 1861. Leeser’s *Occident* published a few, as we will explore in *Chapter 2*. More broadly, the statement unfairly skews the reader’s historical perception. Raphall did not simply break the pro-slavery silence. He pierced the Jewish silence – and Orthodox silence – on enslavement. See: Davis, 110.

⁶ Orthodox leaders only broke their silence on a few occasions. January 1861 was one of those times. Raphall, Illowy, Isaacs, Leeser, and Morais all broke

Covenant in Crisis

their silence after President Buchanan called for a National Fast Day on January 4, 1861.

⁷ “Second Obituary of Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs,” May 1878, Myer S. Isaacs, P-22, Box 1, Folder 1, Collection of the American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

⁸ I administered a keyword search on the National Library of Israel database, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/occ>.

⁹ I administered a keyword search on ProQuest for the word “slavery.” See: <https://www.proquest.com/results/7A1C45B1E15F4E34PQ/1?accountid=14707>.

¹⁰ The scholars focused on Morais’s silence, in particular, but the findings also apply to Isaacs, Leeser, Illoy, Raphall, and Rice.

¹¹ David M. Cobin, Earl Schwartz, and Dorothy Roberts, “The Encrypted Sermons of Sabato Morais,” *Journal of Law and Religion* (2007): 167.

¹² Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism*, 94.

¹³ In 1847, Samuel Isaacs sided with a minority faction of Congregation B’nai Jeshurun during a community disagreement. The majority fired him, replacing Isaacs with Morris Raphall. 1851, Congregation Mikveh Israel denied Isaac Leeser’s request for life-tenure as *hazzan*. As debate ensued, they replaced him with Sabato Morais. See: “First Obituary of Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs,” May 1878, Myer S. Isaacs, P-22, Box 1, Folder 1, Collection of the American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

¹⁴ Sokolow, 126.

¹⁵ Morais once termed this portion of his congregation, “copperheads,” a derogatory word that referred to Peace Democrats during the antebellum and Civil War era. David M. Cobin, Earl Schwartz, and Dorothy Roberts, “The Encrypted Sermons of Sabato Morais,” 167. See also: *ibid.*, 159.

¹⁶ Cobin, 159; Davis, 111.

¹⁷ Davis, 110.

¹⁸ It must be noted that the decision to divide religion and politics was a common pro-slavery strategy. Thus, regardless of the Orthodox leadership’s underlying fears, this move likely indicated latent pro-slavery attitudes, which would manifest explicitly in January 1861. This pro-slavery tactic was evident as early as the late-eighteenth century. See: Sarah Barringer Gordon, “The First Wall of Separation Between Church and State: Slavery and Disestab-

Covenant in Crisis

lishment in Late-Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” *A Companion to American Religious History* (2021): 87-101.

¹⁹ “A MINISTERIAL AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION,” *The Occident*, August 1, 1863. From the National Library of Israel, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/occ/1863/08/01/01/article/4/?e=-01-1861--12-1865--en-20-occ-21-byDA-img-txIN%7ctxTI-slavery-----1>. Arthur Kiron contends that “Leeser’s views on religion and culture shaped his political neutrality towards matters not affecting Jews. While individual Jews might hold strong political opinions about non-Jewish matters, they ought not to voice them as members of a particular religious group.” See: Arthur Kiron, “Golden Ages, Promised Lands: The Victorian Rabbinic Humanism of Sabato Morais,” 281.

²⁰ “A Letter from Tangier to La Presse, Under Date of 13th of March,” *The Occident*, June 16, 1859. Retrieved from the National Library of Israel, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/occ/1859/06/16/01/article/7/?srpos=2&e=-1848--01-1861--en-20-occ-1-byDA-img-txIN%7ctxTI-Tangier-----1>. *The Occident*, “Morocco,” December 22, 1859. Retrieved from the National Library of Israel, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/occ/1859/12/22/01/article/8/?srpos=4&e=-1848--01-1861--en-20-occ-1-byDA-img-txIN%7ctxTI-Tangier-----1>.

²¹ *The Jewish Messenger*, “THE FESTIVAL OF PASSOVER,” April 6, 1860. Retrieved from ProQuest, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/festival-pass-over/docview/870947612/se-2?accountid=14707>.

²² *The Occident*, “The Mortara,” February 1, 1859. Retrieved from the National Library of Israel, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/occ/1859/02/01/01/article/2/?srpos=3&e=-1848--01-1861--en-20-occ-1-byDA-img-txIN%7ctxTI-%22civil+rulers%22-----1>.

²³ Cobin, 168.

²⁴ Abraham Lincoln, “Inagural Address,” March 4, 1861 in *Abraham Lincoln Online*, www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/1inaug.htm.

²⁵ *The Jewish Messenger*, “Correspondence: An American Jew,” January 18, 1861. Retrieved from ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/correspondence/docview/870944961/se-2?accountid=14707>.

²⁶ *The Jewish Messenger*, “Jewish Politics,” January 25, 1861. Retrieved from

Covenant in Crisis

ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/jewish-politics/docview/870943770/se-2?accountid=14707>.

²⁷ Sabato Morais, "A Discourse Regarding Reform," Sabato Morais Collection, Box 17, Folder 16, Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

²⁸ Sabato Morais, "On Radicalism," Sabato Morais Collection, Box 17, Folder 37, Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

²⁹ "Having thus explained the cause which prevented the literature of the Hebrews from being generally known, we owe it to ourselves to declare that we are neither innovators nor reformers. We do not presume to guide the opinions of our readers, or to arrogate to ourselves any right of dictation; but, as the humble interpreters of the great lights of Israel, our duty is to interpret truly; to give their very words whenever the idiom of the language permits and in no case to obtrude our own opinions under the cloak and cover of theirs." See: Morris Raphall, "Introduction," *The Hebrew Review and Magazine of Rabbinical Literature* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1834), 3.

³⁰ Elijah M. Holzman, Morris J. Raphall, and Samuel Myer Isaacs, "Preface," *Sefer 'Emek refa'im. Nu York: Be-vet uvi-defus Leyb Hayim Frank*.

³¹ Bernard Illoy, *The Occident*, "Dr. Illoy to Dr. Wise," May 1, 1854. Retrieved from the National Library of Israel, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/occ/1854/05/01/01/article/3/?e=-1850---1861--en-20-occ-1-byDA-img-txIN%7ctxTI-passover-----1>

³² 101, Sarna.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ I administered a key word search of "Reform" on the National Library of Israel's online archive of *The Occident*. <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/?a=q&hs=1&r=1&results=1&txq=reform&dafyq=1848&dafmq=&datyq=1861&datmq=&req=&laq=&puq=occ&ssnip=img&oa=1&e=-----en-20-occ-1-byDA-img-txIN%7ctxTI-reform-----1>

³⁵ I administered a key word search of "Reform" on the National Library of Israel's online archive of *The Jewish Messenger*. <https://www.proquest.com/results/69B7B37A628449BAPQ/1?accountid=14707>.

³⁶ *The Jewish Messenger*, "THE FESTIVAL OF PASSOVER," April 6, 1860. Retrieved from ProQuest, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/festival-pass>

Covenant in Crisis

over/docview/870947612/se-2?accountid=14707.

³⁷ Isaac Leeser, "Passover Sermon, 1843" Isaac Leeser Collection, Box 5, Folder 10, Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

³⁸ *The Jewish Messenger*, "THE FESTIVAL OF PASSOVER," April 6, 1860. Retrieved from ProQuest, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/festival-pass-over/docview/870947612/se-2?accountid=14707>.

³⁹ Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism*, 91-94.

⁴⁰ The modern-day slogan "silence is violence" provides a critical framework for understanding rabbinical silence. The framework draws from popular refrains, including those by Elie Wiesel (e.g., "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented") and Martin Luther King, Jr. (e.g., "In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.") It echoes Leeser's sentiments in the epigraph. All contend that silence is active. This framework collapses pro-slavery, anti-slavery, and silence into two categories: pro-slavery and anti-slavery. The decision to remain quiet on the antebellum era's most contentious issue was itself a pro-slavery stance. This framework yields a harsh assessment of Orthodoxy's silence. In this view, Raphall's sermon did not signify a change within the community, from silence to pro-slavery, but a continuation of the same.

Images (listed in order of appearance):

Goldman, I. *English: German-Born American Rabbi Isaac Leeser (1806-1868)*. circa 1868. This image is available from the United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division under the digital ID /ppmsca.05659. This tag does not indicate the copyright status of the attached work. A normal copyright tag is still required. See Commons: Licensing for more information. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Isaac_Leeser.jpg.

Deutsch: Abraham Joseph Reiss, Ab 1840 Abraham Rice (1802-1862), Erster Offizieller Rabbiner Der USA. 1850. [1]. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abraham_Joseph_Reiss.jpg.