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ON THE BITTUL IKARE HANOTZRIM:  
A STUDY IN POLEMICS AND TEXT TRANSMISSION

Gary M. Bretton-Granatoor

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
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Referee: Professor Leonard S. Kravitz

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"Books are not made to be believed, but to be subjected to inquiry. When we consider a book, we mustn't ask ourselves what it says but what it means, a precept that the commentators of holy books had very clearly in mind."<sup>1</sup>

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1. The Name of the Rose Umberto Eco, translated by William Weaver; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich c. 1983 page 316

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## INTRODUCTION

This study is an analysis of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim (A Refutation of the Root Principles of Christianity) which has been attributed to Chasdai ben Abraham Crescas. It is believed that the text was originally written in 1398 in Spanish. In 1451, Crescas' student Joseph ben Shem Tov, wrote a critical translation in Hebrew of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim. Both of these texts have been lost. There are two manuscripts that are in fragmentary form and appear to date from the 16-17th century. These two documents are in Hebrew, written in Italian script. Finally, there are three more versions which appeared in printed form. The first is from Salonika, and was published in the year 1860. The second was published in 1904 in Kearny, New Jersey by Ephraim Deinard. The final version was published in 1928 by Judah David Eisenstein in New York. This final version is included in a collection of polemical writings, edited by Eisenstein, entitled Otzar Vikuchim (An Encyclopedia of Polemics).

In this thesis, the following areas will be explored: Each of the appearances of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim will

be analyzed along with the people who have had some connection with this text. Second, the nature of the social climate of early twentieth century New York will be studied, as it was in this period that the two final versions appear. Third, the Eisenstein text, the last of the versions, will be examined to delineate the philosophical, logical, and religious arguments which are used to refute Christian dogma. Finally, each known version of the text will be compared to the social climate in which it appears and conclusions will be drawn. As will be discussed at greater length in the body of this thesis, the appearance of Crescas' Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim (or its subsequent versions) correspond directly to periods in Jewish history which were marked by proselytizing and attempts at mass conversion. The final text, by J. D. Eisenstein, in particular, arose at a time of vehement attempts at conversion of the Jews located on the Lower East Side of New York City.

Up to this point, there have been no texts written about the Bittul Ikare HaNoztrim with the exception of Daniel Jeremy Lasker's Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against the Christians in the Middle Ages. His work uses citations from the Deinard text (1902, Kearny, N.J.) and there has been no questions raised as to the accuracy of that

version.

By studying history with Dr. Martin A. Cohen, I have learned to question documents and historical accounts. He encouraged me to gain a deeper understanding of history by remembering that history has at its very essence the concern for the actions and thoughts of people and that these actions and thoughts are tied to the environment in which the people lived. Dr. Leonard S. Kravitz served as my thesis advisor, and in that capacity guided me in my research and encouraged me to trust my instincts and discoveries. I thank him for his concern, his insights and his loving guidance.

Mr. David Lederkramer, Esq., who served as my editor, deserves special thanks. He willingly gave of his time, most often sacrificing his own free time from his very busy schedule. David forced me to clarify many of my ideas and by doing so brought me to deeper understanding.

I must also thank my parents, Sylvia and Jerold Granatoor, who constantly, from the days of my youth, encouraged me in all of my endeavors. But most of all, I must thank my life's partner, Marianne. She also took from her free time to edit much of this work. My harshest

critic, she is and will always be, my best friend and I thank her for her guidance. If I have achieved anything, it is because of the encouragement and aid of Marianne and the others mentioned.

a disciple of the great Talmudist, Nissim ben Reuben. He soon became known for his great talmudic erudition and was often consulted as a judge in matters of Jewish law. Crescas, along with Isaac ben Sheshet, were regarded as the two great Jewish intellectuals of that period. Crescas' family was one of great wealth which allowed Crescas to travel within the non-Jewish community of Italy. He maintained close ties with the court and with the Spanish king and queen. Yet, in 1397, Crescas, along with S. Nissim and Dov Isaac, was imprisoned in order to obtain a confession as to who in the Jewish community bought the Christians' consecrated host. The whole Jewish community was locked into a local synagogue, but when that failed to produce the perpetrator, the heads of the community (Crescas, Nissim and Isaac) were imprisoned as a ransom to the Jewish community. The imprisonment lasted for three months.

Despite Crescas' high status within the Aragonese court, Crescas left Barcelona in 1399 to become the rabbi of Saragossa. On the fifth of August, 1399, after a series of

CHAPTER 1: APPEARANCES OF THE BITTUL IKARE HANOTZRIM

Hasdai ben Abraham Crescas was born in 1340 in Barcelona. He was a disciple of the great Talmudist, Nissim ben Reuben. He soon became known for his great talmudic abilities and was often consulted as a judge in matters of halachah. Crescas, along with Isaac ben Sheshet, were thought of as the two great Jewish intellects of that period. Crescas' family was one of great wealth which advanced Crescas' station within the non-Jewish community of Barcelona. He maintained close ties with the court and with the Spanish king and queen. Yet, in 1367, Crescas, along with R. Nissim and Don Isaac, was imprisoned in order to obtain a confession as to who in the Jewish community bought the Christians' consecrated host. The whole Jewish community was locked into a local synagogue, but when that failed to produce the perpetrator, the heads of the community (Crescas, Nissim and Isaac) were imprisoned as a lesson to the Jewish community. The imprisonment lasted for five months.

Despite Crescas' high station within the Barcelonean court, Crescas left Barcelona in 1389 to become the rabbi of Saragossa. On the fifth of August, 1391, after a series of

massacres of the Jews in other parts of Spain, massacres began in Barcelona. Crescas' only son was murdered on the eve of his son's wedding. Crescas was shattered by this event: he wrote a letter to his fellow Jews in which he described the events and his feelings:

And they fought the Jews that were in the fortress with bows and catapults, and beat and struck them there in the tower. Many sanctified the Holy Name, my only son among them, an innocent lamb; him have I offered up as a burnt offering, I shall vindicate God's judgement against me, and I shall be comforted with the goodliness of his portion and the sweetness of his fate. Many slaughtered themselves and some threw themselves from the tower... and some went out and were martyred in the street.... And all the others changed their religion. Only a few fled to the places of nobles... a child might count them.... And for our many sins there is<sup>1</sup> not a single Israelite to be found in Barcelona.

This unfortunate event occurred despite the efforts of Queen Violente, who had written letters of protection for Crescas' family (the letters arrived too late).

Crescas' status as a favored representative of the court increased in the year 1393. In that year Crescas was appointed to head a delegation that traveled through Spain

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1. A History of the Jews in Christian Spain Vol. 2 Yitzhak Baer c.1961, The Jewish Publication Society pages 104-105. Also found in appendix of Wiener's edition of Shebet Yehudah



to collect money and to seek out worthy Jews to serve as representatives of a council concerned with the re-establishment of Jewish Barcelona and Valencia. It was in 1398 that Crescas was said to have composed the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim (A Refutation of the Cardinal Principles of the Christians).<sup>2</sup> For Crescas this was a time of seeming prosperity; yet, for his fellow Jews, a time of fear, awaiting the next attack against their faith or lives. In this work, it was Crescas' intention to put forth the principles upon which the faith of the Christians is built and to test each principle philosophically with the hope of disproving each idea. Known as the Tratado, this work was written in the vernacular:

This work was addressed to Christians more than to Jews, and was particularly intended for the perusal of Spaniards of high rank whose friendship Hasdai Crescas enjoyed. Hence it was written not in Hebrew but in Spanish, which the author employed with ease, and its tone was calm and moderate ... with dispassionate deliberation, as if he did not know that he was dealing with questions which might<sup>3</sup> at any moment light the fires of an auto-de-fe.

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2. The date of composition has been suggested as 1396 in Graetz's History of the Jews J.P.S. c. 1894 Vol. 4, page 187

3. *ibid*

The appearance of this work (which scholars assume was published and read within the Jewish community based upon references to the work by Joseph Albo, Profiat Duran and Joseph ben Shem Tov) did not dissuade Charles III King of Navarre from sending Crescas on a journey to various Naverrese towns and a visit to Joseph Orabuena at Pamplona at the King's expense.

It was in the last decade of his life, 1400-1410, that Crescas composed and edited his magnum opus, Or Adonai (Light of the Lord). This work stands as a singular attempt to prove the incompatibility of Aristotle with Judaism. From the eighth century on, many Jewish philosophers, especially Moses Maimonides, sought to meld the Aristotilean system of thought with the tenets of Judaism. Crescas stood opposed to this movement; he sought to remove Aristotle from Judaism:

It remained for Hasdai Crescas... to take up the cudgels again in behalf of a truer Judaism, a Judaism independent of Aristotle, and one that is based more upon the the spiritual and emotional sides of man and less upon the purely intellectual, theoretical and speculative. Himself devoid of the literary power and poetic feeling of Judah Halevi, Crescas had this in common with the medieval national poet that he resented the domination of Jewish belief and thought by the alien Greek speculation.



In a style free from rhetoric, and characterized rather by a severe brevity and precision, he undertakes to undermine the Aristotelian position by using the Stagirite's own weapons, logical analysis and proof.<sup>4</sup>

This work was finally published in 1410, the same year as Crescas' death.

When the social climate of the period in which Crescas' lived is examined, one can understand some of the reasons for the writing of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim. Crescas' status as a wealthy Jew, fully accepted into the high society of the Spanish nobility, no doubt filled him with a sense of security. Yet, the events that befell his fellow Jews must have created a sense of uneasiness. Crescas, no doubt had ambivalent feelings about his two-fold task in his society -- to serve both court and his fellow-Jews. The fact that Crescas served as a court Jew, did not prevent him from fighting assimilation and defending his fellow Jews from the attacks of outsiders.

The two main works of his life, the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim and the Or Adonai stand as testament to the fact that he was opposed to foreign influences upon Judaism, and

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4. A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy Issac Husik  
c.1916 & 1940 Published by Atheneum, page 389

any attempt to convert the Jews themselves. His anti-Aristotilean work, attempted to remove any Greek influence -- he was afraid that this would erode the belief of the Jew. Crescas feared losing all of the essential ingredients of Judaism to a system of beliefs which promised assimilation and acceptance by Moslems and Christians. All around him he had proofs of Christianity's attempts at converting or destroying the Jew, his own imprisonment and the martyrdom of his son are just two examples. Yet, Crescas had a diplomatic style, one that won him the appointments of the court and crown, and one that won him the confidence of his fellow Jews. It was this style that carried over into his style of writing. His attacks against those that stood to harm his vision of a pure Judaism, were attacks without anger. He maintained a calm tone throughout the pages of his writings. Even the letter written after the death of his son, is a text without anger at the aggressors. As Husik states, his writing style evinces a marked precision and brevity.

Crescas' Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim was well known in Spain and the surrounding areas. It is cited by both Joseph Albo,

Crescas' student and Profiat Duran, Crescas' contemporary in their philosophical works. In the preface of Duran's Klimat HaGoyim Duran recognizes that it was Crescas who inspired Duran to write his polemical work and, Duran continues:

I have written little on the subject, for I know that with your wide knowledge you will be able to expound upon it.

There has been some scholarly question over which philosopher's work was written first.

It is through the writings of Crescas' student Joseph ben Shem tov, that Crescas is best remembered. Joseph ben Shem Tov was born in 1400 and grew up during the Disputation at Tortosa. Joseph ben Shem Tov was, himself, a philosopher of note, a writer and preacher who, like his teacher Crescas, made strong contacts within the Spanish courts. He was constantly called upon to defend the tenets of Judaism to both clerical and lay audiences of Christian leaders. Because of the opportunities to defend Judaism against Christian polemicists, Joseph's knowledge of Christianity grew immeasurably. He wrote a lesser anti-Christian polemic, entitled "Doubts of the Religion of Jesus" and wrote a detailed commentary on Duran's Al T'hi K'Avotechah.

It was Joseph ben Shem Tov who, at the bidding of his

fellow Jews, decided to translate Crescas' Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim. Joseph ben Shem Tov translated this work and added his own comments in the year 1451, in the city of Alcala de Henares. The information concerning the date and place of translation is preserved on the final page of one of the manuscripts and at the end of the Salonica 1860 text. As Graetz notes<sup>5</sup> the Spanish Jews preferred, as a rule, Hebrew books to those of the vernacular.

Joseph ben Shem Tov simplified his master's writing style, a terse style, which ben Shem Tov stated, often leads to confusion due to lack of explication. In ben Shem Tov's translation, he states in his introduction:

From my love of truth, Adonai God is truth, and my desire to make God's children, the children of the living God, understand the truth and to put to a two-edged sword in their hand for battle so that they can arise in battle for Torah, a religious battle, to reply to the persecutor by giving instruction in his principles to innocent children, to literate people, and to those who have the strength to stand in the breach of the battle array. And they urged me to devote myself to the work of translation to change it from the apostasy of language (Spanish) into a translation of thoughts. Added to this is its explanation and completion to such a degree that its benefits and its precious fruits may become well known, and that its teachings may not be forgotten by them. I granted their request in the hope of reward from

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5. Graetz's History of the Jews Vol.4 c.1894 J.P.S. page 235

God; since I am a fugitive and a wanderer in the land of my affliction, I may be worthy to behold speedily the glory of God's might, when God will remove the abominations from the heart of humanity, that all flesh may come and bow down before God, to receive upon them the yoke of the Reign of Heaven which was given at Sinai.... And now I begin to work: with the help of God, I shall translate the ideas of this essay -- not translating its language -- but to the best of my ability I shall preserve its intent by explaining its mysteries, its criticisms, and its explications, in all of its fundamentals, so that its benefits may flow to all sides.<sup>6</sup>

In two more places in the text, comments on the style of the text are found. The following has been attributed to Crescas:

This will absolutely be kept brief and to the point, all lengthy explanations will be avoided.

Yet, it is ben Shem Tov who makes the most complete statement of the writing style and what he needed to do in order to make the text understandable:

This is how the words of the Master, of blessed memory, are to be understood here. In translating them I have expanded their meaning, for his original words in this passage are all too brief and all too abstruse, so that I have not met anybody who was able to understand them. Hence, in this passage, more than in any of the other

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6. pages 3-4 in Deinard's edition of Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim published in Kearny, N.J. 1904

7. Page 11 of Deinard's edition of Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim free translation

passages of his book, I have allowed myself to overstep the bounds of what is proper in translation.

It is, therefore, evident that Joseph ben Shem Tov encountered difficulties in the translation of Crescas' Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim. In addition, Joseph ben Shem Tov, intended his translation to be read by a community different than the intended readership of Crescas. Therefore, there is little doubt that there were major modification made to the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim.

The fact that Joseph ben Shem Tov chose to translate the Bittul Ikare HaNoztrim did make the reveals something about both text and original author. At the time of Joseph's translation of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim Crescas had been dead for forty years; yet, based upon other writings of the time, Crescas' name carried great weight and authority. His reputation was widely known and most respected. Sometime after Crescas' death, the poet Solomon Bonafed wrote:

Woe to the shepherdless flock whose tenders  
are prey to the wolf and the bear! Ask ye of  
Hasdai in his heavenly seat, to whom has he put

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8. pages 27-28 *ibid* -- Translation by Harry A. Wolfson as found on page 29 of Crescas' Critique of Aristotle c.1929 Harvard Univ. Press



his children in trust? The prince of his age was  
he -- alack, he died and this was its death blow!  
But though Hasdai is dead, his goodness is  
not....

It is seen by this statement written that the name of Hasdai ben Abraham Crescas was carried as a banner for the persecuted Jews. Thus, it is easy to see why Joseph ben Shem Tov would want to translate this work -- it would serve as a source of hope and strength to the still persecuted Jews. Hasdai Crescas, their hero, had given them reasons not to give up their faith and even more so, reasons not to follow in the footsteps of the other conversos.

Since we do not have Crescas' original, we cannot vouch for the accuracy of ben Shem Tov's translation. He himself indicates that though his translation does not follow the text of Crescas' work, he intended to remain close to the spirit of the text. Certainly, though, any translation is an interpretation, especially one that was completed at least fifty years after the original work. We may assume then, that the text ben Shem Tov left for us is substantially different from the original.

Yet, have neither the original nor Joseph ben Shem

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Tov's translation -- the earliest manuscripts we have of the Hebrew version of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim dates at least a century after Joseph made his translation and probably come from a different region than the area of Spain. Yet, based upon evidence from various sources we can say that there were ten chapters of this refutation of Christianity:

- 1) Original Sin
- 2) Redemption
- 3) Trinity
- 4) Incarnation
- 5) Virgin Birth
- 6) Transubstantiation
- 7) Baptism
- 8) Jesus as Messiah
- 9) New Testament
- 10) Demons

What distinguishes this refutation from any other written during the same period is the fact that it follows a philosophical model.

In the collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary Library there are two manuscripts of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim.<sup>10</sup> These two manuscripts come down to us without

10. They were originally cited in The Polemical Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary: Studies in Jewish Bibliography and Related Subjects, in Memory of Abraham Solomon Freidus N.Y., 1929 ed. A. Marx -- in the intervening years, the J.T.S. Library has reclassified these works and they are now numbered manuscripts #2209 and #2279



attribution of date and place of copy. Yet, from a look at the hand of the two manuscripts it is fairly safe to say that they are written in Italian cursive characters from the period of the 17th century<sup>11</sup> In HaMazkir,<sup>12</sup> Steinschneider states:

From 1855 on I have been preparing for publication these texts found in Leyden and in 1857 in the Saraval Codex # 26 but I was not able to publish them due to constraints in time.... The work of Chisdai differentiates itself from the usual polemical literature in that it illuminates Christian Dogma from the viewpoint of the contemporaneous philosophy in a calm voice.<sup>13</sup>

Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 10 are shorter in one manuscript than in the other manuscript. Both manuscripts differ greatly from the later versions of the text.

The first of the printed editions appears in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Most sources give Salonica 1860 as the date and place of publication, although Steinschneider says 1862 although he states that this date

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11. Manuscript #2209 seems to be a little earlier and somewhat less complete -- possibly 16th-17th century.

12. M. Steinschneider's Hebraeische Bibliographie 1861 vol. 6 page 3

13. Also, concerning manuscript #2279 c.f. Revue des Etudes Juives vol.18 page 226. c.1889, wherein only the authorship and translator are mentioned

is not entirely certain. This edition was printed in "Rashi script" characters on 52 pages. It does not have the final paragraph attributed to ben Shem Tov (in which he gives the year and place of his translation as 1451, Alcala de Henares) and it is filled with typographical errors. It does follow the same structure of the two manuscripts beginning with the first chapter concerning Original Sin and following through Demons.

Ephraim Deinard was responsible for the appearance of the next printed edition of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim. Deinard was a bibliographer and Hebrew author born in Latvia in 1846. For many years, Deinard travelled about collecting various manuscripts and books. He intended on making them available, first through a bookshop in Odessa and then through his publishing efforts in the U.S. Deinard was responsible for the Hebrew book and manuscript collection of the Library of Congress as well as the collections in the New York Public Library, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Deinard was a prolific writer, having written over fifty books and it is reported that his style was also very terse and simple.<sup>14</sup> As Schapiro notes:

His polemics... reveal him as a man who knows no consideration for an opponent. His language was often vitriolic, using sometimes the most abusive terms and when it came to controversies he showed no respect even for men of high standing in life and literature.... Although in some cases truth may have been on his side and his sense of outrage justified, yet the forms in which his views were presented could only but evoke antagonism towards him.<sup>15</sup>

Deinard was known as a violent polemicist against Reform Judaism, Hasidism, Karaism, and Christianity. Yet, his greatest achievements were the collections he established in the above mentioned libraries in America. He died in 1930 in New York.

The next printed edition appears in the United States, published by Ephraim Deinard in Kearny, N.J. This appears forty years after the Salonica text (in 1904). It seems evident that Deinard consulted with the two texts in the possession of the J.T.S. Library as many of the errors seem

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14. "Ephraim Deinard" by Israel Schapiro in Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society #34 1937 pages 149-154

15. ibid page 152

to have been corrected and omissions from one have been added to this text. It was printed in square characters in 96 pages. Of all of the editions, this text is the most readable, accessible and internally accurate: that is, within the text there are fewer errors.

The place of publication is quite interesting and the fact that Deinard chose to publish this text is also noteworthy. Kearny, N.J. was an agricultural settlement founded by Jews. Soon after many invested their savings into the settlement, it met with financial failure. During this period (as will be shown in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 4) there was great missionary activity on the eastern seaboard which was directed at immigrant Jews. By maintaining the same outline as was preserved in the earlier editions, it seems that this text was aimed at a reader of poorer social standing. This is suggested by the fact that the missionaries encouraged conversion by means of attempting to convince individuals that the cause of their downtrodden state was the fact that they had not been redeemed from Sin. Therefore a book that begins with a polemic against the idea of Original Sin, seems to be aimed at a reader for whom this is a worrisome thought. Deinard did not publish this work as a curio; there was a need in the community that this text

answered.

The appearances of this work from the time of its conception, point to a need on the part of the Jewish readership. Joseph ben Shem Tov states that the text was to serve a purpose, to serve as a "sword" with which to battle the forces aimed at the conversion of Jews. Certainly, if Salonica is the correct place of publication of the first printed edition; there too, the text would serve a purpose to ward off attempts at conversion of the Jews of the region (evidence of this will be demonstrated in Chapter 4).

In each of the earlier editions, there are changes within each text -- many of these changes are corrections of errors, yet some are linguistic changes -- changes to bring the text up-to-date for the intended readership and be of the best use for the reader. The most striking example of this will be seen in an analysis and discussion of Eisenstein's version of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim. Judah David Eisenstein was responsible for the final version of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim, the version which evinces the greatest number of changes and modification of style.

Born in Poland in 1854, Eisenstein emigrated to the U.S. and begin his life work of translations, and creating

his series of encyclopedias (Otzarot or Treasuries). His first translation appeared in 1891 -- it was the U.S. Constitution published in Hebrew and in Yiddish. His series of Otzarot contained an encyclopedia of Judaica (Otzar Yisrael), a history of emigration to the United States (Otzar Zikronotai), compendia of folk-lore (Otzar Midrashim and Otzar Aggadot) and his encyclopedia of Polemics (Otzar Vikuchim). Like Deinard, he was a staunch opponent of Reform and Conservative Judaism (although in his later years he accepted honorary doctorates from each branch's rabbinical college).

Eisenstein was also vehemently opposed to Christianity and its influences on Judaism. In his compendium of Polemics (Otzar Vikuchim) he published many polemics against Christianity. But, it is the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim that he elected to modify, so that it would serve as a general polemic against the Christians.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Eisenstein made many dramatic changes in the Bittul Ikare HaNoztrim and it is a wholly different document that the text of the earlier editions.

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16. For exact quotation see first page of Chapter 3



Chapter 1: Appearances of the Bittul  
Ikare HaNotzrim

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CHAPTER 1: MISSIONS IN NEW YORK

Yet, in order to fully understand the changes made by Eisenstein, and to a lesser extent the changes of Deinard, attention must be turned to the social and political climate of the immigrant Jews, the major target of many missionary movements in the period of 1880-1920. It is the needs of the social climate extant in that area that gave rise to the changes in the last two editions of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim.

## CHAPTER 2: MISSIONS IN NEW YORK

In the history of Jewish-Christian relations, different periods in history were marked with differing styles of relations between the Jews and the Christians. Crescas and ben Shem Tov lived during the Middle Age. The Middle Age, for the Jews, was characterized by forced conversions, expulsions, and failing these, death. Yet, in the last years of what many scholars have called "Pre-Modern" History (which changes from region to region) the relationship between Jews and Christians changed. These changes occurred when Jews secured civil, social and religious rights from the secular governments. Under these changed circumstances, the Jews were able to build synagogues, participate in government and enjoy protection from the secular government.

This newly elevated status of the Jew marked the fall of Inquisitions and auto-de-fes, and allowed the Jew to live in relative security. Modern history, for the Jew, begins with emancipation: when the Jew attained citizenship. When this happened, the civil code set forth in the texts of the Jews could no longer govern the Jews. It remained for the law of the state to replace the civil codes of the Jews. The



ceremonial and ritual codes were left to the heads of the Jewish community to enforce. With this new period came a different approach to convert the Jew to Christianity. Since conversion could no longer be compelled, individuals had to be persuaded to convert. In order to persuade the Jews to convert, missionaries were sent to the Jewish communities, missions were built, pamphlets were published, Christian books translated into the vernaculars of the Jews; all of this done with the same fervor as the auto-de-fes of the period past.

Throughout Europe, missions sprang up. As Jewish immigration began to the United States, missions appeared in port cities. The major area of concentration of these missionizing activities became New York -- home to thousands of immigrant Jews. Most immigrants came hoping for easy entry into this new and modern society. Many, therefore, became prime targets of missionary work, which sought to convince Jews that the entry into society required abandonment of the "old ways" and acceptance of the religious beliefs of the American majority.

In the late part of the nineteenth century a well known missionary to the Jews noted:

The need of definite mission work among the

Jewish population, especially in Greater New York, can be better appreciated when it is known that in one ward of Brooklyn, in which 20,000 Jews reside, there is not a single Protestant Church or Mission. In the Jewish Quarter of New York, there is but one Protestant Church to 22,000 inhabitants, and in a section where there are 221,000 Jews, Protestants form only three-fifths of one percent of the population.<sup>1</sup>

In 1881 the first of many missions aimed directly at the conversion of Jews opened in New York City.

Rev. Jacob Freshman, the son of a Hungarian Rabbi who converted to Christianity, began the Hebrew Christian Mission. He, a person of Jewish origin and an immigrant himself, knew the mentality of an immigrant and used his knowledge to convince Jews of the importance of conversion. He preached that conversion guaranteed acceptance into American society. Freshman began to reach out to the Jews soon after they alighted from the boat. Within four years, he had secured enough funding to open new offices at 17 St. Marks Place and in the same year began to publish "The Hebrew Christian" for those Jews who had converted, or who might be interested in conversion. By 1892, Freshman's Mission passed into the control of the New York City Mission and continued under that name for many years.

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1. page 235-6, A Century of Jewish Missions A.E.Thompson, F.H. Revell Co. c.1902

Shortly after Freshman began his activities, the American Tract Society began to write and publish pamphlets and tracts for distribution among Jews. These were aimed at convincing the Jew of the importance of conversion -- the invalidity of the Jewish faith and the quick acceptance into American Society for the convert. S. Goldstein acted as an agent for the American Tract Society, a man who was reputed to have been fluent in 13 languages spoken by the immigrant Jews. He did a large percentage of the translation of all of these pamphlets and tracts to make them more accessible to the incoming, non English speaking Jews. The American Tract Society also gave out Bibles (with New Testament) to the immigrants.

Many of the various denominations of the Church began setting up their own missions. In 1885, the Lutheran Church became involved in missionizing to the Jews when it set up the Evangelical Lutheran Mission to the Jews. The following year, the Methodist faction began the New York Church Extension and City Missionary Society. A mission in Chicago known as the Mission House became the sole agent for Hebrew and Yiddish translations of the New Testament and would send them out free of charge. Each of these Missions were established solely with the intention of the conversion of

the Jews, and were separate from any missionary activity set up for the general public or for any other religious group.

In 1892, eight new missions were founded in the New York area: four in Brooklyn and four in New York City. The largest of these new missions was the Hope of Israel Mission. This mission was founded and supported by the Methodist Church. It was later renamed the Gospel Mission to the Jews. Its main headquarters was on Second and Houston Streets. Aside from these eight mission houses, two new attempts were made to attract Jews. The Christian and Missionary Alliance began a house to house mission in the Upper East Side. No longer hopeful that the Jews would come to them, missionaries were sent out to ring doorbells, hand out pamphlets and Bibles and make personal invitations to public lectures, services and other peoples' homes. At the same time, the Presbyterian Church began their own house to house mission.

Benjamin A. M. Schapiro, a convert to Christianity from Judaism, played a very large role in the attempts made to convert the Jews. With the private support of many wealthy individuals, Schapiro founded the Brooklyn Christian Mission to the Jews. Schapiro was well versed in Talmud and he knew many of the languages which the immigrant Jews spoke. He

began a quarterly magazine entitled, "The People, the Land and the Book." In 1897 Schapiro published a book, Christian Obligations to the Jews which was a guide on how to attract and convince Jews, as well as an encouragement to Jews to follow in the footsteps of many great converts from Judaism. Rev. Charles Cuthbert Hall, then President of Union Theological Seminary wrote the introduction which gives a description of the work of Schapiro:

The young missionary, Rev. Benjamin A. M. Schapiro, whom I have known from the very beginning of his Christian life, has been in charge of this work [the conversion of Jews to Christianity] from its foundation. He is a consecrated and intrepid young man.... He is really the pioneer of Jewish work in this great city where there are now about 100,000 Hebrews. Undaunted by difficulties, which at times amounted to personal perils, he has turned not back from his original purpose to be a witness for Jesus Christ in the dense and thronging population of the Jewish quarter of Brooklyn.... Love for his countrymen has sustained him and confidence in the inspired Scriptures as a message for Israel, has filled him with enthusiasm. After long patience in the endurance of hardships as a good soldier of Christ, he has at length won the confidence and respect of many Hebrews. They are willing to hear him -- and service after service, his Mission Hall, at No. 129 Boerum Street, Brooklyn, is crowded with eager young Jews listening to a pure Gospel. It is an inspiring place to visit; the writer has been there and has preached to a congregation of inquiring Jews that filled the

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2. Christian Obligations to the Jews Compiled by B. A. M. Schapiro -- this edition was given out to anyone who made a contribution to the Brooklyn Christian Mission to the Jews



house.<sup>2</sup>

This work contained portraits of seventy-five eminent Jewish Converts as well as four of Schapiro's sermons preached to potential converts. Additionally, there are works by other missionaries outlining approaches to Jews.

In 1894, two new missions opened in Brooklyn, The Brownsville Mission to the Jews and the Williamsburg Mission which was founded by the Baptist Church. At the same time another mission opened in New York City: the American Mission to the Jews at 424 Grand Street. By the turn of the century there were eleven successful missions which were exclusively devoted to the conversion of Jews to Christianity. Many of these missions were very well endowed and financially secure. Below is a list of these missions:

Name	Hdqtrs	Founded	#of Mis.	Ann'l \$
Amer. Mis. to the Jews	NY	1895	3	\$3,000
Bap. Soc. for Evangelizing Jews	NY	1845	1	1,000
Brownsville Mis. to the Jews	Bk	1894	2	1,200
Xtian & Mis. Alliance	NY	1892	10	4,000
Xtian Mis. to the Jews	Bk	1892	1	1,000
Church Soc. for Promoting Xtian	NY	1878	5	9,800
Gospel Mis. to the Jews	NY	1892	2	3,000
Jew. Mis. of Evan. Luth. Synod	NY	1885	2	1,500
NY Church Ext. & Mis. Society	NY	1886	2	800
NYC Mission	NY	1889	1	1,700
NY House to House Mission	NY	1892	1	700

Additionally, there were five major publications that came

out on a regular basis aimed directly at the Jews. Each of these publications was published by established missions. The Gospel Mission to the Jews published "Our Hope." The American Mission to the Jews published "Salvation." The Brownsville Mission to the Jews, in Brooklyn published "The Chosen People." "The Jewish Evangelist" was published by the Christian Mission to the Jews and, as mentioned above, "The People, the Land, and the Book" as published by Benjamin A. M. Schapiro. There were five other missionary newspapers that had separate columns for the Jews in Yiddish or Hebrew.<sup>3</sup>

As time went on, the missionaries became more sophisticated, honing their skills and adapting techniques to improve their success rate. In 1931, a few years after the final version of Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim appeared there was a conference held in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The conference was entitled "The Christian Approach to Jews" in which various lectures and papers were presented about the proper techniques to use when trying to interest the Jews. The conference was sponsored by the International Missionary Council. The most interesting section of the report that was

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3. Specifically: "Tiqueth Israel", "The Christian and Missionary Alliance Paper", "The City Mission Monthly", "The Christian City", and "The Missionary Review of the World."

published subsequent to the conference, was the conferences findings.<sup>4</sup> In the section on the findings of the conference, within the section, "Training for Leadership" the members of the conference suggest that missionaries be trained for the specific type of Jew that they are trying to convert. It was suggested that those who work with the Orthodox community be learned in Talmud and Rabbinic literature. Those that work in Reform or Unaffiliated communities, which were in a other parts of New York, should understand Philosophy, Business and other topics of interest to these "modern" Jews.

Much of the information above was distilled by reports published through these missionary societies and one would expect that a different point of view would be presented by authors from a Jewish background. This is the case; we find much information to discredit the work and the reported successes of the missionaries. David Max Eichhorn, in his book, points out some of the failures of the missionaries. For example, he points out that the Northern Baptists hired a Rev. Aris Lichtenstein (real name Hirschman). Lichtenstein obtained converts by paying them \$10.00 to be converted and and additional 50 cents for each meeting they attended. In

4. pages 131- 139, Christians and Jews: A Report of the Conference on the Christian Approach to the Jews c. 1931 International Missionary Council



1896, he left New York for St. Louis. Other missionaries are mentioned who were attacked when they entered Jewish neighborhoods or began to preach in certain areas.

On the other hand, in a book published by the Jewish Missions Committee of the United Lutheran Church of America<sup>5</sup> we find the following two statements:

...J. F. de la Roi, a reliable historian, gives the number of Jewish accessions to Christianity for the 19th century alone as 204,500<sup>6</sup>

and:

Dr. Arthur Rupin, a well known Jewish writer and prominent Zionist, commenting upon the figures given by de la Roi, says: "It is quite conceivable that the approximate calculation of 204,500 Jewish baptisms in the 19th century not only does not exceed the actual number, but may perhaps fall slightly short of it."(The Jews of Today, pages 183-184)<sup>7</sup>

These statements would lead us to believe that the missionary movements were more than successful.

Yet, all sides agree to the intensity of missionary activities during this period:

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5. Compiled by Henry Einsbruch Jewish Confessors of the Faith c. 1925

6. page 5, ibid unattributed writer

7. page 5, ibid

From 1880 to 1910 the number of Jews in the United States jumped from about a quarter of a million to over two million.... The number of Christian agencies seeking to convert the Jews increased in like proportion during this period. Twenty-nine American denominations established Jewish missionary enterprises in these decades. In addition, hundreds of independent societies and thousands of individuals<sup>8</sup> sought to turn the Jew from his ancestral faith.

We do know that the publishers of the last two versions of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim were violently opposed to Christianity and its attempts at conversion. Ephraim Deinard published much material against Christianity aside from the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim, but this seems to be a most important addition to his Bibliography<sup>9</sup>. J. D. Eisenstein was also known for his attacks against Christianity and missionary activities.<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein, the great encyclopedist added to his editions of Otzarot, encyclopedias, Otzar Vikuchim (An Encyclopedia of Polemics and Disputations). This was a history of polemical literature written by Jews. In this collection one finds the Bittul Ikare Dat HaNotzrim

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8. page 141 Evangelizing the American Jew David Max Eichhorn, c.1978 Jonathan David Publishers

9. c.f. biography and bibliography of E. Deinard in A.J.H.S.P. Vol. 34, 1937 pages 143ff

10. c.f. Eisenstein's biographical information in A.J.H.S.P. Vol. 12 Oct. 1960 pages 123-4

(note the addition of the Hebrew word dat -- which changes the title to "A Refutation of the Root Principles of the Religion of the Christians").

As we will see, this text of Eisenstein's, despite its attribution to Crescas, is very different than the earlier editions, published or manuscript. In the next chapter we will closely analyze this edition of the text. Attention will be paid to sources cited, philosophical principles used, material that is clearly not from Crescas, as well as organization. We also hope to glean from this material, the intended readership and the extent of the editor's modifications.

I have added a number of sections for the purpose of the index and I have divided the references to twenty sections and have arranged them in a correct order as follows: 1) The Trinity; 2) Son of God; 3) Incarnation; 4) Resurrection of Jesus; 5) Mary, the Mother of Jesus and her sister as a Virgin; 6) Jesus as Messiah; 7) Jesus' New Testament; 8) Original Sin; 9) Salvation; 10) Belief in Demons; 11) Transubstantiation; 12) Baptism; 13) Abrogation of Circumcision; 14) Abrogation of the Sabbath; 15) Permission to Eat Forbidden Food; 16) Resurrection; 17) Pardoning of Sins and Confession before a Priest; 18) The Matter of the Pope; 19) Anti-Christ; 20) Belief in Jesus as the Basis of Their Faith.

CHAPTER 3: EISENSTEIN'S BITTUL IKARE HANOTZRIM

INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

In the Introduction to Eisenstein's version of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim, Eisenstein explains the difference between his text and the previous versions:

In this Encyclopedia of Polemics I have made this text the basis for a refutation of dogma (Christian principles); however, I have taken out words which are unintelligible due to the negligence of those who handled the text and also because of the negligence of the original publisher who caused confusion with his many errors. I have added a number of reasons for refuting the dogmas and I have doubled the refutations to twenty sections and have arranged them in a correct order as follows: 1) The Trinity; 2) Son of God; 3) Incarnation; 4) Geneology of Jesus; 5) Mary, the Mother of Jesus and her status as a Virgin; 6) Jesus as Messiah; 7) Jesus' New Testament; 8) Original Sin; 9) Salvation; 10) Belief in Demons; 11) Transubstantiation; 12) Baptism; 13) Abrogation of Circumcision; 14) Abrogation of the Shabbat; 15) Permission to Eat Forbidden Food; 16) Resurrection; 17) Pardoning of Sins and Confession before a Priest; 18) The Matter of the Pope; 19) Anti-Christ; 20) Belief in Jesus as the Basis of Their Faith.

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1. page 288 Otzar Vikuchim J. D. Eisenstein first published in 1928, printed in Israel 1969

In this introduction, Eisenstein admits to the major changes he brings to the text. His expressed intention is to clarify the previous versions of the text. The earlier versions of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim do not defend Judaism, they simply refute Christian dogma.

Eisenstein employs seven different techniques to refute the Christian faith. In each section he uses a combination of these techniques to refute the principle at hand. The primary technique that is employed is "logical refutation." In this technique Eisenstein points out the internal inconsistencies that form the foundation of the belief. In some cases this means that Eisenstein will refer to two different citations from the New Testament and demonstrate that they are contradictory. In other cases Eisenstein will point out a statement from the New Testament and demonstrate the inconsistency with accepted Christian dogma.

Eisenstein also employs two different techniques of comparison. The first is a comparison between Christianity and Judaism and the second is a comparison between Christianity and other cultures. Each of these techniques are used by Eisenstein to demonstrate the "inferiority" of Christian belief and/or practice.

On at least three occasions Eisenstein sets up a "straw-man" which he uses to pick apart each of the beliefs components until the whole concept is nullified. Most often this is done by taking the concept out of context and ignoring the other beliefs that bolster the original concept. Another technique that Eisenstein often employs is the "forced comparison." Eisenstein takes a Christian belief and forces it to conform to Jewish standards. This is form of refutation also takes a Christian concept out of context and then judges it against Halachah (Jewish Law).

The final two techniques used are most often, unfair swipes at Christian belief. The first is a refutation by "mockery." Eisenstein mocks the belief of the Christians, most often by drawing a caricature of the concept and in a scornful tone dismissing the belief as foolish. The second technique is the "baseless refutation." Here, Eisenstein attempts to refute an idea that the Christians hold that either Judaism agrees with, or is truly not held by the Christians at all.

Of these techniques, the "logical refutation" is used most often: it is employed sixteen times in the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim. The comparison between Christianity and Judaism



is used twelve times. Comparison between Christianity and other cultures is employed four times. The "straw-man" technique is used in three sections of the text and the "forced comparison" is used eleven times. Eisenstein employs "mockery" in seven sections of the text and the "baseless refutation" in three sections.

Unlike any of the other editions of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim which contain a paucity of examples from the Christian tradition, Eisenstein's text is filled with citations from the New Testament. Eisenstein evinces a vast knowledge of the Christian tradition: more often than not offering unusual examples and citations from the New Testament. That is to say, there seems to be a list of oft-cited examples that are used to refute Christian principles which Eisenstein avoids in favor of more sophisticated but lesser-known examples. In one case Eisenstein brought to light a story of one of the Saints that is not commonly known.<sup>2</sup> By a reading of Eisenstein's edition, one also gains a deeper understanding of Christian faith, despite the fact that the clear intention is a

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2. this can be seen in Eisenstein's section 12 on Baptism in Otzar Vikuchim page 303a

refutation of that faith.

### SECTION 1: THE TRINITY

Eisenstein begins his refutation of Christianity with the concept of the Trinity.<sup>3</sup> In the language of the Church, the Trinity represents the three personalities of God. Eisenstein translates into Hebrew the three names of these personalities: HaAv, HaBen, and Ruach HaKodesh; in English: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church has often described the three personalities of God in an allegorical manner stating that God can be described as having three qualities: Ratzon (Desire), Hoochmah (Intelligence), and Yachol (Ability).<sup>4</sup>

Eisenstein's first technique of refutation is the use of the logical argument against the concept of a triune God. Eisenstein posits that the Son derives from the Father and the Holy Spirit emanates from the Father and the Son. By

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3. This is quite different from the earlier editions of the text and will be commented on in chapter 5

4. c.f. Emunot V'Dayot Saadia HaGaon, Chapter V on God, Rosenblatt edition pages 103-107

pointing out that each entity could not be considered complete in and of itself, then there are internal inconsistencies with the concept of the triune God. Therefore, this notion is held to be without logical basis and hence, unbelievable.

This is then followed with another statement that points out an inconsistency addressing the problem of precedence: Eisenstein argues that if the Father brings forth the Son, did the Father exist before the Son? Or, did the Son and the Father always exist simultaneously. The Christian response is detailed by Eisenstein: the three personalities can be likened to a burning coal. In a burning coal there is fire, flame, and coal. One cannot exist without the others for the burning coal to be complete; yet, each is a separate entity -- one can think of a flame, one can think of fire, and one can think of a burning coal.<sup>5</sup>

Eisenstein then employs a comparative refutation, comparing Christianity with another culture. In this case the other culture derives from Aristotilean philosophy.

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5. c.f. Otzar Vikuchim page 289a

According to Aristotle's system: if people are created from clay, it is therefore impossible to think of clay and people as the same thing -- a transformation occurred. By pointing this out, Eisenstein demonstrates that one cannot think of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as being the same entity, if one emanated from the others (if one did emanate from the others, a transformation occurred and therefore, they could not be considered the same entity). This reliance upon Aristotle is surprising, as Crescas was vehemently opposed to the thinking of Aristotle.<sup>6</sup> If, in fact, Crescas himself ever did rely upon Aristotilean philosophical concepts, it is reasonable to conjecture that this was done in order to use examples which were familiar to the intended readership. The popular style of philosophy in Crescas' time was based upon Averroes's translations and explanations of Aristotle's Ethics.

Eisenstein demonstrates the unity and uniqueness of God by citing examples from the Hebrew Bible; employing the technique of a comparison between Christianity and Judaism. Since the Christians accept the Hebrew Bible as inspired

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6. Crescas' opposition to the thinking of Aristotle is detailed in H. A. Wolfson's Crescas' Critique of Aristotle

literature these citations point out an internal inconsistency in their logic as these state unequivocally that God is Singular and Unique as opposed to Christian claims that God is a Trinity. "Because Adonai is the God of the Heavens above and the earth beneath -- there is none else."(Deut. 4:39) "I, even I, am the Lord; besides Me there is no deliverer."(Is. 43:11) "I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God besides Me."(Is. 45:5-6) "Yet, I am the Lord thy God from the Land of Egypt, and you know no God but Me: for there is no saviour besides me."(Hosea 13:4) "See now that I, even I, am He there is no God with Me: I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal."(Deut. 32:39) "I am the one God who did all of these things"(Is. 45:7). Eisenstein then cites examples from the New Testament which demonstrate further inconsistencies on the nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as different personae of the same entity. The first of these examples illustrates that the Son and the Holy Spirit are not the same entity:

That, I assure you, is why every sin, every blasphemy will be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever says anything against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever says anything against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. Matt. 12:31-32

In Matt. 19:16-17 Jesus is asked what must be done to possess eternal life. Jesus responds, "Why ask me? There is only One who is Good." This points out the difference between the Son and God. The difference between the Son and the Father is further denoted in an example from Matt. 24:36, "As for the exact day or hour, no one knows it, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father only." The same concept is found in Luke 10:21 and in John 7:16 wherein Jesus says that the ideas which he teaches do not come from himself, but rather from the One who sent him. Again, the New Testament text draws a distinction between the aspects of God. The writer in John 7:39 declares that the Spirit only begins after Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension.<sup>7</sup> In John 14:17, John 14:30 and especially in John 14:28 and I Cor. 11:3 Jesus explains that the Father is greater than the Son. The final New Testament example is a statement made by Paul in Ephesians 4:6; Paul states that there is only one God and Father who is over all.

The first refutation is based upon the inconsistencies with the concept of the Trinity itself and the

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7. see above, the question of precedence



inconsistencies in the revealed literature of the Christians. If, as they claim, the Christians accept the Hebrew Bible then there are glaring contradictions between that text and the New Testament. In this section, Eisenstein employed three different types of refutation: the logical style; the comparative (with Judaism) and the comparative (with other cultures). While Eisenstein's logic is sound and clear, one questions the effectiveness of this refutation as it refutes a concept that cannot be believed due to empirical verification -- it is a concept of faith. On that level, a believer in a triune God would not be swayed. This can be likened to the believer in the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea, who would not stop believing in that miracle, were someone to come along with logical reasons for the miracles' impossibility.

## SECTION 2: JESUS AS SON OF GOD

Eisenstein uses four different techniques of refutation in this section, two of which (logical and comparative [with Judaism]) were employed in the first section. He will also use two other techniques: the forced comparison and mockery. In this section, Eisenstein refutes the concept

that Jesus was both a person and a divine being. The basic thrust of Eisenstein's argument is that the two terms that are used to describe Jesus as a divine being are nothing more than common expressions for a human being. Eisenstein's implication is that if Jesus wanted to say that he was a divine being, he could have employed other expressions as opposed to calling himself either Son of Man or Son of God.

This section is divided into two parts: the refutation of Jesus as Ben Elohah (Son of God); and Jesus as Ben Adam (Son of Man). Eisenstein begins with a text from the Hebrew Bible that shows that both attributions (...of Man and ...of God) refer to humanity rather than the divinity of Jesus. This is demonstrated in Gen. 6:2, "... that the Sons of God saw that the daughters of Man were fair...." In this case both Sons of God and daughters of Man are understood by Eisenstein to describe the male and female of the same human species (although others take the Sons of Man to be another name for the melachim). In Ex. 4:22 Gods tells Pharoah through the mouth of Moses that Israel is my son -- meaning that the children of Israel are God's children, male and female. In like manner, Deut. 14:1 points out that God refers to humanity as his children (Banim plural of Ben).

Luke 2:41-48 is a text which is internally inconsistent as in the same section Jesus is said to have Joseph as his father and God as his father. This text is followed by Eisenstein's mention of the parable of Jesus' encounter with Satan, which is used to prove that Jesus is not a divine being. Satan tempts Jesus and says to him, 'If you are truly the Son of God, you can do the following thing....' In each of the three temptations, Jesus refuses the challenge and instead offers Satan a Scriptural statement to block Satan's test. Christian interpreters see this text as a proof that Jesus would not use his heavenly powers simply to convince an unbeliever. Yet, Eisenstein uses this text as a proof that Jesus was unable to perform these miraculous acts and was therefore, not a divine being -- only a Son of God (a human).

Again, logical refutation plays an important role in the next use of New Testament text. In Luke 9:28-24, Peter tells Jesus that he is on equal standing with Moses and Elijah. Eisenstein states that both of these great people were born of a human father and a human mother, yet they are considered on equal status with Jesus. Furthermore, if Jesus is to be included with these men, there must be 5 Gods, if

Jesus is to be considered a God (Moses, Elijah, Jesus, Father and Holy Spirit). Or, as Eisenstein is wont to prove, Jesus is a human being as was Moses and Elijah.

In the context of Jesus' death, Eisenstein asks, if Jesus is divine, why is he afraid to die whereas Jewish martyrs who died in the flames, were not afraid. Here Eisenstein interjects a mocking refutation -- by comparing Jesus to the martyrs of Israel, he mocks Jesus. Yet, by comparing Jesus and the martyrs of Israel, Eisenstein casts doubt on the divinity of Jesus. Why would this man-god be afraid of death if he were truly divine?

Occasionally throughout this work, Eisenstein makes his own voice very clear. In this section, he uses terminology that could not possibly have been known by Crescas' or others of his day. Towards the end of this section the term "Propaganda" is used in reference to a question put to Jesus by his apostles. According to the Oxford English Dictionary this term as used in this context first appeared in 1842. Therefore, Crescas would not have used this term -- it is clearly an addition of Eisenstein's.

The second part of this section is a refutation of Jesus as Son of Man. Eisenstein records that Jesus is

referred to as Ben Adam thirty times in the book of Matthew, twenty-seven times in Luke, fourteen times in Mark, eleven times in John and once in Acts of the Apostles. Eisenstein posits that Ben Adam can be used only to describe a human and not a divinity. He cites: Psalms 144:3 | Is. 41:12 | Ezek. 34:31 | Ezek. 36:37 | Psalms 80:18 | Dan. 8:17 | Psalms 2:7 as well as ninety-nine other times in the Book of Ezekiel and in Talmud Bavli Berachot 17. Additionally, it must be noted that the term Ben Adam is always used in the hebrew language to refer simply, to a person.

In brief this section ends stating that in almost every case, the terms Ben Elohah and Ben Adam are synonyms for a human person. If these terms can only apply to a human -- they cannot also refer to a divine persona. Therefore, statements in the New Testament that record Jesus as either ben Adam or ben Elohah cannot be understood as proof of the divinity of Jesus. This section is a much more successful refutation than the section previous, as it clearly refutes a concept by striking out at the basis for the concepts belief. By undermining the terms that are used to defend Jesus' status as a divine being, Eisenstein undermines the belief in the concept itself.

SECTION 3: INCARNATION

The next section, which is one of the shortest in the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim, concerns itself with Jesus being born of the flesh, and therefore as a human. The explanation for Jesus' birth as a man, was to allow Jesus to come to mankind and bring forgiveness to the rest of humanity who have been cursed with Original Sin. As a result of the sin of the first man and woman, the mercy of God was supposed to have been removed from humanity. It is Jesus, in the flesh, that comes to return God's mercy.

After a brief explication of the principle of the Original Sin, the section closes with a series of rhetorical questions which bring the logical inconsistencies of the concept of Jesus as Saviour from Original Sin to light. Some of the questions are logical refutations and others are mockery. Eisenstein asks: 1) Why was Jesus born of a Jewish woman in the land of Israel? 2) Why wasn't he born of a Greek, Italian, French or Spanish woman? 3) What is the connection between the Son of God and the Jews? and 4) Since he was borne of the Jews, why is it that so many of the Jews rejected his messiahhood and others accepted him?



This section is rather strange in that the author ignores the use of citations and examples from both religious traditions to refute this concept and relies wholly on the use of rhetoric logic, and mockery. It is also not very successful in its stated intention. This section is lacking in any detail that would allow for a proper refutation of the incarnation, as the concept is never even stated in Christian terms.

#### SECTION 4: THE LINEAGE OF JESUS

One of the most obvious inconsistencies in the story of Jesus is his lineage and in this section Eisenstein relies fully on the technique of the logical refutation. In several New Testament books we find different listings of Jesus' genealogical line. For example, in the book of Matthew, Jesus' line is traced through Mary's husband Joseph to prove Jesus as a person of Davidic origin. In this book there are forty-two generations listed which extend from Abraham through David through Joseph, Jesus' father. Yet, Eisenstein points out, in the Gospel according to Luke there are fifty-six generations noted. The question Eisenstein

then asks, if Joseph and Mary did not cohabit, why then is Joseph called Mary's husband? Further, why trace Jesus' line through Joseph if he, according to all accounts, was not the father of Jesus (since Jesus was supposed to be a Ben Eloah a Son of God)? And why, in Matthew 13:53-56 is Jesus called "the carpenter's son" and in John 1:45-47 Jesus is called "the son of Joseph." These examples question the problem of Jesus' father. Since there are inconsistencies in the New Testament record of the genealogy of Jesus, Eisenstein implies that all accounts are to be doubted.

It is the last example that brings the refutation full circle to the question of Jesus as a member of the Davidic line. Eisenstein queries that if the Christians really wanted to show Jesus as a part of the Davidic line, why not put Mary at the end of the line as opposed to Joseph? By doing so one could definitely place Jesus' mother in the line of David as all accounts state that Jesus was born of Mary. By placing Joseph in the Davidic line, and Jesus was not fathered by Joseph, then Jesus would not be of the Davidic line.

SECTION 5: MARY MOTHER OF JESUS AND HER VIRGINITY

The immaculate conception and the perpetual state of virginity of Mary is called into question by a statement in Luke 2:22. Here Jesus was brought into the Temple to be redeemed:

When the day came to purify them according to the law of Moses, the couple brought him up to Jerusalem so that he could be presented to the Lord, for it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every first-born male shall be consecrated to the Lord."

This day is recognized in the Church as the Candlemas celebrated forty days after the birth of Jesus -- it is the day of the redemption of Jesus and Simeon's blessing of Jesus and Mary.

This ceremony is obviously Pidyon HaBen (the redemption of the first born son). The law concerning the number of days after birth derives from Lev. 12:4 which states that seven days after the birth of a male child a woman is unclean, on the eighth day he will be circumcised and for thirty-three more days (from the seventh day) she shall be not be allowed to touch any holy thing (therefore, for forty days, she would not be able to enter the Temple). This ceremony marks Peter Rechem (the first-fruits of the womb). Yet, Mary is considered in a state of perpetual virginity, and therefore would not have been considered to have had her

womb opened. Therefore, by comparing the Christian belief in the Candlemas with the proper observance of Pidyon HaBen Eisenstein states that if Mary were celebrating Pidyon HaBen then she could not be considered a virgin, as a virgin could not give birth and maintain the mark of her virginity.

Eisenstein then returns to his standard form of logical refutation by pointing out further inconsistencies. In John 2 Jesus performs the miracle of turning water into wine and Mary is referred to as Eeshah (woman) and not Eemi (my mother). Eisenstein implies that if Mary were Jesus' mother he would have referred to her as such. By not calling her his mother, the text casts doubt on Mary as mother of Jesus. This argument of Eisenstein's is quite weak and is not one of the better examples of the logical refutation form.

Eisenstein concludes this section with a series of other stories of virgin births from other cultures to demonstrate that this story was a borrowed tradition and not indigenous to the story of Jesus. He cites the Greek myth of the Goddess Astarte (who was a virgin) and the Egyptian myth that Eros was borne of the virgin Isis. The author then points out that the Indians have three god-heads: Brahma, the father; Shiva, the Holy Spirit; and Vishnu, who is the

son of the Virgin Divanuna. This citation reflects Eisenstein's doubt, not only on the concept of the virgin birth, but of the originality of the triune God. Further, the virgin Rea who slept with Mars gave birth to Romulus. The final example comes from the Jewish tradition which is cited in Sefer Zerubabel and Midrash Asarah Melachim<sup>8</sup>. These refer to a rabbinic story of the virgin birth which produced Armilus, who has been referred to as the Anti-Christ.

Within the first paragraph of this section<sup>9</sup> Eisenstein makes a few references that could not possibly have come from the period of Crescas -- the first is a reference to the Protestants and the second is to Pope Pious IX who lived in the middle part of the nineteenth century. There are several more additions that could not derive from the time of Crescas. Eisenstein mentions: 1) America and the State of Mexico, 2) Guadaloque, 3) Dec. 12, 1531, 4) St. Patrick's Cathedral, 5) Newark in the year 1927.

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8. both of which are published in Eisenstein's Otzar Midrashim 160. and 466:

9. 293.

## SECTION 6: JESUS AS MESSIAH

This next section opens up with two refutations of the Christian belief in Jesus as Messiah. 1) The Messiah could not have come yet, for the Children of Israel have not been gathered in from the Diaspora and been brought to the land of Israel and 2) the Messiah would not bring a Brit Hadashah (a New Covenant) as the Torah of Moses represents the only true Covenant. Eisenstein cites Galatians 1:7-8 to refute the notion which states that a different covenant (other than the covenant already established) is not to be believed. The final refutation in the opening section is Acts 5:36-38 which states that if one comes along and claims that he is the Messiah, he will perish along with those that follow him.

What then follows is a series of twenty refutations based upon the Hebrew Bible which confronts different aspects of Jesus' messiahhood, this is an example of the "straw-man" refutation and in this case, it works very powerfully:

- 1) The Messiah comes from the house of David and must be human and not divine. c.f.: Ezek. 34:23-24 & Jer. 30:9
- 2) The Messiah will return the exiles from the lands of their dispersion. c.f.: Hosea 3:5



- 3) The Messiah will come, only after the incident of Gog and Magog as found in Ezek. 38 and 39 and Zech. 14.
- 4) Elijah will bring the Messiah.
- 5) The Messiah will restore the land and its wealth as in Deut. 30:3-5 and the tribes will be united as in Ezek. 37:16-22.
- 6) The Messiah will perform signs and wonders as in Zech 14:4 and Is. 11:15-16.
- 7) Others will join the Jewish people with the advent of the Messiah as in Zech. 8:23 and Is. 66:20.
- 8) The Messiah will unify the world under a Jewish King as in Num. 24:17-19; Is 60:12; Zech. 9:9; Dan. 2:44; Dan. 7:27.
- 9) The Messiah will cause one religion and one belief throughout the world: Is.45:23; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 14:9.
- 10) There will be peace in Israel: Lev. 26:6; Is. 52:1; Joel 4:17; Zech. 2:9.
- 11) There will be peace in the world: Is. 2:4; Micah 4:3; Is. 47:19; Hosea 2:20; Zech. 9:10.
- 12) There will be peace among the creatures: Is. 11:6-7; Is. 65:25; Hosea 2:2.
- 13) People will live long, good lives: Is. 65:16-20.
- 14) There will be no sin or iniquity in Israel: Deut. 30:6; Is. 60:21; Jer. 50:20; Ezek. 36:26-27; Zeph. 3:13.
- 15) The Messiah will bring an increase in knowledge: Is. 11:9; Jer. 31:33; Dan. 12:13.
- 16) The Shechinah will dwell among us: Ezek. 37:27-28; Joel 3:1.
- 17) Idols will no longer be worshipped: Is. 2:17; Is. 42:17; Ps. 97:7.
- 18) The Temple will be restored: Ezek:43:7; Ezek 47:1-12.
- 19) The Land will be divided for the twelve tribes as in Ezek

47:13.

- 20) The dead will be brought back to life: Deut. 32:39; Is. 26:19; Dan. 12:2.

As is obvious from this section, the concept of Jesus as Messiah was a major problem for the intended readership. Therefore, a significant amount of energy and research went into this section. The author went to great lengths in order to refute any statement that has been made about the Messiah and Jesus in that role.

#### SECTION 7: THE NEW TESTAMENT

As in the last section this section follows a pattern of exhaustive "straw-man" refutations which are meant to dispell any belief in the need of a New Testament and the religious theories propounded therein. In this section there are eight refutations.

1) The first refutation is a logical statement: if the Christians still believe in the Torah of Moses then one cannot say that it is incomplete -- if the Torah was given to Moses on Sinai by God, it must be complete.

2) According to Num. 12:8 the Torah was given "mouth to

mouth" from God to Moses. Therefore, the words of Moses were the direct words of God. Yet, Jesus spoke his words in the form of parables, which is not as direct as Moses' words.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the New Testament is not as direct a revelation as the Torah.

3) The Torah shebichtav (written) is the remez (hint) and the Torah shebe'al'peh (oral tradition) is the explanation. Also, all of the commands of the Torah are written in the singular 'you' and not the plural 'you.' Therefore, the Torah of Moses is direct revelation whereas the New Testament is a series of unexplained parables and stories and not direct commands from God.

4) Those who follow the New Testament do not keep Shabbat properly (or even their form of Sunday as Shabbat) nor do they follow the command to follow your father and mother (c.f. Luke 14:26 and John 2:4). Therefore, the New Testament commands abrogation of commands that came directly from God on Sinai.

5) Jesus, himself, states that he did not come to abrogate the Torah of Moses. This is stated many times in

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10. c.f.: Matt. 13:3; Matt. 13:34; Mark 4:11; Mark 4:34

the New Testament itself: Matt. 5:17-18; John 7: 15-17; I Romans 2:134; II Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 2:14-17 and Acts 19:21. Since the New Testament contains commands to abrogate Toraitic commands and Jesus claims he did not come to abrogate the Torah -- the New Testament is a contradiction of itself.

6) Jesus was opposed to those who explained the Torah: Matt. 16:1-12 and Mark 7:1-25. Yet, the New Testament has been claimed to be the explanation of the Torah.

7) The New Testament is filled with errors and absurdities; for example: love your enemy (or do good things to terrible people) c.f.: Matt. 5:38-39 and Luke 6:27 which are in direct contradistinction to Lev. 19:17ff which commands that one not "hate a brother in his heart." The Hebrew Bible states, do not hate or harm your neighbor yet the New Testament says, love your enemy. This is further underscored in John 18:22 and Acts 23:2 when one is struck by an enemy, one turns the other cheek. Furthermore, the Christians do not even uphold the commandment to love your enemy: as Jesus and Paul mocked their enemies as in Acts 23:2. Finally, if Christians really loved their enemies why did they kill myriads of Jews when it was the Romans who

killed Jesus and not the Jews. Even Jesus himself forgives the Jews for complicity in his death (Luke 23:34) yet the history of the Jews is filled with Christian attacks despite the New Testament command to love your enemy.

8) In Revelation, John states, "I myself give witness to all who hear the prophetic words of this book. If anyone adds to these words, God will visit him with all the plagues described herein!" Yet, the Christians ignore many of the commands in the New Testament and add to them (as in the change of Shabbat to Sunday, and the command against having statues [Acts 15:20] which proliferate the worlds churches, etc.) Again, this points out internal inconsistencies and contradictions within the New Testament.

Both Sections #6 and #7 evince a sense of anger. Both sections employ the use of mockery as a refutation. It is most probable that this tone emanates from Eisenstein himself as the character of Crescas would not have allowed this tone to creep into the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim.

#### SECTION 8: ORIGINAL SIN

The eighth principle which is refuted is the concept of

Original sin, or the sin of the first man when he ate from the tree of knowledge. Romans 5:12 states, "Therefore, just as though one man sin entered the world and with sin death, death thus coming to all men inasmuch as all sinned." It is in this passage that we find the basis for the Christian belief that the sin of the first man is visited upon all humankind from that time onwards. A corollary to this principle, that Jesus comes to redeem from sin, is seen in I Cor. 15:21-22, "Death came through a man [Adam]; hence the resurrection of the dead comes through a man also [Jesus]. Just as in Adam all die, so in Christ all come to life again." These two statements form the principle of Original Sin.

Eisenstein posits a logical refutation for the concept of Original Sin: why would the responsibility pass from Adam to his future seed -- his was not a sin of the spirit but one of the flesh. Additionally, if Cain's sin is not visited upon all the future generations, why should Adam's? Eisenstein asks, should Zaddikim (righteous individuals) such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses be punished for Adam's sin?

The refutation continues with citations from Deut.



34:10, Ex. 33:11 and Num. 12:8 all of which state that God spoke to Moses face to Face. Eisenstein argues, if God could speak to Moses so intimately, why would God not have forgiven the sin of previous generations? Finally, the author turns to the Talmud to state that the sin of eating of the fruit was not a sin of man but a sin of the serpent.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the sin was not a sin of humankind's anyway and the concept of Original Sin is unmerited.

#### SECTION 9: SALVATION

This section buttresses the previous chapter; in fact the first statement of this section is that if, as already demonstrated, the sin of the first man does not pass down through his seed, there is no need for salvation from Original Sin. If, we did need to be saved, we would not need Jesus to save us, as the Dam Brit (the blood of the covenant of circumcision) is salvific.

Eisenstein states, that Jesus could not have died for our sins as he died against his will b'al corcho quoting

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11. Talmud Bavli Shabbat 45: and Baba Batra 17.

Psalm 22:1, "Eli, Eli, lamah azavtani!" (My God, why have you forsaken me!). Again by extension of logic, the author asks, why would God sacrifice his "son" in order to save others from sin. More importantly, how could this death atone for peoples' sins when it was this death that, in fact, caused the slaughter and persecution of Jews for hundreds of years. An additional point of logic is asserted by Eisenstein: 1) Why did God have to wait four thousand years to provide a vehicle of atonement for "original sin"? 2) Why does God need to send a Shaliach (agent, representative) when it is well known that ki haElohim hu rachaman hamirachaym al kol briotav (that it is God who is the Merciful One, showing mercy to all of His creatures.) and 3) In Luke 16:19ff the ending of the parable of Lazarus and the Rich man states that even if one were to rise up from the dead, sinners would never repent.

It is clear that the concept of salvation from Original Sin is dismissed as absurdly illogical. Eisenstein allows a bit of anger to permeate this section, especially with his statement concerning the death and persecution of Jews. This is sometimes distracting as the voice of the persecuted is not as strong or convincing as the voice of the refuter.

## SECTION 10: BELIEF IN DEMONS

The tenth section is a refutation of the belief in Demons -- that is Satan and his Melachim (angels). In Rev. 12:9-12 John describes the beginning of Satan:

The huge dragon, the ancient serpent known as the devil or Satan, the seducer of the whole world, was driven out; he was hurled down to earth and his minions with him.

The Christians have stated that even the Jews believed in demons citing Deut. 32:17 but this verse, Eisenstein states, refers to the other nations:

They sacrificed to powerless spirits; to gods they knew not, to new gods that newly came up, whom your fathers feared not.

Also cited in this context is Lev. 17:7, Psalms 106:37 and in Pirke Avot 5:6.

While the Satan in Job is thought of as an angel who tempted Job, the Christians liken him to the devil who tempted Jesus in Matt. 4:1-11. It is demonstrated that the Christians believe that Satan has the ability to gain advantage over humanity, "... to prevent Satan -- whose guile we know too well -- from outwitting us." (2 Cor. 2:11)

The author then dismisses the belief in demons on two different levels: 1) that the belief in demons was an ancient concept that developed because ancients could not accept evil as coming from the Creator. 2) The belief in demons was an invention of other nations, not Israel, which leaked into the literature of the Hebrews. The Christians maintained this belief and it was extended to encompass the idea that demons can inhabit one's body as seen in Mark 9:25, "Jesus, on seeing a crowd rapidly gathering, reprimanded the unclean spirit by saying to him: 'Mute and deaf spirit, I command you: Get out of him and never enter him again!'"

This refutation is rather interesting as it is one of the three examples of the "baseless refutation". Eisenstein refutes a belief that, in fact, was held by Jews. Demonology is found throughout the history of the Jews. The Jewish literature is filled with stories of demons inhabiting individuals (as in stories of the Dybbuk, etc.) and in the belief of the Jewish mystics. As a whole, this section does not sound convincing, nor does it successfully refute the concept of belief in Demons.

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Note: c.f. The Devil and the Jews Joshua Trachtenberg, Meridian books, 1961 and Fallen Angels Bernard J. Bamberger J.P.S. 1952

## SECTION 11: TRANSUBSTANTIATION

This is one of the more interesting sections of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim as it attempts to refute one miracle and yet fully accepts a parallel miracle held by the Jews. The Christians believe that in the ceremony of communion, the body and blood of Jesus actually are transformed from a cup of wine and a wafer. The first question that is raised about transubstantiation is: would it make a difference if the wafer were made out of Matzah or Hametz (unleavened or leavened bread)? This question arises as there is a question as to whether the "Last Supper" occurred on Erev Pesach or Seder HaRishon (the night before Pesach or the first night of Pesach)<sup>12</sup>. The Roman Catholic Church uses unleavened wafers and the Greek Orthodox Church uses leavened wafers. The question is raised as to which group was performing transubstantiation properly. Also there is little belief that the miracle would occur if the wrong material was used. The import of Eisenstein's argument is that if the Christians cannot agree on the proper performance of transubstantiation, why should anyone accept

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12. The problem is: on the night before Passover, the bread could have been leavened; on the first night of Passover, it would have been unleavened.

the miracle itself. On the whole, this argument from Eisenstein seems silly as, again, it is an argument over whose miracle is more believable and in that sense it is a groundless refutation.

The concept of transubstantiation stems from Matthew 26:26-28:

During the meal Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples. "Take this and eat it," he said, "this is my body." Then he took a cup of wine, gave thanks, and gave it to them. "all of you must drink from it," he said, "for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out in behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins."

The Church upholds that the use of Jesus' words by the priest offering communion are so performative, it does not matter how wise or simple the priest is, the miracle occurs because it is a sacrament. Additionally, no matter how many times communion is performed, the wafer and wine actually become Jesus' body and blood. In order to make this easier to comprehend, the Church often uses the following example: if a mirror is smashed, each and every one of the pieces still has the ability to reflect as a whole mirror does.

Eisenstein recognizes that it is difficult to refute the conviction concerning transubstantiation if we as Jews adhere to a similar belief concerning the Shechinah. Judaism



teaches that the Shechinah (God's presence) dwells in every place people pray. The author then turns to Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 39a to answer this problem: the sun shines upon the whole world, yet each person enjoys it -- if the sun is but one of the many servants of God, how much the more so, the Shechinah itself! Eisenstein then declares that there is a qualitative difference between the Shechinah and the concept of transubstantiation. The Shechinah dwells in spirit but Jesus is supposed to appear bodily -- the latter being a logical impossibility. Therefore, Eisenstein concludes that it is easier to accept the concept of the Shechinah than the concept of transubstantiation.

Again, ready to answer charges that Jews have beliefs that are as logically impossible, the author gives the example of the Jewish belief that Elijah comes to each Seder and Brit. Eisenstein states that Jews believe that Elijah comes in spirit, it is just the language of the Haggadah that leads us to the belief that Elijah appears bodily. Of course, this section is again, rather weak. The arguments contained therein are not at all powerful not are they well constructed.

## SECTION 12: BAPTISM

According to Christian belief, baptism replaces Brit Milah (the covenant of circumcision) as a way to bring redemption to the individual. In Judaism, Brit Milah is an act that brings a person into the covenant that was first established with Abraham. The Christians believe that this covenant was abrogated and one need only be redeemed from Original Sin in order to be accepted into the new covenant.

Eisenstein's refutation of the practice of baptism is particularly interesting because he cites for his refutation the very same book which the Christians use as the foundation for the practice itself. Once again Eisenstein uses an example of the internal inconsistency of the Christian dogma to support his position. It is in Ezek. 36:25 that the following statement is found, "... then I will sprinkle clean water upon you , and you shall be clean: from all your uncleannesses, and from your idols, will I cleanse you." Also, in Ezek 16:9: "I swore to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you have become Mine. Then I washed you with water...." These are passages commonly cited in support of the practice of baptism. Yet, by citing these passages Eisenstein

demonstrates that baptism, as practiced by the Christians, based upon these passages, is based upon a faulty reading to the text. Eisenstein then turns to a earlier passage to establish that the same book declares baptism to be wholly unnecessary to one's redemption.

... as for your birth, in the day you were born your navel was not cut, neither were you washed in water.... And you did increase, and grow big, and you came to possess great attractions: your breasts were firm and your hair was grown. Ezek. 16:4,7

In addition, according to Eisenstein those citations which are commonly believed to refer to baptism, are only allegorical statements which describe the redemption of Israel from Egypt by God. None of these Biblical references are meant to advocate a practice of baptism.

Eisenstein turns next to a logical refutation of the practice of baptism. He bases this argument upon an analysis of related Jewish practices. If one is born a Jew, one only needs Milah to be considered part of the covenant. If one converts, one needs both Milah and T'vilah (immersion) but T'vilah only washes away sins that occurred prior to one's conversion. Further, if one were a born Jew, later abandoned the faith, and then became a Ba'al T'shuvah (a penitent) he would not need baptism. Therefore,

according to Eisenstein, the Jews only practice T'vilah in the case of conversion, not when one is born and not in the case of Ba'alay T'shuvah.

Eisenstein points out that the only time John the Baptist, widely credited with originating the Christian practice of baptism, practiced baptism was in the case of Ba'alay T'shuvah. This is demonstrated by a citation from Acts 19:3-4:

"Well, how were you baptized?" Paul persisted. They [the new disciples] replied, "With the baptism of John." Paul then explained, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance."

Therefore, the thrust of Eisenstein's argument is that the practice of baptism of new born children, as commonly practiced by Catholics and other orthodox churches, is inconsistent with John's practice. Furthermore, it is in conflict with the correct use of baptism as practiced by the Jews.

Eisenstein closes this section with an unusual refutation which also discloses his breadth of knowledge of the literature of the Christians.<sup>13</sup> This story further points up the inconsistencies in the practice of baptism. It must be remembered that the Christians believe that if one was baptized that action redeemed the person from Original Sin and therefore, the person was guaranteed a place in Paradise. The story is told of Gregory Thaumaturgus (based upon Greek, probably, 'the Miracle Maker'). One day when passing through an Ishmaelite cemetery he paused by the grave of an Ishmaelite and read the inscription on the head stone. The inscription noted that the person buried there was a generous, kind and thoughtful man. Gregory, upon reading the inscription, cried, for he knew that the Ishmaelite had not been baptized and would therefore, not have entered into Paradise as he had probably deserved. When Gregory's tears dropped onto the grave, they acted as waters of baptism, the dead man was considered to have been baptized and his spirit then flew off into Paradise. After

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13. The following story is based upon a little known saint of the Church, probably St. Gregory Thaumaturgus or St. Gregory of Thaumaturgus. After an exhaustive search for the origin of this tale, I can only state that the source for this tale is unknown

relating this tale, Eisenstein comments on the inherent inconsistencies which are implicit in the belief of the powers of baptism. Eisenstein asks, if one believes that baptism will guarantee a place in Paradise, what about the evil person who had been baptized -- does he deserve Paradise? The Christian tradition would say yes. Additionally, Eisenstein posits the question, can anyone be redeemed from Original Sin -- even after death? The story points out a gross inequity -- the good but unbaptized are doomed to death without Paradise and the evil who are baptized are guaranteed a place in the world-to-come. In a mocking tone, Eisenstein's final sentence of this section is: "Kach hi Torat Yeshu HaNotzri!" (So this is the Law [or Torah] of Jesus the Nazarite?!).

### SECTION 13: THE ABROGATION OF CIRCUMCISION

This refutation is presented in a very clear and logical style. Eisenstein first demonstrates that Jesus and his followers were circumcised. He cites as proof of this fact Luke 1:59, wherein John the baptist and Jesus and his followers were all circumcised on the eighth day after birth. A similar statement is found in Luke 2:21. Further,



in Acts 16:1-3, Timothy is said to have been circumcised by Paul. Eisenstein then points out the text of Acts 15:1,"... unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved."

In the early period of the apostles' missionary attempts, they insisted upon circumcision. Later attempts at conversion, directed at other cultures, encountered resistance because many of the other cultures found the practice of circumcision abhorrent. Therefore, Eisenstein concludes that the insistence upon circumcision was abandoned because of those nations that opposed such a practice. The abandonment of circumcision is found in several chapters of the New Testament:

Pay close attention to me, Paul, when I tell you that if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no use to you! I point out once more to all who receive circumcision that they are bound to the law in its entirety. Any of you who seek your justification in the law have severed yourselves from Christ and fall from God's favor! It is in the spirit that we eagerly await the justification we hope for, and only faith can yield it. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor the lack of it counts for anything; only faith, which expresses itself through love. Galatians 5:2-6

The abandonment of circumcision for those that would find the act abhorrent is also found in the Epistles to the

Romans (2:25-29 and 3:30) as well as First Epistle to the Corinthians (7:18).

Eisenstein then closes the refutation with a single citation from the Hebrew Bible powerful enough to demonstrate that the abrogation of circumcision is in direct violation of a command from the mouth of God:

And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to the children of Israel saying, "If a woman have conceived seed and bears a son...on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Lev. 12:1-3

Eisenstein pits the Hebrew Bible against the New Testament because the command from the Hebrew Bible is a direct command from God, whereas the abrogation of the command is based upon a desire to make Christianity accessible to other cultures. As seen in earlier refutations, Eisenstein relies upon the Hebrew Bible, which the Christians claim they follow, to demonstrate the incorrectness of the Christians.

#### SECTION 14: THE ABROGATION OF SHABBAT

Eisenstein declares that the Shabbat that Jesus and his followers followed and later transgressed was the seventh day (Saturday). The observance of the sabbath on the first

day (Sunday) was commenced in 338 C.E. It was in that year that Pope Sylvester claimed that Jesus appeared to him and told him to move the sabbath to the first day so that the Christians would not be like the Jews. The first day was also the day that Jesus was supposed to have been resurrected. Therefore, Eisenstein points out the inconsistency between the tradition of the New Testament and the actual practice of the Christians.

Eisenstein did not include reasons for honoring the Shabbat in Jewish tradition, he assumed that the concept was so central to Jewish belief that it need not be proven. Eisenstein, instead, gives a series of examples of how Jesus and his followers desecrated the Shabbat.<sup>14</sup> Then to demonstrate that this irreverence for the Shabbat was only held by Jesus and his apostles, Eisenstein cites Luke 23:54-56:

That was the Day of Preparation, and the sabbath was about to begin. The woman who had come along with him from Galilee followed along behind. They saw the tomb and how the body was buried. Then they went home to prepare spices and perfumes. They observed the sabbath as a day of rest, in accordance with the law.

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14. Matt. 12:10 | Luke 13:14 | John 5:18 | John 5:11 | Luke 6:5 and Luke 13:10

These women were the people who prepared Jesus' body for proper burial, the perfumes and spices were used in this process. Yet, the women observed the Shabbat, as did many of Jesus' followers. Eisenstein points this out in order to demonstrate that it was Jesus and the apostles who transgressed the Shabbat and by doing so, caused future generations of followers to do the same. Again, there is an implicit comparison being made with the tenets of Judaism. By demonstrating that Jesus did not honor the Shabbat, he compares him to the generations of Jews that did follow this essential command from God.

#### SECTION 15: ABROGATION OF KASHRUT

In this section Eisenstein addresses the abrogation of the laws of kashrut which derive from the Torah. Eisenstein states that it was not Jesus who transgressed the laws of kashrut but Peter and Paul. The book of Acts relates Peter's decision to abrogate the laws of kashrut after the voice of God came to him in a dream instructing him to eat those things that are unkosher. After Peter, in his dream, objects, Gods says, "What I cleanse, do not call unclean!" (Acts 10:11-15) Paul then writes to Timothy as recorded in I

Tim. 4:1-4 and tells him that it is wrong to turn away food that God created to eat and give thanks for; therefore, Paul encourages Timothy to eat anything that pleased him. In Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 10:25-26, Paul tells the Corinthians to eat anything they wanted, "...for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." This statement of Paul's derives from a misapplication of Psalm 24:1. Because the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, does not mean that one can eat anything one chooses.

Eisenstein then turns to the Hebrew Bible and cites a statement from Isaiah, that says that anyone who eats of forbidden food, such as swine or reptile, shall die (Is. 66:17). Again, Eisenstein relies upon the Hebrew Bible to refute the Christians' abrogation of a command from God.

#### SECTION 16: RESURRECTION

The first part of this section deals with the inconsistencies within the accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Eisenstein presents examples from the New Testament that call into question the length of time between the death and the resurrection. The number of days has been generally established to have been three days

between death and resurrection. This is based upon the prediction of Jesus himself in John 2:18-20 and Matt. 12:40.

The first citation that is used to question the interval between death and resurrection is John 20:1 which states that it was early in the morning of the first day of the week (Sunday) when Jesus' tomb was examined and he was found to be missing. The account of John suggests that it was late in the afternoon on Friday when Jesus was discovered to be dead (John 19:33). Based upon the fact that Jews count their days from sundown to sundown, this text reckons only two days elapsed between death and resurrection. This same problem is demonstrated by Eisenstein to exist in Matt. 27:57-28:15 where the time elapsed is only two days. Eisenstein refutes the reports of Jesus' resurrection and thereby, intended to refute belief in the resurrection itself.

Eisenstein points out further inconsistencies in the stories of the resurrection of Jesus. One of the major problems stems from the multiple endings of the book of Mark. There exist several different manuscripts of the book of Mark which contain different endings. The details of the resurrection are usually found in Mark 16:9-20. Yet, this



section is missing in many manuscripts and replaced with a two sentence ending which does not describe the details of the resurrection. Additionally, there is a third ending that is preserved in a forth-fifth century manuscript held by the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C. which also fails to describe the events of the resurrection.<sup>15</sup>

In an analysis of the final section of the book of Luke which also describes the resurrection, there are more inconsistencies which cast doubt on the testimony of the many witnesses. Eisenstein carries on the theme of the problem of testimony when he raises three questions about the witnesses to the event of Jesus' resurrection. The first question concerns the fact that each account describes women as witnesses to the miracle. Halachah holds women to be Passul (ineligible) as witnesses. Therefore, Eisenstein concludes that their testimony cannot be relied upon, nor would the Jews of Jesus' times have relied upon their testimony. Further, none of the witnesses actually saw Jesus rise from the dead.

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15. Eisenstein does not state that he knows of this manuscript. In my research, I have found several reports of this manuscript: most importantly, it was known by St. Jerome

There are also inconsistencies in how many angels each of the witnesses saw in the same tomb that Jesus was supposed to have arisen in. In one of the accounts there is mention of one angel dressed in white (Matt. 28:1-7); in another there are supposed to be two angels in white (Luke 24:1-8); in the third account there are two angels dressed in gold (John 20:11-13). Finally, Eisenstein notes that one of the people who witnessed the resurrection was a Cohein (c.f. Luke 24). He asks rhetorically why a Cohein was walking in a cemetery (which is forbidden to Cohanim). The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this part of the refutation is that none of the witnesses actually saw Jesus rise from the dead, the testimonies differ vastly over what the witnesses saw and that there are inconsistencies in the stories that make the report unbelievable.

The final section centers on I Cor. 15:12-14:

Tell me, if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how is it that some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too.

Eisenstein argues that the Christians held that one who does not accept the resurrection of Jesus, cannot accept the

other tenets of the Christian faith. As Eisenstein refutes the very occurrence of Jesus' resurrection, therefore the logical result is that the Christian faith is without basis.

#### SECTION 17: PARDONING OF SINS BY A PRIEST AND CONFESSION BEFORE A PRIEST

In the Christian faith, power is given over to the priest to absolve individuals of their sins. This is based upon Luke 7:41-50 wherein Jesus forgave the sins of a harlot because she honored him. Jesus was able to absolve the sins of the woman and the Church passed the ability of absolution to the priests. The concept of Absolution is the ability to remove a person's sins whether they are sins against God or sins against another person.

Eisenstein then cites a series of Biblical examples which establish that absolution is impossible as only God can forgive the sins of man against God and only another person can forgive the sins that are committed against him. In Numbers 14:20 Eisenstein finds proof that not even Moses, the greatest of all Prophets, could forgive sins. Only God

is the source of forgiveness (Ps. 130:4). Further, Eisenstein cites Joshua 7, for proof that even God will not forgive a person his sins unless the person does something positive to expiate his sins. As found in Ps. 32:1 and also in Talmud Berachot 34b, it is only God who can forgive iniquity. Based upon these citations Eisenstein demonstrated that the priests have no right, nor ability to absolve one from his sins. In a very clear and simple fashion, Eisenstein is successful in refuting the concept of the priests' abilities to absolve people from their sins.

#### SECTION 18: THE PAPACY

In this section, Eisenstein is neither sardonic nor does he invoke a mocking tone. This section is a simple and clear statement as to the problem of the papacy. While Jesus explicitly states that one can not change one letter of the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17-18), he later gives to Peter and the popes that follow, the power to alter the law. Jesus appoints Peter as the first Pope, it is Peter who denies Jesus three times (John 13:38). Eisenstein rhetorically questions, why would Jesus appoint such a person to this position? This is followed by a reference

from 2 Peter 3:16 which states that there are certain passages of the law that Peter is unable to understand. Again, Eisenstein queries rhetorically, is this the man that Jesus selects for his pope? These rhetorical questions are intended by Eisenstein to undermine the belief in the station of the Pope, which is the one who stands in the place of Jesus on earth. Eisenstein intended to discredit the one who held the first papacy, and thereby discredit the office itself.

The only other pope that Eisenstein mentions is Pope Sylvester, the one who changed the day of Shabbat (see Section #14). It is clear that Eisenstein holds little respect for this pope, and by this unfounded action of Pope Sylvester, Eisenstein also intended to discredit the office of the pope in general.

#### SECTION 19: ANTI-CHRIST

As can be found in 2 Cor. 11:4 and Gal. 1:6-7 there was a pervasive belief in other holy spirits and messiahs, during the time of Jesus. The apostles called these Anti-Christes -- those who stood in the way of Jesus to

pervert the belief of Jesus' followers. It soon was believed that Satan was behind the anti-Christ (2 Thes. 2:9) and even Jesus admits that some will leave the faithful to follow deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons (2 Tim. 4:1). This refutation follows the technique of the "straw-man": Eisenstein describes what the anti-Christ is supposed to be and then states that we have no evidence of the presence of the anti-Christ. The reasons offered are that the prophecies recorded in the book of Daniel have yet to be realized; additionally, they did not occur prior to Jesus' "resurrection." This refutation of the Anti-Christ also serves as further refutation of Jesus as Messiah.

Many of Jesus' followers believed that these anti-Christ's were present to fulfill the statement of Daniel who dreamt of the Yamot HaMashiach (the advent of the Messiah) and immediately prior to the time of the messiah, Daniel foresaw demons, great battles and wars. Yet, Eisenstein points out that Jesus does not fulfill the visions of Daniel. In the New Testament, Mark (13:30 ) claims that his generation will not pass away before the Yamot HaMashiach arrives and in Mark 9:1 he says, "I assure you, among those standing here there are some who will not taste death until they see the reign of God established in



power." Matthew reports that Jesus tells his followers that if they are persecuted in one town, they are to flee to another. They should continue fleeing because the Yamot HaMashiach will arrive before they reach many of the towns in Israel.

In the midst of his refutation of the concept of the anti-Christ, Eisenstein does make another reference that could not have possibly been known by Crescas. He refers to the commentary of Abravanel who lived in the 16th century, which discusses the false messiah that is supposed to proceed the second coming of Jesus. Since the story of Jesus does not fit in with any predictions of the Yamot HaMashiach, Eisenstein dismisses Jesus as the advent of the Yamot HaMashiach and he dismisses Jesus as the messiah.

#### SECTION 20: BELIEF IN JESUS AS THE BASIS OF THEIR FAITH

The final section of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim compares Judaism and Christianity. First, Eisenstein establishes that in order for a Christian to be saved, all he must do is firmly state his belief in Jesus. This is demonstrated in Matt 21:31 wherein even the harlots and the

tax collectors are guaranteed a place in heaven if they believe in Jesus yet a righteous person who does not believe in Jesus is denied his place in heaven. In Mark 16:15-16, Jesus tells his followers to go out and preach the gospel -- those that believe are saved and those that do not accept the faith are condemned.<sup>16</sup>

Eisenstein further intends to confound a belief in Jesus by citing Luke 19:27. Jesus tells his followers, "Now about those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king, bring them in and slay them in my presence." Jesus, by threatening to kill those who do not follow him, does not comport himself in a manner that one would expect of a messiah.

Eisenstein then quotes John 5:46 which states that if one believes in the Torah of Moses, one must believe in Jesus, as Jesus was predicted in the Torah. Eisenstein steps back and asks, how could Jesus believe that he is mentioned in the Torah of Moses when there are no mentions of a messiah in the Torah at all? The concept of a messiah is only brought out in the writings of the Prophets. After

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16. Other examples of this are John 3:36 | Luke 17:6 | Mark 11:23

stating these basic Christian concepts, Eisenstein commences with his comparison with Judaism. He cites Talmud Sanhedrin 105a which states that the righteous in the world have apportion in the world to come. This forms the basis of the comparison -- Christians don't care about actions, just belief and they exclude all those that do not believe. On the other hand, Judaism includes all those that act righteously, even those not of the faith. He cites Tosefta Sanhedrin 3 and Ps.146:8 and also Bamidbar Rabbah 8 all of which demonstrate that God loves the righteous, no matter what his faith is.<sup>17</sup>

Eisenstein ends the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim by stating that the difference between Jews and Christians is that Jews live by their beliefs and Christians die by them. A Jew lives out his beliefs through his daily activities, in synagogue, lying down, rising up, going out, coming in. A Christian just has to believe, be baptized and confess before a priest before death. A Christian need not be reminded of his Christianity on a daily basis and it is not his acts, but his beliefs that save him. This is, of course a caricature of Christian ethics and sets the stage for

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17. also cited is Is. 26:2 | Ps. 118:20 | Ps. 125:4

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

Eisenstein's last dig at the belief of the Christians.

Eisenstein's final comments in the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim center on a quotation from Luke wherein Jesus tells the murderer who is being crucified next to him, that surely the murderer will be in heaven with Jesus as long as the murderer believes in Jesus. This is Eisenstein's way of characterizing the faith of the Christians -- that it is a faith of those who want an easy guarantee to Paradise -- that actions are unimportant, only faith is important. To the Jew, Eisenstein, this is ridiculous and his tone in the final section is one of mocking and scorn.

#### CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

A close reading of the Eisenstein text, reveals a number of elements and polemical techniques that were not expected. The first element is the introduction of vitriol and cynicism directed towards those who maintain a belief in the Christian faith. One would not expect remarks about the murder of Jews to be used as proof that the Christians do not practice their belief in "love your enemy." Nor would one expect an attack on the Christians based upon their belief that it is faith and not acts that brings salvation. By attacking the Christian faith on this level, Eisenstein leaves his reader with the impression that the Christians believe that they commit any act and escape its consequences by merely professing faith in Jesus. This is not an accurate portrayal of Christian belief.

One is also struck by the incorrect portrayal of Judaism in portions of Eisenstein's text. In section 10, "The Belief in Demons" Eisenstein implies that Jews do not hold such a belief and attacks the Christians for holding such a seemingly primitive belief. As I have mentioned in the explication of that section, Eisenstein ignores the fact that the belief in demons plays a very important role in

periods of Judaism. This is especially true in the thoughts of the Jewish mystics, of whom Eisenstein was so enamored. Further, in the final section, Eisenstein portrays Judaism as being rather open-minded towards non-Jews -- that a righteous non-Jew will merit almost the same rewards as the Jew. Yet, this is far from the case: the literature is often most negative on the portrait of the non-Jew, even the most righteous non-Jew. Eisenstein will go to any end to denigrate the belief of the Christians and venerate the belief of the Jews -- even if he has to distort both beliefs.

While Eisenstein most often bases his refutations on the inconsistencies within the dogma and texts of the Christians, he occasionally uses a technique which pits Christian belief against the belief of the Jews. At many points in the text, Eisenstein isolates a Christian belief and instead of revealing its internal inconsistencies, he points out a parallel Jewish belief and refutes Christianity based upon Judaism. But Judaism and Christianity are not comparable on that level. This is an unfair technique and ends up portraying Judaism as the ideal to which Christianity is a poor imitation.

All of the changes that Eisenstein made in the text,



are minor compared to the change in structure and content from what we would have expected from the Crescas text. Eisenstein's changes were not only of tone (as pointed out above) but he had a different readership in mind. The changes in structure and content were made for this new reader -- a more sophisticated, wealthier and intellectual reader confronted with the proselytizing efforts of the Christians. Yet, Eisenstein also knew that he had the poorer Jew as reader, and he maintained arguments that would appeal to this class of reader, also.

At the time of Eisenstein's writing and editing the Otzar Vikuchim in which the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim is found, the missionaries on the Lower East Side found the Jews they were proselytizing had changed from the poorer Jews of an earlier generation. While there was still an influx of Eastern European Jews of poor economic standing, there was a new class of Jews. They were entering the business world, moving into the higher social and economic strata of the society around them -- a society that was predominantly Christian. If some of these Jews abandoned their Judaism on their own in a effort to find greater acceptance into this society, others left Judaism at the encouragement of missionaries. These were the "Cohens" who became "Kanes"

the "Goldsteins" who became "Golds" in an effort to secure firmer standing in the society around them.

These Jews of higher economic and social strata were, not only educated in the Talmud and Chumash, they were aware of secular philosophy and literature. They were reading different books, attending lectures and trying to make themselves acceptable to the society around them. Many were beginning to enter institutions of higher learning or learning vicariously through the education of their children.

In the previous editions of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim, the text began with a refutation on the concept of Original Sin. A poor person, at the hands of a missionary would be reminded of his depressed economic status. A missionary would often suggest that this poverty came because the person was a "sinner" from birth. The missionary would then attract the person to Christianity as a means of removing the state of sin, which would result in a better existence. Therefore a refutation aimed at a poorer immigrant readership would begin by confronting the Christian concept that most troubled the reader. In the case of the poor immigrant Jew, this would of course be, the concept of Original Sin.

Eisenstein's refutation, aimed at a more sophisticated reader, was framed on a more intellectual plane. He therefore assumed that the most troubling concept would be the Trinity, followed by refutations on different aspects of Jesus as Messiah. Despite the fact that these sections are among Eisenstein's weakest arguments, the concept of the Trinity was one that was used to attract the wealthier, more sophisticated Jew. Jesus, the man-god who came to save the world from sin, was supposed to have come for each individual. The idea of a personal messiah proved attractive to many. The concept of the three gods who were one, was the stuff of an intellectual discussion.

Additionally, Eisenstein adds sections that were heretofore never present in the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim, these too, are more scholarly and intellectual. They deal with matters such as the Genealogy of Jesus, the Pardoning of Sins by a Priest, the Anti-Christ, Jesus as Saviour, and Absolution. These, were concepts that could occupy the thoughts of the intellectual Jew.

Most importantly, Eisenstein adds three sections which are of concern, not only to those who actually converted, but to those who were simply assimilating into this

"christianized" society: Abrogation of Circumcision, Abrogation of Shabbat and Permission to eat Forbidden Foods. These were not the concerns of the poor Jews, these were entrances into society by the rich Jews: the badges of their wealth and their status symbols. By no longer observing the Shabbat (for economic reasons) and eating in anyone's home or restaurant, one was freed from the shackles of religious imprisonment. Eisenstein's text answered a very definite need in the Jewish community. They needed reasons not to abandon their Judaism just for entrance into the society of the rich. The reasons, Eisenstein supplied in abundance. The consumption of forbidden foods leads to death and destruction as does the breaking of the command to observe the Shabbat. Eisenstein intended, not only to instruct the reader -- but to warn him as well.

Eisenstein's version of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim is not as controlled as other authors' and editors' versions of this text. His hatred for, and his disdain of, Christianity is apparent

throughout the work. In his attack on Christianity, he went so far as to add examples from periods that Crescas, very clearly, could not have known.<sup>1</sup> In these cases, his own voice is very clear, and each instance is used to bolster his argument against a certain concept.

His aim was, not only refute the faith of the Christians, but even those influenced by it. Eisenstein cared about the apostates as well as the assimilated. Both, the converted and the assimilated worried Eisenstein. On that level, he shared a known characteristic of Crescas: they were both xenophobes concerning outside influences upon Judaism. Crescas attacked foreign influences upon Judaism in his Or Adonai -- Eisenstein attacked them in the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim.

Eisenstein saw the threat to the Jewish community and responded on a very different level than other published responses. In the 1920's, Adolph Benjamin relied upon the newspapers and editorial writing to respond to missionaries. Benjamin often published his attacks in the New York Herald. Samuel Freuder, a graduate of the Hebrew Union College, who converted to Christianity and worked as a

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1. as illustrated in Chapter 3, sections #2, 5, 12, 19

missionary, then turned on the Christians and published a book, A Missionary's Return to Judaism. Even the Mayor of New York, William Jay Gaynor, a non-Jew, published an open letter to the missionaries, questioning their efforts. He asked why the missionaries thought that the Jewish faith was not good enough for the Jews.<sup>2</sup> Eisenstein, on the other hand, used a scholarly approach. Despite his lapses, his is a philosophically constructed text, intended as a compilation of responses to missionaries and reasons for Jews' not to abandon the faith.

In order to do this, Eisenstein made major structural and content changes in a text which he still attributed to Crescas. He doubled the number of concepts from the earlier editions. He added notes of mockery and scorn which were never present in earlier editions. He added many more citations from the New Testament to ready any Jew with enough ammunition to battle a missionary. Yet, with all of these changes, Eisenstein claimed the text to be Crescas'. Were one not careful in reading the text as it appears in the Otzar Vikuchim, he would be left with the impression that this was Crescas' text.

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2. These and others are reported on in Evangelizing the American Jew D. M. Einhorn op. cit.



We should not be surprised by what Eisenstein did; in fact, each appearance of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim paralleled a need in the Jewish community for a response to the missionary attempts of the Christians. Each time the text does appear, it is modified to respond to the particular social situation of the Jewish community. When Chasdai ben Abraham Crescas first wrote the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim it was not written as a source book of responses to missionaries. Crescas intended on recording a series of reasons why Jews, especially himself, should not abandon the faith of their ancestors. His text was written in Spanish and written for his Spanish friends who could not understand why he so insistently maintained his beliefs in the face of hatred. Crescas was a diplomat, and knew that he would not advance himself if he offended. Crescas knew that he had little chance of convincing his Christian friends that they were wrong, so his document was not designed to insist on the error of Christian dogma. Therefore, his was simply a terse, concise argument for his inability to accept Christianity.

When Joseph ben Shem Tov received the text and translated it, he did not intend for it to be read by Christians. Joseph ben Shem Tov's co-religionists were in

dire need of reasons not to abandon their faith. Not only did he translate the text from Spanish into Hebrew, but he added comments and explanations. He modified the text to fit the situation, by making the text accessible to the Jews. Yet, he also preserved the name of Crescas as the author of the text. The name carried a special meaning to the Jews of 1451 in Spain. They remembered that, not only was Crescas a Jew who defended the faith and principles of Judaism, he did so while maintaining peaceful co-existence with the ruling class. He was a Jew, accepted by the Christians, who stood adamantly opposed to the Christian faith. In that light he was their hero and exemplar. His name carried great weight and therefore, his words were more powerful than the words of Joseph ben Shem Tov. Joseph ben Shem Tov knew how much he had to modify the text for his day. Not even the intention of Joseph ben Shem Tov's book was the same as Crescas' text. Yet, Crescas' name remained in the text as a symbol for the Jews.

While there is a paucity of information on the date and place of origin of the two extant manuscripts, certain suppositions can be made. As stated in chapter 2, these two manuscripts are in an Italian handwriting of a style that evinces the 16-17th centuries. That period in Italy was the

height of the Renaissance. Yet, it was in this period that Jews were cordoned off into newly invented ghettos. The ghettos in Italy were not free from attempts at conversion to Christianity. Government regulations stated that on regular basis, Jews had to attend Churches in order to listen to preachers attempts at converting Jews to Christianity.<sup>3</sup> There is little doubt that these manuscripts appeared in this period, handwritten and passed from person to person. It would be strange for a manuscript to be written out by hand merely as a curiosity. There had to be a need in the community if one were to devote time to writing out these texts. Again, the name of Crescas could have served as a symbol for these ghettoized Jews. Here was a text that gave them strength and reasons not to abandon their faith. The manuscript texts seems to evince changes in linguistic styles (verb forms, etc.) and they are fragmentary. No doubt, those sections that are more fragmentary in nature either demonstrate the state of the Joseph ben Shem Tov text, or they demonstrate those topics that were not important to the Italian Jews at that time. Yet, there is too little evidence to support any firm

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3. for a fuller discussion see A History of the Jews Solomon Grayzel J.P.S. 1947 pages 483-484

conclusions about these manuscripts.

The next appearance of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim, in Salonika occurs in 1860. The Jews in Turkey were again beginning to feel the oppression of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire began to think seriously of ridding Turkey of their Jews and sending them all to Palestine -- also under their control. The mid-nineteenth century saw Turkey in turmoil as the strains in the Ottoman Empire began to appear. During this period the Christians were also ill-treated by the Ottoman Empire. Yet, despite the poor state of affairs for both Jews and Christians, Christians still continued their efforts to convert the Jews. In 1848 the American Board of Missionaries sent two missionaries (Dodd and Maynard) to Salonika. They moved on in 1852 to Smyrna, but four years later, the Established Church of Scotland reestablished missionary activities in Salonika.<sup>4</sup> We do not know who published the Bittul Ikare HaNoztrim in Salonika, but there is little doubt that a text of this type was necessary for the first time in many years.

It is Ephraim Deinard who makes a major contribution to

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4. page 169-170, A Century of Jewish Missions A. E. Thompson, Revell Publishers 1902

his society, by bringing forth the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim. He knew of the attempts by the missionaries. He had collected works from Europe and brought them over to America with him. Deinard, published his version of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim and tried to fill in the places that the two Italian fragments and the Salonika text, left out. There are sections in Deinard's edition that are not found elsewhere. There are "corrections" that Deinard makes in the text. In all, Deinard's mark is prominently left in the text. It follows the pattern set in earlier editions, the order is not different. Deinard's readership is the poorer immigrant and in that light, his edition is most appropriate to his readership. Again, the name Crescas is all-important. Deinard's readership knew of Crescas, they had a very traditional education from the old-countries. The name Crescas itself was a source of comfort.

In each appearance of the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim we find a text that is a refutation of the dogmas of Christianity but in each appearance, it is somewhat modified. The greatest changes were wrought by Joseph ben Shem Tov and Judah David Eisenstein however, the fact that changes were made is not unusual. In order to keep the work contemporary, changes had to be made, otherwise it would not

be worthwhile promulgating such a text. Additionally, the name of the original author had to be preserved no matter how different the present text was -- the name of Crescas legitimized the text and brought a further degree of comfort to the reader. The intention of Crescas, in one sense, was maintained in each version -- that reasons be offered as to why a Jew would not and/or should not abandon his faith. The editor/publisher then made changes in the text for it to suit the contemporary situation.

Much has been learned from a study of the history and content of this text. An important style of polemic and refutation was studied. The history of a number of Jewish centers was examined and the attempts at conversion of Jews in those centers was also studied. The Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim has a rich history all of its own which has been revealed in the study of the text. Yet, this study also serves as a caution in the way other texts are treated and examined. If we accept a text at face-value, without consideration of where the text comes from, who the text was written for, and the documentation of the texts' appearances, we run a great risk in misunderstanding the text. Texts have intended readerships, they are written because of a social climate and they respond to that climate



-- these things are not written in ink, yet they permeate the document. If one ignores these aspects of a text, these invisible but no less important marks, we do a great injustice to the meaning of the text. Care must be taken in the analysis of each and every document so that we do not fall prey to false attributions and additions.

While each version has a right to be called the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim we have no evidence to claim that we have Crescas' text. In fact, aside from a few contemporaneous references to Crescas' text, we have no other evidence of its existence. Every hand that touched the Bittul Ikare HaNotzrim has left an indelible mark, one that casts a great doubt over the authorship of the text. Three versions of the text are left to us without benefit of the attribution of authorship. Two texts, we can verify were handled by Deinard and Eisenstein. Each version leaves us with a taste of the society that found some solace from the text. Each documents a different period in the history of the Jews' struggle to maintain their Judaism despite the efforts of those who wanted to convert them.

For many years, since the end of the Second World War, we Jews of the United States have been able to maintain our Jewishness without the concerted efforts of those around us

to convert us. Yet, it seems that the times again change. More and more, we are aware of the efforts through all media, to spread the word of gospel. Missionaries reach out via television and radio, freely entering our homes and automobiles. Young men and women hand out pamphlets in subways and streets offering easy ways to be relieved of troubles and pain. Christian missionaries call out that even Jews can believe in Jesus; Stars of David are painted on walls with crucifixes super-imposed upon them.

No longer are our Jewish youth safe from efforts to convert them. Many, disenfranchised with their own religion, seek out other systems of belief. Others, often experiencing the pains of maturation are approached with ways of making their lives easier. They are told that Jesus saves -- that Jesus died to remove your sins. They are told that even their own Jewish Bible predicted Jesus as Messiah. Yet, they have no answers, they know of no replies. They must be prepared to answer all who seek to entrap or entice them. They must be sure enough of themselves that they are able to withstand these attempts. But most of all, they must understand that they share something in common with their ancestors -- people who also had to maintain hope and faith in order to keep Judaism alive.

There have been modern attempts at books aimed at providing answers to the missionaries.<sup>5</sup> Yet, they all pale compared to the potential depth and breadth of a revised Bittul Ikare HaNoztrim. This new version would have to include refutations to the notions: that Jesus saves from Sin; that without Jesus in one's life, there is no hope for Salvation; as well as containing an up-dated list of Hebrew Bible citations that have been used by missionaries as "proofs" of Jesus as Messiah. It is unfortunate that we must continue to defend ourselves from the attacks of those who seek to convert us, and we must continue to defend the importance of our faith. Despite this renewed effort against us, it is hoped that one day Jews will be able to peacefully co-exist with others and not have to worry about the survival of their faith.

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5. c.f. Bibliography

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