

Donato Manduzio's
Diary, from Church
to Synagogue

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By

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To Donato Levi Manduzio
In memoriam

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INTRODUCTION

In 1930, at a time when the Fascist regime had extended its hold over Italy, Donato Manduzio, a Southern Italian peasant who only learned how to read and write in his early thirties, simultaneously discovered the Bible and monotheism. In the belief that the Jewish people had disappeared from earth, he became convinced, through a series of visions and prophetic dreams, that God had given him the mission of recreating His people. After chancing to discover the existence of an organized Jewish community in Italy, Manduzio set about obtaining an official conversion for himself and his followers. For twelve of the sixteen-year-long process, he wrote a *Diary*.

Manduzio's story elicited a fair amount of media attention in Italy, in Israel, in France and in the United States, with the very first news item published in 1939 in an underground anti-Fascist Italian paper published in Paris.¹ A *Time* magazine article about Manduzio appeared in 1947, but it was marred by a spurious dramatization of events and several erroneous pieces of information.² More articles, television documentaries and a film were to follow.³ Manduzio's story was also turned into a novel by one of the protagonists of the events, Corporal Spitzer, who was a Canadian journalist

¹ Guido Lodovico Luzzatto, "Sei mesi di antisemitismo in Italia," *Il Nuovo Avanti*, 17 giugno, 1939.

² "The Converts of San Nicandro," *Time Magazine*, Vol. 50, Issue 11, September 15th, 1947, 56-57.

³ Fritz Becker, "The New Jews of San Nicandro: Some Latter-Day Recruits to the Covenant," *Commentary Magazine*, April 1, 1948; Dana Adams Schmidt, "Italian Converts Find their Way in Israel," *The New-York Times*, March 30, 1953; Dana Adams Schmidt, "Converts Abandon Old Passover Rite," *The New-York Times*, April 1, 1953 (both *NYT* articles are heavily influenced by Phinn E. Lapidé's fiction, cf. note n° 6). Recent reports include a film by Alexandra Pizar-Pinto and Henry Salfati, *San Nicandro*, shown on the French TV channel Arte on October 3, 2002; a documentary film by Vincenzo Condorelli, *San Nicandro, Zefat. Il Viaggio di Eti* (2009); a documentary film in English by Roger Pyke, *The Mystery of San Nicandro*, shown in Canada on CBC on November 12, 2012; a television broadcast in Italian by Piera di Segni and Massimo Gabrielli, "Il villaggio del sabato," *Sorgente di vita*, Rai TV World, September 8, 2013; a television broadcast in Italian by Packy Caruso, *Focus*, Sannicandro TV, October 7, 2014.

serving as a reporter in the Palestinian Unit of the Eighth Brigade.⁴ Writing under the pseudonym of Phinn E. Lapide, Spitzer took more than a few liberties with the particulars of the events, as was to be expected from a fictionalization process. His novel was also permeated with a sentimentality that mythologized Manduzio and aggrandized Spitzer's own role and thus caused much resentment among the protagonists of the story.⁵ Fiction, however, can be truthful even when straying from the facts, and Spitzer made up for whatever embellishments he introduced by demonstrating a deeply empathetic understanding of the San Nicandro converts.⁶

Despite the degree of recognition Manduzio enjoyed when his story was made public, none of his writings have ever been published in full, either in the original Apulian dialect or in Italian translation or in any other language. Only some fragments have been reproduced or translated in the research published up to this day.⁷ Manduzio's story and the contents of

⁴ Michael Tagliacozzo, Letter to the Editor, *Ha Keillah* 4 (October 2009) <http://www.hakeillah.com>.

⁵ See for instance an unsigned, undated letter to the editor of the Jerusalem Post, written by one of the Jewish Agency envoys who participated in the San Nicandrese's conversion and emigration to Israel between 1946 and 1949. He points out all the errors in Lapide's novel, and especially insists on the fact that Manduzio never claimed to be a descendant of the *marranos*, i.e. the Jews who had been forced to convert to Christianity but kept practicing Judaism in secret (CAHJP, Leo Levi Papers, 252/13). See also in the Leo Levi archive Eliezer Tritto's memoir, where the novel is described as "a pack of lies," and Gualtiero Cividalli, "Ritorno a San Nicandro," *La rassegna mensile d'Israele* 39, 4 (1973) 226-236, partly written to restore the facts that an article by Dino Colombo based on Lapide's novel had thoroughly misrepresented.

⁶ Phinn E. Lapide, *The Prophet of San Nicandro* (New-York: Beechhurst Press, 1953).

⁷ Elena Cassin, *San Nicandro: Histoire d'une conversion* (Paris: Plon, 1957); an augmented edition was published in 1993, (Paris: Editions du Quai Voltaire); an Italian translation was published under the title *San Nicandro: Un paese del Gargano si converte all'ebraismo* (Milano: Corbaccio, 1995); Antonio Moscato and Maria Novella Pierini, *Rivolta religiosa nelle campagne: il movimento millenarista di Davide Lazzaretti. La profezia neo-ebraica di Donato Manduzio* (Roma: Samonà e Savelli, 1965); Ernesto De Martino, "Un arcangelo sul Gargano," in *Furore, Simbolo, Valore* (1962) (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1980), 209-212; Anna Iuso, "Inquietudine religiosa e itinerari spirituali a San Nicandro Garganico", in *Il Gigante Invisibile: Nuove credenze e minoranze religiose nella provincia di Foggia*, eds. Luigi Berzano and Massimo Introvigne (Foggia: Edizioni N.E.D., 1997), 223-262; Leo Levi, "Canti tradizionali e tradizioni liturgiche giudeo-italiane" in *Canti tradizionali e tradizioni liturgiche*, ed. Roberto Leydi (Lucca:

the *Diary* have mostly been rephrased, with the researchers using their own voice over Manduzio's, tapping his diary for facts and retelling them.

The drive to paraphrase and retell might appear to be reasonable in view of the many exceedingly detailed episodes in the *Diary* that make for a sometimes awkward, long-winded narrative. The lexical register is unsophisticated and the punctuation is erratic, with sentences of Proust-like length. Dream sequences, realistic narration and religious comments appear in quick succession, and there is hardly any indication of the end of an episode and the beginning of another, for paragraphs are few and far between. Moreover, Manduzio's *Diary* is a marginal text: it is on the margins of literature, on the margins of religious writing, on the margins of self-representational writing. As a conversion narrative, it might be seen to form part of a conventional genre, and hence it might appear to be stereotypical, thus further relegating it to marginality and therefore in no need of being quoted in full.

Selected readings and anthologies have their uses, in school contexts or to whet the reader's appetite for more. But no matter how efficient it might look to keep only the major passages of a narrative and to retell and abbreviate other passages, significant distortions arise in the process: the selected fragments are the result of considerable editorial intervention and tend to form a whole of their own, unwittingly ending up misrepresenting the original. With its shortcuts and its digests, the resulting narrative rewrites the text and imposes an order that decontextualizes events, skews meaning and misrepresents the text's structure. Nor do the unintended consequences stop here. Editors commenting on a text that is not available to the reader in its entirety but presented in fragmented form only, become the final arbiters of its meaning. What emerges through this process is their own interpretation of the text, what they choose to highlight or to overlook. The reader cannot challenge the interpretation, gain a full picture of what is being investigated, let alone look at the text with fresh eyes. But texts must be studied in their entirety if their meaning is to be fully perceived. Even those parts that might seem to be puzzling, badly written, or downright useless must be taken into account and their relationship with

LIM editrice, 2002), p. 67-88; Emanuela Trevisan Semi and Tudor Parfitt, *Ebrei per scelta: movimenti di conversione all'ebraismo* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2004); Cesare Colafemmina, *Mosé nelle nostre terre* (Fasano: Schena Editore, 2006); Francesco Lotoro, Paolo Candido, Pasquale Troia, *Fonte di ogni bene: canti di risveglio ebraico composti dal 1930 al 1945 a Sannicandro Garganico* (Barletta: Editrice Rotas, 2009); John Davis, *The Jews of San Nicandro* (New-Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

the whole text needs to be ascertained.⁸ Doing otherwise blunts the specificity of any text and stunts interpretation.

I knew therefore that if I wanted to consider Manduzio on his own terms, not through the distorting lens of someone else's interpretations, if I wanted to understand the full scope of his experience and of its historical context, I needed to read Manduzio's entire *Diary*, to be confronted to his own words as he intended the reader to see them. I knew that what a writer chooses to keep silent or to deny may be key to understanding the meaning of the whole. I knew I had to listen to his voice in the shape in which he had chosen to leave it to posterity, without subtracting either the heterogeneity of his inspiration or what he had chosen to leave unsaid. A translation of the full text into English and a careful literary examination of its tropes would highlight facets of Manduzio's writings that had hitherto been consigned to irrelevance.

The search for Manduzio's *Diary* took me on a long quest from Brindisi to San Nicandro Garganico and eventually to Jerusalem. I found out that the original still exists, and that it is carefully safeguarded by the San Nicandrese community. My offer to carry out a joint translation of the diary was turned down, and I quickly realized I was far from being the only scholar whose request had fallen on stony ground. Pierini had been the last researcher to be given access to the original manuscript, under the supervision of Manduzio's widow, and she was only allowed to copy it in longhand.⁹ Anna Juso was seemingly told that the manuscript had disappeared,¹⁰ and even Cassin, whose eminently empathetic study did so much for the group, had eventually been told that the final sections of the

⁸ Pierini, for instance, thus sees Manduzio's text as "a messy cauldron in which you can find, next to an interminable series of marginally interesting items, elements that are vaguely alluded to or recorded with indifference, while they would in fact represent a definite interest for the genesis and development of the group's existence." Pierini, 168, my translation. The frustration in this passage, coupled with the apologies she proffers to the "cultivated reader" (291) for Manduzio's supposed stylistic transgressions, evidence a misapprehension of the nature and purpose of textual analysis. Yet, Pierini's careful transcriptions of excerpts from the original text simultaneously – and paradoxically – recognize the importance of such writings.

⁹ Pierini, 144-145.

¹⁰ Iuso, 229, note n°1.

diary were no longer in Italy and was thus unable to consult them.¹¹ More recently, John Davis was confronted to a similar turndown.¹²

Although I was disconcerted at first by this refusal, I gradually came to understand that the reluctance to give up control of the original notebooks was a sign of the ongoing importance of the manuscript; it confirmed the still-sacred character of the text for the descendants of the original group members. It also showed that even though the group now belongs to mainstream Judaism, the founding myth of the San Nicandro Jews is still very much alive among the descendants of the first converts. In such a context, the translation project and literary approach I had announced could not but raise some hackles. It elicited the Italian saying “*traduttore, traditore*,” a terse and particularly apt definition of the paradox at the heart of all translations, which must betray the letter of the text to be faithful to its spirit. Disseminating a text also means losing control over its interpretation and might have raised fears for the public image of a still fragile group.

Access to the original manuscript having been denied to me, I had to locate a reliable copy somewhere else. Several copies of Manduzio's *Diary* had been made in longhand, on his own initiative, during his lifetime, for Manduzio was eager to make his story known and repeatedly tried to get it printed. Other handwritten copies had also been made after his death and were kept in various archives. From John Davis' list of sources, I found out that the copy which had been stored at the Union of Jewish Communities in Rome had long been mislaid.¹³ Another copy was made by some of Manduzio's followers. It was sent to Cassin's publishing house by Eliezer Tritto, a member of the original group who had immigrated to Israel, and Cassin sent it in turn to Trevisan Semi, who quoted from it in her own book chapter.¹⁴ This is the copy that found its way into the Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), located at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This is also the copy I have been working on: I was able to identify it thanks to the names of some of the protagonists, identically misspelled in my copy and in the passages quoted by Trevisan Semi.¹⁵

¹¹ Cassin, 1957, 13. All quotations from Cassin's study refer to the 1957 edition.

¹² Marla Brown Fogelman, “The Curious Case of the San Nicandro Converts,” *The Forward*, November 5, 2010.

¹³ Davis, 223.

¹⁴ Trevisan Semi and Parfitt, 115-144.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, footnote 27, 124.

It is by no means a fair copy. The CAHJP names the copyist as Noam Artom, but the handwriting seems to belong to at least three different scribes, each with their own idiosyncrasies. One of them writes in the same manner the letters *p*, *f* and sometimes even *g*, another one does not differentiate the letters *n* and *u* in her cursive, making the deciphering problematic, to say the least.

Furthermore, Manduzio wrote his *Diary* and his book of psalms in an Apulian dialect in which some word endings, conjugations and some lexical elements differ from standard Italian. Judging from his books of psalms, photocopied from Manduzio's original notebooks, as well as from the few *fac-similes* of the *Diary* in Cassin's study, the original text in dialect remains, for the most part, accessible to Italian speakers, and his handwriting is rather appealing, with the disproportionately large letters characteristic of people who learned how to write as adults. Yet, and in keeping with the time-honored tradition of scribes altering the text they were supposed to reproduce, the copyists introduced several modifications, some minor, some major when transcribing the diary. Pierini's transcriptions of some passages and her own linguistic remarks enabled me to identify some of these changes.¹⁶

In the first place, the original Apulian dialect has been Italianized. Most of the verb tenses and conjugations have been corrected, and articles and pronouns have been made to conform to standard usage. The punctuation, however, seems to mostly stick to the original, with very long sentences only separated by commas. The dominant rhetorical device is parataxis, i.e., the juxtaposition of events rather than their concatenation through cause and effect. The result is a mixture of oral and written forms which is most visible in the management of reported speech. In several instances, dialogues begin as a traditional exchange but segue into indirect speech, or vice-versa.

Moreover, some passages have been altogether omitted from the CAHJP copy. In some cases, the omission is probably involuntary, due to fatigue or inattention. But the situation is different in other cases: a careful comparison between Pierini's transcript and the scribes' copy evinced several instances of bowdlerization, or at the very least euphemization of the original. I attempted to restore Manduzio's words whenever possible. Pierini having reproduced only a limited portion of the text, however, I sometimes had to turn to Cassin's translation of the Italian into French to recover the original. Again, this was helpful only in a small number of cases and was duly referenced in footnotes, like the other interventions I

¹⁶ Pierini, 291-327.

identified. It occasionally became necessary to interpret the barely legible longhand of the copyists, without - hopefully - betraying the translation pact requiring fidelity to the original.

The scribes' interventions did not stop there, for they introduced a title that does not appear in the original: "*The Prophet of the Century*", is in fact an addition of their own.¹⁷ So is the opening paragraph, dating the conversion back to 1928 and referring to Donato Manduzio in the third person singular, as "Signor Manduzio", while a few lines down, Manduzio himself dates his first vision back to 1930, using the first-person pronoun *I*. He mentions the same date again both within and at the end of his *Diary*. This discrepancy can hardly have been due to Manduzio himself, and the shifting personal pronouns appear far more likely to indicate the existence of two or more redactors, with divergent versions of the same story.

The hypothesis of one or of several redactors is confirmed by three additional elements: the first list of would-be converts is dated 1929, in line with the redactor's claim that the first vision occurred in 1928, while 1930 appears far more frequently throughout the text to indicate the date of the first vision. Furthermore, several times in the *Diary*, Manduzio is referred to in the third person (p. 35; 137; 147; 159; 160), and of course the last line mentioning his death cannot be his own. There is therefore a second, anonymous narratorial voice in the *Diary* in addition to Manduzio's. The fact that a few poems composed by some of his followers are mentioned in the *Diary* even points to a polyphonic narration. The copy forming the basis of my translation is therefore a heavily redacted one.

Although I would certainly have preferred to translate from the original text, these variations do not detract from the value of the *Diary*. They indicate that it is a living document, a document that has retained its meaningfulness and its foundational status for the descendants of Manduzio's group. By adding titles and subtitles and by bringing Manduzio's text closer to standard Italian, the copyists worked like translators attempting to be faithful to the spirit, if not the letter of his writings, thus preserving Manduzio's stature and aura. This is the probable reason why they frequently toned down his earthy, straightforward language. Even the imprecision of the dates is part and parcel of this process. The copyists' additions and subtractions thus turn the *Diary* into a collective expression of the group's founding myth.

The *Diary* also raises questions about genre. Is it an autobiography, a diary, or a memoir? Manduzio frequently describes his writings as a

¹⁷ This is confirmed by Colafemmina, 41, as well as by Pierini, *ibid*.

“memoir” (e.g. p. 108; 118 etc.), and his work does comply with the requirements of the genre, since it retraces an authentic, life-changing experience. However, the *Diary* also contains poems, canticles, prescriptions on the right way to lead a religious function, a few homilies, lists of offerings, and above all an abundance of dreams, thus resisting easy categorization. It has some of the characteristics of autobiography, since he started writing in 1935, five years after the initial visions, and therefore reconstructed the past into an orderly narrative.

After ending the first section and sending it off to the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Davide Prato, in June 1938 (p. 40), Manduzio began writing again, starting over from 1931, eventually catching up with 1938 and continuing from there. His text therefore also has some of the open-endedness and linear temporality characteristic of diaries. Still, he opens the second section of his text by lumping together several of his faith healing achievements, entirely disregarding chronology in the process. Other thematic clusters occur throughout the text and give it a unity that differs from the fragmentary and heterogeneous nature of diaristic writing. After these sections, we get the sense of the here and now, and yet time is not quite linear. For instance, Manduzio mentions events that occurred on June 17, 1938 (p. 47), followed by another sequence of events on June 7 (p. 48). The loosely structured chronology of events is repeated in several instances (e.g. p. 23-24; 76-77; 78). Time seems to oscillate back and forth, exactly as memory might disregard the sequential ordering of events and condense them, and thus the text again veers towards autobiography. The *Diary* can therefore only be defined by its hybridizing of the generic conventions of different kinds of self-representational writing.

By studying the *Diary*'s historical, geographical and social context, I propose to demonstrate that, far from being a unique case, as Manduzio's story has too often been described, his conversion and his writings belong in fact to a very long tradition. Examining the *Diary*'s structure and themes from a literary perspective will also show that, far from being an ethnographic curiosity, Manduzio's text is a fully-fledged poetic creation. But Manduzio's own voice must have precedence over any commentary or analysis. His *Diary* therefore constitutes the first part of the following study.

MAIN PROTAGONISTS

The San Nicandro Jewish community numbered between seventy to eighty people in 1948. This brief list only contains the names of the group members involved in the various episodes recounted by Manduzio.

Donato Manduzio is the author of the *Diary* and the visionary mystic who started it all. His wife is Emanuela Vocino: she is his first audience, the recipient of all his visions. After his death, she becomes the guardian of his memory.

Rocco Di Paolo: a blind man and single, he is one of the first to convert. He has been to Florence at the Institute for the Blind and has attended synagogue services there. He convinces Costantino Tritto to convert to Judaism.

Costantino Tritto is married to Incoronata di Lella: he frequented two different Protestant churches before joining Manduzio's group. A cobbler, he protests Francesco Cerrone's decision to set up shop next door to him. His son Eliezer wrote a memoir about the group.

Francesco Cerrone is also a cobbler and occasional ice-cream vendor. His wife is Angela Pizzichetta (nicknamed Angiolina); they have eight children at the beginning and a ninth one is born later. They are beset by poverty. One of their children, Pasquale, will play a pivotal role after Manduzio's demise.

Angelo Marrochella is a tailor¹ who married Grazia Rendina (nicknamed Graziella), a seamstress. Marrochella has briefly been attracted by Evangelical Protestantism before choosing Judaism. He is drafted in the army in 1941.

Antonio Bonfitto is a farmer and Concetta di Leo's husband; Antonio opposes Manduzio at the beginning, while Concetta remains Manduzio's

¹ For Cassin, Marrochella is a stone-cutter (Cassin, 90), but he defined himself as a tailor in an undated letter he sent Pierini from Israel (Pierini, 170).

staunchest supporter throughout. They have had six children, of whom five survived.

Ciro di Salvia is married to Incoronata Augello: they are the unhappiest couple in the group. Manduzio tries hard to save their marriage.

Vincenzo Di Salvia is married to Costantina Augello. Manduzio defines Costantina as “a faithful woman,” whereas Vincenzo sometimes stirs up trouble.

Leonardo Leone is a merchant and Maria Frascaria’s husband. After she becomes a widow, Maria frequently turns to Manduzio for advice. He often berates her thoughtlessness.

Michele Soccio is Lucia Gravina’s husband; he did not convert to Judaism, only his wife did, albeit in a rather perfunctory fashion. Then a miraculous recovery changes everything.

Giuseppa Jannone is Michele Soccio’s mother and Lucia Gravina’s mother-in-law. She is one of Manduzio’s faithful followers. She convinces Michele and Lucia to give up their sinful ways.

Filomena De Santis is one of the very first converts in 1929 or 1930. She remains faithful to Manduzio’s teachings throughout the entire period.

Maria Luigia Jannone is a widow. Manduzio likens her to a wheel without a hub in one of his visions.

PART ONE

THE DIARY¹

Section One

This notebook was copied in August 1952 from the original notebook written by Donato Manduzio

This century's prophet

This is a true story which took place in 1928 in Southern Italy in the small city of San Nicandro, in the Foggia Province; because God inspired a very worthy man to kindle Judaism in this obscure place. This man called Donato Manduzio received by divine inspiration the duty of proclaiming the Law of the One God. And here Mr. Manduzio tells you his true story.²

-----OoO-----

A small and luminous story is told here, of a light that came out of a dark path, of a light that shines in the darkness and shadow of death.

The reader is asked not to sully this story which is the true word of God. And pay no attention to small spelling mistakes because I have never been to school and I have never been taught by a teacher. But believe me, my teacher has been the teacher of the prophets, the teacher who showed the way to Abraham on the way to Canaan and who made of Isaac his first born and who promised to Jacob that kings and princes would be his descendants and who then blessed him and gave him his name and made

¹ In the following translation, the punctuation has been modified to clarify meaning whenever necessary and the references to Biblical chapters and verses inserted in the original manuscript have been placed in footnotes. Paragraphs have been introduced as well. Apart from these modifications, the translation is as close to the text as possible.

² The passage in italics, i.e. the title and introductory paragraph were added by the copyists.

him his heir. And this name is Israel,³ my son, the one who sits at God's right hand.⁴

I am Donato Manduzio, son of Giuseppe. I was born in San Nicandro Garganico, Province of Foggia, on July 25, 1885. Because I was poor, I never went to school and did not even know how to write the letter "A". Then the European War of 1915-1918 broke out: I was drafted for military service in the 94th Infantry Regiment; there I learnt how to write a little and I did so with passion.

Then I began to love reading. I studied many novels and among them *Rotiglio* and *Magic*, but all these books were written by false shepherds. I was doing all I could to see the truth, but like a blind man, I believed in their fantasies. When I finally understood that everything in those books was untrue and made of cunning spells and sorcery, I found it repulsive to teach misleading things. I prayed to Truth and I said: "If there is a Being who created the world and rules it, a Being who is a God of justice, I truly want to serve Him."

At that time, I had many friends who came to me to be instructed about the Moon's epact⁵ and about other things I knew to be untrue. I taught them these things, but I did so very reluctantly.

In 1930, during the night between August 10 and 11, I had a vision: it was dark and I heard a voice that told me: "I'm bringing you a light." In the darkness, I saw a man who held an unlit lamp. And I told him: "Why don't you light the lamp you have in your hand?" And the man said: "I can't do it; I don't have any matches. But you have some!" Then I looked at my hand and I was indeed holding a lighted match. Then I took the lantern from his hand; it was ready with oil and a wick, and I lit it up. The darkness dissipated and then the vision disappeared. But I did not know what it meant and I kept it in my heart.

On the following day, I was in a piece of land I owned, about one kilometer away from the village, and an acquaintance came to see me with a Bible in hand. But I did not know the Bible, I had never seen it. I told him: "Why don't you read it?" And he answered: "A Protestant gave it to me, but I don't understand it; you'll understand it, I'm sure, because you know more than I do." And I took the book, and I opened the first page and, with deep amazement, I saw the Creation, and how the Eternal

³ Genesis 35:10 seq. All Biblical references are part of the original text, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Psalm 110.

⁵ The Moon's epact is a period added to the lunar calendar, so that it harmonizes with the solar calendar. Merriam Webster 9th New Collegiate Dictionary, 1983.

existed before the creation of the Earth, and how He created everything on His own. *After I read the first five books of Moses, I understood all the Bible.*⁶ And then, a light was kindled in my heart and as I remembered the vision of the night before, it occurred to me that the Bible was the light in my dream. I immediately announced to the people the One God and the words from Sinai and how the Creator rested on the Sabbath. I confirmed that God is One, and that He does not take the advice of others, because no one ever existed apart from Him. And I celebrated the sanctity of the Creator in the vastness of the heavens,⁷ and I read about His people and I listened to His people, the people of Israel. But I did not know that this people existed.

I read on to find out who was the best, the Catholics or the Protestants, and with astonishment I discovered that they were both worthless compared to the real Creator of everything. And I understood that all the gods are idols, and that whoever did not make the heavens and the earth perished under the heavens and on the surface of the earth.⁸ Then one Sunday, I was called by the head of the Protestants and I immediately went to him because he wanted to teach me his religion. After having listened to him, I asked him for his Bible, and I read to him the words of Sinai which are the Ten Commandments, and how the Eternal sanctified the Sabbath.⁹ But he said that it was in the Old Testament, so I took the New Testament and I told him that Paul had said: "He rested on the Sabbath and He gave the Sabbath to the people of God,"¹⁰ and then he was not able to answer me anything. And this is how I understood the first vision; I understood that I had to kindle a light, and that this light was the true word of the Holy One, blessed be He.

Then, I started to preach to my friends the unity of the Creator, who out of nothingness created all things in six days and sanctified the seventh day.¹¹ The Eternal called on Moses to nourish His own people.¹² Then the

⁶ The sentence in italics does not appear in the CAHJP version of the text, but in Pierini's transcription from the original. Pierini, 159.

⁷ The passage from line 23 to line 42 does not appear in the version found at the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem. It is quoted, however, by Colafemmina, 41-44. It also appears in French translation in Cassin, (1957), 22-23.

⁸ This is a rephrasing of Jeremiah 10-11: "Tell them this: "These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens."

⁹ Ezekiel, 20:8-11-31-12.

¹⁰ Hebrews, 4:1.

¹¹ Genesis 2-1-3, Isaiah 56, Ecclesiastes 58:13-14.

Creator made me understand that Israel is the firstborn among all the other nations.¹³

The Eternal gave me another vision. I was standing in spirit outside my house and I heard a voice that said: "Levi! Levi!" I looked towards the voice that came from my house, and inside it I saw a lamp with twenty-eight lights. It had four sides, and on each side, there were seven lights, and I was full of awe and wonder at the light that was within my house and then the vision disappeared. So, I thought within myself that the Eternal wanted His word to come out of my house, His word that no one had ever revealed.

*To nurture His people Israel which was the firstborn among all the nations on earth,*¹⁴ the Eternal said: "You are a treasure for all the nations that are on Earth,"¹⁵ and then I said it everywhere, and many were willing to listen to me. But because I told them that the Blessed Almighty is jealous when we hold sculptures at home, and that we must toss them in the fire and burn them, I was abandoned by all and remained with two or three friends; and one of my brothers, one of my own flesh and blood, left me forever, paying more heed to death than to life, exactly as David said: "The man who had eaten my bread bit the hand that had fed him."¹⁶

So, I told everyone about the One God and about His people Israel but without knowing that such a people existed. One day, I was talking to a friend of mine about God and His people, when a stranger heard us. He told us that the cities were full of this people, and he gave us some addresses in Florence and Turin. We sent letters there straight away, and we received an answer only from Turin, telling us to write to the Chief Rabbi in Rome, whose name was Angelo Sacerdoti.

We wrote him two letters and both of them remained unanswered. Then, the third time, he answered, saying that he had received our letters, but believing them to be pranks, he had not responded, because he had never heard that there were Jews in the Gargano region. He asked us if we had been told about the Holy Words by someone or if we had heard about them in some city.

I wrote him that I had not heard the Holy Words from anyone, but that I had received the revelation from God, just as our father Abraham

¹² Exodus, 31 seq.

¹³ Exodus, 4: 22-19

¹⁴ The passage in italics is not part of the CAHJP version but is quoted by Pierini, 161.

¹⁵ Exodus, 19:4-6.

¹⁶ Psalms, 41: 9.

received it.¹⁷ Then the Rabbi was enlightened and knew that here, there was a voice shouting that God is the One Creator. The good Rabbi always wrote to us and sent us two volumes of *The Book of the Family*, and other small gifts of Hebrew studies to make us understand that the Blessed Almighty showed Jacob his offspring and called it by the name of Israel.¹⁸

Then twin daughters were born to a brother, who gave them their names: he called the first one Sara, and the second one Esther. I informed the Rabbi of these births and he gave the brother a present of a hundred lire and he sent his fatherly blessings.

I preached the greatness of the Creator and the vanity of the idols that cannot see and cannot hear.¹⁹ Now my own brother, of the same flesh and blood, and my cousins as well, took me for a madman and they shunned me as if I were a leper. To draw them to the true light, I gave them a great deal, at my own expense, and they promised to behave well. But after receiving favors from me, they betrayed me, meaning that they *betrayed the true word of God*²⁰ that showed to Jacob the ladder and the true light of holiness.²¹ And seeing that they hated the true Word, I drove them out of my house as I would a foul and filthy thing and I welcomed the few brothers and sisters in the spirit, those who heeded the Law given by the Holy One, blessed be He, on Mount Sinai.²²

The brothers and the sisters got together in my house on the holy day and we prayed to the Blessed Almighty, so that He might send His light on Earth. One day, towards evening, on a Thursday, *a young man who might have been twenty-five or thirty years old* and whom I did not know came to my house and asked me: "Is this the house of Israel?" And I said "Yes, it is," and he said: "I was with the Carabinieri in Rome, and then I had a different job; now I want to come inside and talk to you." I asked him in and the young man went on to say: "I'm a man sent by God, I've come to tell you that the Kingdom of the Heavens has arrived, I'm the white horse." I did not believe him, but the young man kept talking on and on about the Bible and about his people, and when I saw this, I gave him food

¹⁷ Genesis, 12:7.

¹⁸ Genesis, 32:24-35.

¹⁹ Psalms, 115-136

²⁰ From this point on, all passages in italics correspond to underlined passages in the original text.

²¹ Genesis, 8:12-15 in the manuscript; the actual chapter and verse is Genesis 28:12-15.

²² Exodus, 20:1 seq.

and a bed as our father did.²³ Then on Friday, he told me that I had to write to the Rabbi in Rome, and ask him to come to San Nicandro and take me to Rome, because I was a doctor of the Law. And I was alarmed and I told him: "Write him yourself, but on one condition: if the Rabbi comes, then you are a good man, but *if the Rabbi does not come*, it will be a sign from God that *you are evil*." And he accepted.

I made him write, and then in the evening, I set him a trap and I asked him: "Who is the true son of God?", but as the saying goes, with a stomach full of bile you can't have a sweet breath, because the young man answered right away: "Jesus-Christ!" This is how he was bewildered by the Creator. And I trembled with anger and I showed him the Bible.²⁴ The young man said: "Yes, it's the truth, Jesus really was His son." And I told him about all the people who respect the Sabbath and [God's] laws; they all are [His] sons and [His] daughters.²⁵ Then I said a prayer to the Living God for that young man, and He who knows all that is concealed, gave me a vision. And I saw that I was looking at the top of a tree, and on that tree, there was a young girl who held a pruning hook in her hand to cut wood with, and the girl said to me, while showing me *a piece of dead wood* on that tree: "*It must be cut off because it's damaged*," and she immediately started cutting the branch, and the vision disappeared. And I meditated on what the Eternal had told me, that the young man *was not a good man* and that we ought to stay away from him.

Then, on Sabbath morning, I lit a lamp with olive oil and the brothers and sisters came to pray. The young man also came, and when he saw that the Sabbath lamp was lit, he said that neither the light nor the prayer were necessary any longer, because the Messiah had already come. And I went up to him and told him: "You're *an impostor and a liar*, but if you want to be good, God will forgive you. And stop blackening my name." He kept claiming that I was not a good man because I did not believe him, and I told him: "Whoever doesn't believe in God is deceitful and evil."²⁶ He said that he could repeal any law, so I wanted to drive him away.

Just then, an incredible thing happened, like a man who would give up the Creator in order to worship idols, because all those who were in my house said *that the young man was right*, and that I had to let him do things in his own way; I was astounded that the sons of Israel should kill

²³ Genesis, 18:1-8.

²⁴ Exodus, 4:22-23, Psalms, 2; Hosea 11.

²⁵ Isaiah 56:5.

²⁶ Deuteronomy 13:11 seq.

the Prophet to defend the cause of *the false shepherd* and break every law.²⁷

Then I told them a parable about what the King of France Pippin did when he wanted to burn Elisetta at the stake with her two bastard children.²⁸ And then I told them: “You don’t want that young man to leave?” And all the assembly said: “No, we don’t.” I said: “Let it be so! But later you’ll see my truth and his lie. And then, there’ll be trouble for me and for you both.”

On that Sabbath, we did not pray, and it seemed to be a day like any other. Then, while I was away, the young man said that I was evil. When this was repeated to me, I told them: “Mark my words, in a short while, you’ll all see who the impostor is and who the righteous man is. O Lord, open the eyes of all *those who come to the light from darkness*. May the sons of Israel not wander off and follow false shepherds!” Then, seeing that everyone was muttering against me, I gave food to that young man too. Then I waited for the six days we had agreed on, *but there was no news from Rome*. And so, the young man’s claims were refuted, because if the Rabbi did not come, it meant that he was an impostor, and I told him: “There. God has shown that you’re evil, and now get out of my house.”

And so, everyone could see that he was an impostor. But one brother started second-guessing me and said: “Maybe the Rabbi wasn’t in Rome! And maybe he didn’t receive the letter,” and he said we had to send a telegram. *This brother was Francesco Cerrone*. And I told him: “You don’t trust in God but you’ll soon find out. Here are five lire to send a telegram. This way, you’ll also be able to find out that you’re a liar too.”

On the same evening, there was no answer because it was already late, but on the following day at nine o’clock came the telegraphed news saying that *the young man was an impostor* and I rebuked the one who had made me send the telegram. Then I turned to the young man and while I drove him away from my house, I told him: “If you’d wanted bread, I would’ve

²⁷ 1 Kings, 19:10.

²⁸ Reference to Pépin le Bref who reigned in the 8th century. Manduzio is referring to a legendary episode recounted in Barberini’s *Kings of France*, part 3, book 6. The King’s wife, Berthe-aux-grands-pieds, was betrayed by her lady-in-waiting, Elisetta, who took her place in Pepin’s bed and tried to have Berthe killed. The queen managed to escape and Pepin miraculously ran into her while hunting. He reinstated Berthe at her rightful place and wanted to put to death Elisetta and the two daughters she had given him. Berthe magnanimously prevented him from exacting revenge. Cassin, note 23, 230.

given it to you, provided you didn't call the Holy Name in vain."²⁹ And the young man answered: "I'm going to Rome, because I'm a Doctor of the Law, and if people don't listen to me, *I'll go to the police, and the Rabbi will have to resign.*"

Then the impostor wanted to deceive me again, because after about twenty minutes, a taxi stopped before my door and there was that young man sitting in the car, and then the car owner told me: "Manduzio, do you know this young man?" And I answered, "I know him, just like you know him, and nothing more!" Then the driver made the young man get off his taxi, and told him: "There's no way I'm going to drive to Rome without being paid!" The young man got off the car angrily, cursing the Creator all the while; and upon his departure, some brothers and sisters in the spirit told me that I should have prevented him from going to Rome. Then I said: "You just don't understand! He's a liar. He's come in sheep's clothing so as not to have to do any work, but deep down inside he's a wolf."³⁰

The young man had left an overcoat with me and therefore I said that he was bound to come back again to take it back. And after a few days, I received a *letter from the Rabbi*, in which he told me that the young man had been to Rome where he had made some *fuss*. Out of sheer kindness, the Rabbi had given him some money to pay for his return fare.

Then, after a fortnight, the young man came back again to San Nicandro to pick up his overcoat, but no member of the community would offer him hospitality and everyone told him: "If you'd been wise, you would've been rewarded."³¹ And I, seeing him tormented, told him: "You didn't allow us to pray the Lord Almighty on that Sabbath day: that sin will be visited on you and on your children,"³² and I let him leave with this parting curse. In the following days, I heard that he had been arrested because he was criticizing the current government.

After this event, I swore that I would drive away from my house whoever would not speak in accordance with God's word. In this way, the Holy Name would not be desecrated anymore. Then one day, I heard that in *Lesina* too, a village in the Gargano administrative district, there were a few people who rested on the Sabbath, and then I wrote them, asking them if they had converted to Judaism too. They answered that they had, and I was invited to call on them. However, in order not to be misled once

²⁹ Exodus, 20:7.

³⁰ New Testament reference. Matthew, 7: 15. Translator's note.

³¹ Proverbs, 9:12.

³² Numbers, 14:18.

again, I wrote back asking them about their true doctrine and their goal; they answered me that they were “Pentecostals” and that they were waiting for Christ who was supposed to come down from Heaven. I understood instantly that they were impostors and thus I stopped writing to them. Five or six months later, one of the sisters of our community went to their village to sell fruit, and by chance she ran into these “Pentecostals” and they told her that *they were Jews* and on the following Sabbath, they came to me, in San Nicandro.

I prayed the Creator to know whether they were good and in *a vision* at night I found myself on the slope of a hill where there were *two shepherd huts* and on the road, there was a man and a woman, both of them pale and tormented, and I asked them: “Why are you in such a state?” And they answered me: “We’re both sick with malaria,” and right then the vision disappeared. I immediately told the brothers and the sisters what the Lord had revealed to me, and I said that these people were *sick in their spirit* and that it was not true that they had to come here, and I no longer received any news from them and they did not come either, because they were impostors, as the Lord had told me. All of us in the community glorified God who reveals hidden things.

One day, towards evening, I was outside the door of my house and I saw a man looking in my direction and he asked me: “Where is the Sabbath house?” I answered: “It’s right here, what do you want?” And the stranger told me: “I’m from Foggia, I’m an Adventist, and I’m waiting for the Messiah.” And I said to him: “Who’s the Messiah?” and he answered: “Christ who’ll come down from Heaven where He ascended.” And I called him “Satan!” And I told him: “The Messiah means the reign of Justice, when the Creator forgives the sins of the world. The Creator will make His king come out of Isaiah’s lineage.³³ He will be King and Prophet and God will make him rule the world from one sea to the next, that is, from the East to the West, from the South to the North: *the wolf will eat next to the lamb and there will be peace everywhere.*³⁴ Then I told him also: “All that the Creator did to His own people, he also did to the enemies who do not worship Him and who will fall in the valley of Gog.³⁵ The stranger was disconcerted and said that all of this was true and then he left, saying that he would come back, but then he never showed up again.

As I was corresponding with *the Chief Rabbi of Rome* and as he saw that in my letters I always referred to words taken from the books of the

³³ Jeremiah 23:8.

³⁴ Isaiah 11:6.

³⁵ Ezekiel 39:11.