

REVEALED: Dr. Diego Lucci, Part II

[Stone] Welcome to Flames of Freedom Revealed, brought to you by Lance Toland Entertainment. I'm Richard Stone, your host and co-creator of the historical drama Flames of Freedom. In these bonus episodes accompanying our dramatic stories, we explore the historical roots of the Jewish quest for liberty with world-renowned scholars, authors, and historians.

We'll delve into the background of the characters in our story who were escaping from the cruel inequities of the Portuguese Inquisition, murderous pogroms in Eastern Europe, and virulent anti-Semitism. Why were they willing to risk their lives to sail across the Atlantic Ocean to settle in the untamed wilderness of the new American colony of Georgia, founded by James Oglethorpe, but with no assurances?

that they'd even be allowed to come ashore. Dr. Diego Lucci is a professor at the American University in Bulgaria and has previously been a research fellow at the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London and the Maimonides Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Hamburg.

He is also a permanent fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and is the author of Scripture and Deism, a widely cited classic on English Deism, and his book on the Enlightenment debate on Jewish emancipation is an important contribution to the study of Jewish Gentile relations in 18th century Europe.

In this second part of a two-part interview with Dr. Lucci, we'll be exploring the roots of antisemitism in early Christian thought, and we'll be looking at how John Toland's writings completely changed the conversation around the equality of Jews in English and European culture. So I think maybe some of the ideas that flowed from this was that no church and no state could rightfully claim supernatural foundations and a monopoly of truth, and thereby he rejected the divine right system of power.

This, I think, would have been a radical departure in thinking of the time. And what were the social and political implications by rejecting this notion of divine right for power? Because it was. really rejecting the whole political structure that ran most of Europe at that time, including England.

[Dr. Lucci] Oh yeah, indeed. Well, of course, uh, Toland was not the first and not even the most important philosopher of the time to reject divine right. Everything started with Thomas Hobbes. Now, Hobbes was a supporter of authoritarianism in politics, as we know, but he was a great thinker because he was the first important contractarian political philosopher.

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What did he do? He rejected the idea that the state is a divine entity. creation. He maintained that the state is created through a covenant, a contract, a pact, essentially, and through this pact, people decide to submit to the authority of a man or an assembly of men. It can be, therefore, a king, or it can be an aristocratic government, or even a democracy, by the way.

I mean, regardless of the side of sovereignty, what matters is that political authority is created by humans who decide. to be ruled in change of safety in order to have a more secure life. Then came John Locke, and John Locke was even more important than Hobbes because Locke not only rejected the divine right system of power, but he also laid the foundation of the liberal state.

He located sovereignty in the hands of the people. And he argued that the people have the right to appoint their political representatives, the civil magistrates, but also to evaluate the civil magistrates who are accountable to the people and therefore can be reelected or replaced after the end of their term, or even before, given that Locke supported the right of revolution, the right of resistance.

Why was it so necessary to, to reject the mine right? Because, I mean, uh, Until the English Revolution, at least, kings were supposed to rule in the name of God, to be appointed by God. You know, in England, I'm talking. In France, this divine right system went on until the French Revolution. By the way, we have to thank Robespierre and others if it came to an end in continental Europe.

But in England, up to the time of Cromwell, I mean, the king was supposed to be the representative of God on earth. There was an important thing, Robert Filmer, who wrote in the time of Cromwell, but whose work, Patriarcha, was published only in 1680, posthumously. Well, Robert Filmer had this theory. He said that Adam, was actually the king.

He had a kingly power over his children, and therefore, uh, the rulers of modern Europe, the Christian rulers of modern Europe, were actually the heirs of Adam. They had a kingly power given by God to them in the same way as Adam had been given a kingly power by God directly. Locke rejected this view. He said, no, in Genesis, in the book of Genesis, when God donated dominion to Adam over the other creatures, such as animals, for instance, Adam was only a representative of mankind.

He was not a king, but only a representative of mankind. And Locke used this view of Adam as a representative of mankind in order to affirm the principle of natural equality between humans. And if human beings are naturally equal, if

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God created human beings as naturally equal and gave the world to all human beings in common, well, this means that all human beings have the right, and even a duty, I would say, to appoint some representatives to rule over them, but these are accountable to them.

So this idea which Toland embraced, because Toland was a big fan of John Locke, well this idea put into question the view that kings, monarchs, rulers in general are not accountable to the people. Now from that time on, king, monarchs, etc. became accountable to the people and in practice this happened in England with the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89.

It was the time when England became, well Britain indeed, became a constitutional monarchy. Nowadays, King Charles, unfortunately for him, is accountable to the people. He's not the only one to make and enforce decisions. Real sovereignty actually is in the hands of the representatives of the people.

[Stone] Interesting. Interesting. So, Toland, getting back to biblical history, in my reading, he blamed Paul for having deified Jesus, and he believed that this distorted the original plan of Christianity. What did Toland mean by this?

[Dr. Lucci] Very nice question, yes. The original plan for Christianity for Toland was a plan to actually accept in the Christian church, and for him the Christian church is a sort of universal church, universal human community, we can say, All those who believed in the moral precepts taught by Jesus, regardless of their particular theological ideas.

So, I mean, for him, whether Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, etc., was not so important. In his opinion, the early Christians accepted anyone would accept the moral teaching of Jesus, including Jews who continued to respect the Sabbath, for instance, including Jews who continue to follow all the 613 precepts of the Torah, of the Pentateuch, including Gentiles, for instance, who gave up their polytheism, but accepted the idea that there was one God and that this God had, uh, may had accepted actually this eternal law that had been, uh, repeated by Jesus Christ. So for Toland, the original plan of Christianity included wide toleration of all those who agreed on the moral precepts taught by Moses first and foremost, and then by Jesus.

Why did he blame Paul for having perverted this original plan of Christianity? Well, he blamed Paul because he said that Paul had introduced abstruse pagan philosophical ideas in Christianity. Ideas such as the deification of an old man, such as Jesus, indeed, who, according to Toland, was not regarded as a deity before Paul made him a god, the Son of God, indeed.

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Other ideas concern, for instance, miracles, okay? According to Toland, not believe in miracles. Other ideas concern mysteries, that is, such as the mystery of the Trinity, which is incomprehensible to reason. Well, according to Toland, the early Christians practice a perfectly rational religion consisting of morality.

So, Toland regarded Paul as a villain, as the first villain in this Christianity, because by introducing these dogmas, these abstract and useless theological, philosophical ideas into Christianity, he started the spirit of persecution. Essentially, the Gentile Christians, that is, those who had a pagan background, accepted these dogmas taught by Paul and his associates, and they started to persecute those who disagreed with them. So the concept of heterodoxy originated with Saint Paul, according to, uh, to Toland.

[Stone] So, would it be fair to say that we can trace the Church's antipathy toward the Jews that led to centuries of anti-Semitism, we can actually trace it back to Paul, in a sense?

[Dr. Lucci] According to Toland. Yes, according to Toland. Yeah, yeah. Toland saw Paul as, uh, you know, as competing with the Apostles, particularly with Peter and James. Because while Peter and James were more sympathetic to Jews who wanted to convert to Christianity, that is to follow the precepts of Jesus message, of Jesus ethics, while retaining their traditions, conversely, Paul rejected the Jewish law.

Paul presented the Jewish law as overtaken, as superseded by Christ's message, and therefore he actually opposed the practice of Jewish rituals and ceremonies among Jews who had converted to Christianity. A good way to understand why Toland regarded Paul as the initiator of anti-Judaism, if not really of anti-Semitism in Christianity, is to look at the Jewish law in the New Testament.

It's a comparison between Toland and another, later, Deist author, who conversely was very sympathetic to Paul. His name was Thomas Morgan, and Morgan depicted Paul as the hero of Christianity. Morgan was a Deist. He thought that Jesus had reaffirmed the universal and eternal law of nature, and he thought that Jesus had been crucified for this reason.

Indeed, the most important book of Morgan, published in 1737, was titled *The Moral Philosopher*. And the moral philosopher is Jesus. In this book, Morgan opposed Christian Jews and Christian Deists. And he said that the real Christians are the Christian Deists, whose views were the same as Paul's. That is, according to Morgan, the real Christians were people who just practice the

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morality as taught by Jesus without any ritual, without any ceremony, without anything, any external profession of their faith, without any worship, etc.

On the other hand, there were the Christian Jews who were not real Christians. They were people who were still attached to the external manifestation of their religion. And according to Morgan, the Jews, the Jewish converts to Christianity, by the way, were enemies to Paul because Paul was trying to teach the real Christianity, the real religion, which is an internal religion, merely morality, et cetera.

So from this, and from this comparative analysis of Toland was against Paul and Morgan, who conversely liked Paul very much, what emerges is something that these two authors have in common. That is the fact that Paul opposed Jewish rituals. Paul opposed Jewish traditions. Paul opposed the Jewish law. Paul, therefore, advocated the end of the Jewish religion, the end of, you know, of Jewish identity, we can say, in favor of a more abstract, universal, and merely theoretical adherence to this, uh, internal religion that is Christian morality.

So yes, we can say that if we read the works of these early Enlightenment thinkers of distinguished tastes, we can infer that Paul was one of the initiators of hostility to Jews among Christians.

[Stone] Interesting. That leads us to the year 1714. Toland publishes what at the time was a fairly radical book. It was entitled *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland*. And in it, he states, the Jews therefore are both in their origin and progress, not otherwise to be regarded. Then under the common circumstances of human nature, you comment that to the modern reader, this assertion sounds not, not such a profound idea, but at the time it was right. So talk to us about, about this book and its central thesis. And why was it so important? Cause it was really a stake in the ground when he wrote this book and had it published. He was taking a stand that was maybe the first of anybody to publicly come out and say, *Why are we so prejudiced against the Jews?* This doesn't make any sense.

[Dr. Lucci] Yeah, indeed. Indeed. You know, I mean, Toland's, uh, reasons, uh, was the, actually, I think the first explicit request for emancipating the Jews, naturalizing the Jews, that is making Jews citizens with all the rights and duties as all other citizens in Great Britain and Ireland.

Yeah. Why was it such a revolutionary idea? Well, to argue that Jews are the same as all other human beings was quite a revolutionary idea back in 1714. Because, uh, still in that time, Jews were regarded as inferior beings. In the

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name of, uh, supersessionism, that is, in the name of replacement theology, the new chosen people were Christians.

So one may ask, why were Jews not forced to convert everyone in Europe in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period? Or why weren't they exterminated, you know? Why? Because according to supersessionism, Jews need to be protected because when Jesus Christ will come back with the second coming of Christ, Jews will acknowledge their mistake and they will accept the Christian faith and their repentance and their acceptance of the Christian religion will be the ultimate, the final, I would say, sign that the Christian religion is the true one.

So, for this reason, Jews were preserved by the ecclesiastical authorities in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period as well, both in Catholic and Protestant Europe. Nevertheless, I mean, Jews were not Christians. They were not part of the new chosen people, so they could not be regarded as being on a par with Christians.

For this reason, they could not have the same rights as Christians. So for this reason, first, the Catholic Church, then political authorities, then Protestant churches, and the political authorities in Protestant countries imposed a bunch of prohibitions and obligations on Jews. Jews were forbidden to own real estate, own pieces of land, plots of land, houses, apartments, ships.

Why? Because the earth belongs to God and therefore a Jew, an infidel, I mean a member of a community that is not the chosen people, cannot own something that is given by God to his chosen people. Jews could not marry Christians, of course, unless they decided to convert. Jews could not have Christian servants. Because it was inconceivable that an inferior being had a servant who was a superior being, a Christian, a member of the chosen people. On the other hand, Jews were forced to do a lot of things. In some places, for instance in Venice, they had to wear a distinctive sign, usually a hat, you know, a red hat, or a circle, a red or yellow circle on their clothes.

Why this in order to be identifiable right away, then starting in the 16th century, first in Venice in the year 1516, then, uh, in all of Catholic Europe with the Papa 1555 bipolar, the fourth Jews were forced to live in ghettos. Ghettos were, I mean, neighborhoods surrounded by walls, they had gates which were closed at night, they were guarded by Christian guards, by the way, paid by Jews with their taxes, and Jews could not live among Christians in other areas of the city.

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And Jews were actually forced to practice money lending because Christians could not, officially, Christians could not practice banking. Why? Because when one loans money on interest, One makes money out of time, but the Christian cannot make money out of time because time belongs to God. Nevertheless, medieval and early modern European economy needed banking.

They needed money to be loaned to merchants, traders, uh, even the owners of a huge, uh, lots of land for agriculture. And therefore it was decided that the banking Money lending, also known with the despicable term usury, should be practiced by Jews, by these infidels, by these sinners, given that one more sin would not make their situation much worse.

Now, to say in that time that a Jew was not an inferior being, a Jew was not an infidel, a Jew was not someone who had to be submitted to Christians just because of his religion, was really a revolutionary idea. And indeed, Toland's reasons, which were written right after the Hanoverian accession to the throne of Britain, was largely ignored by the public opinion and by the political authorities.

But it also elicited some hostile reactions, a confutation in particular, a refutation, which is titled Confutation, by the way, in particular was published. And this Confutation was focused on refuting exactly this point. In his book, in his pamphlet. Tolland tried to demonstrate that all anti Semitic stereotypes were the fruit of superstition and ignorance.

Well, he's, uh, the author of The Confutation, conversely, tried to prove Tolland wrong and tried to prove that Jews were inherently evil, that they were not as worthy as Christians, etc. They were not so useful to society as conversely Tolland tried to show, and therefore it was still a very, very deeply rooted prejudice.

To such an extent, if I can conclude this discussion about the condition of Jews in England back then, to such an extent that in the year 1753, the English Parliament decided to naturalize Jews. The Jewish Emancipation Bill became an act. Indeed. But less than one year later, it had to be abrogated. The weak majority in Parliament, which had advocated the passing of this bill, the passing of this act, and therefore the emancipation of Jews in England, preferred to abrogate this act due to the huge and violent reaction of Tory pamphleteers, Tory politicians, and of a large part of the public opinion, who still reaffirmed old anti Semitic stereotypes.

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And since the Whigs were afraid of losing the elections in 1754, they preferred to deprive Jews of the emancipation that had just been granted to them. In the end, Jews were emancipated. only gradually in England during the mid 19th century. Full emancipation came in the year 1858 when Lionel de Rothschild was finally allowed to sit in Parliament without taking a note to the Christian God.

After being elected multiple times and after being denied, I mean, his membership to the House of Commons, multiple times. So we can say that Britain was one of the last countries to emancipate its Jews in Europe. 1858, this was the year. So what's so interesting is if we go back to 1656 when the Jews first were tacitly allowed in, but there was never a formal emancipation and it took nearly 200 years really for that to take place.

Yes. 1656, 1858. 202 years. 200 years.

[Stone] Amazing. Amazing. I want to talk a little bit, I know this is not your area of expertise, but our story is about the first Jews who come to America, to Georgia, uh, in 1733. And the colony there was led by James Oglethorpe. And Oglethorpe. did something that was relatively radical at the time. He contravened the wishes of the trustees and he allowed the Jews to come and stay. And, uh, so he took a big risk doing that. He also had a taken a major stance against slavery. So, do you think that, uh, that Toland perhaps set the stage, we don't know whether James Oglethorpe, who spent some time at Oxford, whether he may have been exposed to this book or not, what was the impact of this on the wider political and social and religious environment when this book came out that could have actually impacted the thinking of people like James Oglethorpe?

[Dr. Lucci] Well, yeah, you know, I'm not a specialist in Oglethorpe's life and deeds, you know, but of course I know that he was an important Tory politician, by the way, colonial administrator. He was an officer in the British army. I mean, as you are showing in your podcast, he played a crucial role in the founding of the province of Georgia in North America.

And, uh, I've also noticed that Oglethorpe lost re election to the House of Commons in 1754. The year when there was the big scandal about the emancipation of Jews and, uh, and the Whigs decided to withdraw the Jewish Emancipation Act. Well, I think that, you know, the resurgence, the re emergence of antisemitism back then, Played a role in Oglethorpe not being elected, probably was regarded as a friend of Jews, and this is one of the reasons

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why he was not reelected, you know, maybe, you know, that's a hypothesis that I'm making now.

But yeah, what was the reception? And I would say the impact that Toland and other thinkers such as Locke, Bale, Spinoza, Voltaire himself, by the way, had on the ruling class. back then. Well, yeah, when Reasons by Tolland were published, Oglethorpe was only 18 years old, 17 years old. I think he was already at Oxford.

It's possible he read or at least he knew of Reasons. Given that this, um, I mean, this pamphlet is circulated quite widely, even among students at the two Universities that is Cambridge and Oxford, and therefore I will not be surprised if I knew that Oglethorpe read or at least knew about Toland's ideas concerning Jewish emancipation.

Then the debate on Jewish emancipation went on, by the way. There are very interesting books on, uh, on this topic, uh, particularly by two good friends of mine. One is, uh, Adam Sutcliffe, uh, who is an English historian and teaches at King's College London. The other one is, uh, Ron Schechter, another good friend of mine who teaches at, uh, the College of William and Mary.

And Sutcliffe and Schechter have the same thesis, essentially. They say that for Enlightenment thinkers and for the ruling classes in Europe, and in the Americas as well, in the age of Enlightenment, Jews were more important for what they represented than for who they were in fact. Why? Because one of the major projects of the culture of the Enlightenment was the emancipation project.

And when we talk of emancipation, we talk of emancipation of mankind as a whole, of humankind as a whole. Emancipation from, first of all, political oppression from the ancient regime, from the divine right of rulers. Emancipation from oppressive authorities who were Much, much different from the liberal democratic system of power that we know nowadays, from the liberal system of power that was advocated by Locke, partly by Spinoza as well, by Toland, you know, and on the other hand, we also talk of emancipation from internal chains, from the chains of ignorance, superstition, belief in sacred books, belief in religious ideas that are not confirmed by reason.

Now, Oglethorpe seems to me to be a very enlightened person. He opposed slavery. He was in favor of the Jewish settlement in Georgia. He was definitely a philosemite. And I had the suspicion that, you know, his opposition to slavery. And this philosemitism emerged from an attitude that we can regard as the philosophical one.

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Typical of the emancipation project of the Enlightenment, because Enlightenment thinkers and part of the ruling class back then thought that if we want to emancipate humankind as a whole, first of all, we have to emancipate the oppressed elements of humankind, Jews and slaves. Jews and blacks. I mean, those who had lived in a condition of inferiority and submission for centuries because of theological ideas, and this is the case of Jews, and those who had been enslaved and forced to work in the Americas, and this is the case of slaves.

So yeah, Toland's Reason, as I have argued, by the way, in a book that I've written on Toland and other projects on the emancipation of Jews, well, Toland's Reason is one of the emblematic Uh, works concerning this attitude of the enlightenment. That is the project of emancipation of men, of humankind starting with the most marginalized elements of human, which back then were actually the Jewish minority in Christian Europe, and slaves, of course, in the territories colonized by Europeans, in Americas.

[**Stone**] I think, uh, we are reaching the end of our time, Diego. That was a wonderful wrap up and conclusion. I want to thank you for your generous time. And I know our listeners will be enlightened by learning more about this era and these important thinkers. And we look forward to talking with you again soon.

[**Dr. Lucci**] Thank you for inviting me, and it was a pleasure for me to talk of Toland, who is an author, in my opinion, is underrated. I think he was one of the most important researchers on the history of religion, uh, of the earliest researchers on the history of religion. He was an original philosopher who drew on Locke, Spinoza, and other things from the time, but elaborated his, uh, his own original philosophical ideas.

And I think it's an honor to be rediscovered, given also his role in advocating for Jewish emancipation as well.

[**Stone**] Thank you so much. In our next Flames of Freedom Revealed episode, we'll be speaking with Michael Thurmond. Thank you for listening to Flames of Freedom Revealed, hosted by Richard Stone and produced and directed by Mark Simon.

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