Rabbi Eliyahu Benamozegh (1822-1900) and Conversion to Judaism

Rabbi Eliyahu Benamozegh was born in Livorno (Leghorn), Italy. The Jewish community of Livorno is one of the youngest in Italy. The first records of the arrival of Jews to that city date back to the late 16th century, when Ferdinand I de Medici (1549-1609), the Duke of Tuscany, granted the Jews of Livorno the right to freely exercise their religion, something that was uncommon at that time. The original Jewish population of Livorno was of Sefaradim who were expelled from Spain and lived in the Balkans, or of those converted to Christianity by force (anusim) that moved to Livorno from Spain or Portugal to openly practice their religion.

When Rabbi Benamozegh was born, Livorno had a Jewish population of between 7,000 and 10,000 members. There were synagogues, Jewish schools, charitable institutions, etc. and a very important Hebrew printing company founded in 1650.

The parents of Rabbi Benamozegh came from Fez, Morocco. His father Abraham, married Clara Coriat at 70 years old (sic.) And he died when Eliyahu was only 4 years old. Rabbi Eliyahu was educated in Tora by his uncle and received his semikha, rabbinic ordination at thew age of 18. He spoke and wrote Italian, French, Spanish, English and, of course, Hebrew.

Rabbi Benamozegh dedicated his life to teaching and defending the Tora.

An example.

In those times, around 1840, the ideas of the first Jewish reformists spread from Germany to all of Europe. The message was that traditional Judaism was out of fashion and represented a huge impediment to the integration (assimilation) of European Jews into modern Christian society. The call of the day was to modernize Judaism. How? Leaving only its universal message, and eliminating all its ritual (Mitsvot) such as circumcision, Shabbat, Kashrut,Tefillin, etc. As we know most of the leaders of the Reform Movement , or their children, ended up completely abandoning Judaism, and

many, converting to Christianity.
Much of Ribbi Eliyahu Benamozegh's work focuses on demonstrating the preeminence of Judaism, and that the is eternal. One of Rabbi Benamozegh's most important books is called "Morale Juive et Morale Chrétienne …" ("Jewish morality and Christian morality, a comparative examination, followed by some reflections on the principles of Islam"). This book was published in Paris, 1867.
In this book Rabbi Benamozegh explains that although Christianity and Islam were based on Jewish ethics, they ended up deviating from it. Rabbi Benamozegh criticizes that these religions, which supposedly came to replace Judaism, fail to see (or decided to ignore) that original Judaism still exists. And on top of that, to justify the existence of their new religions, its leaders have dedicated themselves to fighting Jewish religion and persecuting, destroying or converting Jews to these new religions.
A short quote: "Christianity has always been a fragmented Hebraism, devoid of the elements that link it to practical aspect of life in this world … Muhammad formulated and designed the world to come [hell and paradise in Islam YB] as a reflection of what he saw in this world. He projected the pains, desires and whims of this world, its materialism and the pleasures of the flesh, into the muslim life after life. … Islam adopted from Judaism mainly its social and political side, while Christianity preferred to adopt its spiritual and metaphysical aspect [and put aside its practical and political aspect YB]"
In other words: while the reforming Jews of Germany struggled to prove that Judaism was outdated, and while they went out of their way to be accepted by the Gentile society, Rabbi Benamozegh proved that Judaism was the true religion. The first, last and only "covenant" that God made with a people, He made it with the people of Israel.
It should be noticed that in the past it was inconceivable that a Jew would dare to "defend" his religious ideas, let alone dare to suggest that other "biblical" religions were merely fragmentary imitations of the Tora.
Rabbi Eliyahu Benamozegh is one more example of those Forgotten Giants , Hakhamim Sepharadim who have contributed so much to modern Jewish thought, and have been completely

ignored and forgotten …
I have not yet begun to write about Rabbi Benamozegh’s position on conversion to Judaism … I will leave this BH for tomorrow.