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# **Conservative Judaism and Modern Thought:**

**A Symposium.**

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**No. 1.**

## **The Function of Judaism.**

**By HERBERT M. ADLER, LL.M.**

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## The Function of Judaism.

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It has been said that Judaism is not a religion but a misfortune. There is at least this grain of truth in Heine's bitter aphorism, that the avowal and practice of Judaism involve a serious material sacrifice. Even in a tolerant country like our own, they entail obvious disadvantages; for we form a small but compact minority which rigidly refuses to mingle its blood with that of the land of its adoption, and which, though composed largely of alien elements, is yet solid within itself, and solid also with the same minority in every other country. That we should be regarded, at least by some, with a certain degree of suspicion and dislike is an inevitable result of these conditions. In addition, there are the restraints we ourselves impose upon our liberty of action by conforming to religious ceremonies and observances. And since these trammels—if such they be—can be shaken off in a day by giving up the profession of Judaism, the Jew who remains a Jew—not through the compulsion of others, or his fear of shocking them, nor yet from mere lethargy and inanimity—must (it might be assumed) necessarily have some great cogent reason behind him. The repetition of some half-digested formula is not, and cannot be sufficient motive for a man or woman, adult in mind and experience. To the investigator of history it may possess the merit of antiquity; to the student it may afford a cut-and-dried answer sufficient to satisfy an examination-paper; but to men of flesh and blood, and for the practical work of life, it lacks altogether the conclusiveness which a deduction arrived at by a process of self-argumentation and self-conviction can alone produce.

### Have Jews a Mission?

The question we set ourselves to answer is this: What object do we serve by remaining Jews? In other words, what is the function of Judaism? I suppose we have all answered the question in our own way, and this essay, therefore, professes to do no more than to formulate the answer as it presents itself to the mind of the writer, and in its broad outlines, to that of the other members of the circle whose deliberations have given rise to this publication.

Now to point to the past and to show what we—or, rather, our predecessors—have achieved centuries ago, is plainly irrelevant. Have we any work now? Or have we had a mission, and is it accomplished? If we are to believe even so friendly a writer as Renan, we must think that we are the tragic survivors of our destiny. In other words, having produced Jesus, we should by rights have been put long ago on the world's scrap-heap with the other useless and discarded instruments of a past, or, at best, have earned a place as an interesting exhibit in a theological museum. We ask ourselves, then, what is the ideal which we have set up as being worthy of eternal perpetuation? Wherein does the teaching of Judaism excel that of other creeds? To answer this question, let us for a moment compare our own religion with the other great religions of the world, and attempt to differentiate it from them.

### Replacing Paganism.

Paganism and idolatry are easy to distinguish from Judaism. The Deity in their case takes a corporeal form, or there are many deities, and they each have a form and characteristics of their own. The form is sometimes human, sometimes, and more rarely, it is an inanimate body, such as Fire in the religion of Iran. Where the godhead assumes a human form, he also usually assumes human emotions and passions and even weaknesses. He is frequently capricious, and is prone to care more for his own sacrifices and personal aggrandisement than for the welfare of his devotees. It has been the glorious and undisputed achievement of Judaism in the past, that it has uprooted Idolatry with its debased morality, its cramping superstitions and its repellant rites, and has set up in its place the idea of a sole and eternal Creator, all of whose acts and commands are righteous, such, that is, that the best reason and instincts of the highest of mankind recognise that they are just and good. Nor was this consummation the work of a few generations, but slowly and not unswervingly the Israelites assimilated this lofty conception. From the patriarchal days of their nomadic existence down to the time of the Babylonian captivity, we see the idea of the worship of the Universal Father making headway into the hearts and minds of Israel, carrying on an incessant war with the alluring paganism of the surrounding nations, sometimes overcome by it, and sometimes victorious, yet always persistent. After the return from the captivity the Jews never again lapsed into their old sin. Hellenism might win over the younger spirits for a time, but it meant a change of civilisation only, of manners and dress, but not a change of creed. It is hardly an exaggeration, therefore, to say, that to Judaism and to the Jews, every Christian and Mohammedan directly owes his emancipation from idolatry.

### The Gap between Judaism and Islam.

The religion of Mohammed has a good deal in common with our own. Not that there is anything remarkable in this fact. For Judaism and the Talmud had (as has been frequently shown) a considerable influence on the beliefs of the various sects in Arabia before the preaching of the Prophet. Moreover, it was to the Jews that Mohammed first turned with the greatest confidence, and it was among them that he hoped to find his readiest adherents. Not till they had finally rejected his preaching, and after his victories had definitely secured his position, did he vent his pent-up spleen upon them. Islam taught that there was one God, all-just and all-merciful, whose Will must be the rule of life, and that to it all must submit themselves. "God is great. There is no god but God, and Mohammed is his prophet." The last proposition alone is the one that Judaism cannot accept. And yet Mohammed never claimed to be more than man. "Is it then Mohammed," asked Abu Bakr, his successor in the Khalifate of the weeping Moslems as they frantically mourned the death of their prophet, "or the God of Mohammed that we have learned to worship?" Nevertheless, the other articles of Islam, the prominence given to the belief in angels, the nature of the belief in the future life, constantly and prominently holding out, as it appears to do, a mere material reward in the shape of a somewhat sensuous exaggeration of the pleasures of life upon earth, and the fatalism, induced by its doctrine of predestination and ingrained in all those who profess the faith, place it at a considerable distance from Judaism. Greater still is the gap which we find between the two religions when we examine the positive side of Judaism and compare it with the teachings of Mohammedanism, and when we contrast the formalism and exclusiveness of Islam with the mystical sublimity of the Hebrew prophets.

### The Ethics of Christianity.

Of far greater interest and moment is the comparison of Judaism with the great religion of Western civilisation—Christianity, in its different forms. At the outset, it cannot be too clearly emphasised, the

religion of Jesus, or even that of his early followers, must be kept absolutely distinct and viewed absolutely separately, from that of modern churches. For to one who attempts to regard the question with the cool and impartial judgment proper to a purely historical investigation, the divergencies are enormous. It has been pointed out by many competent scholars and—though it has been contested with great heat by innumerable theologians—the conclusion does not appear above the range of the normal lay intellect, that the fair result of the three earlier gospels is to show that Jesus did not himself lay claim to a divine or even a superhuman nature, but at the most believed himself in the later stages of his preaching, to be the long-looked-for Messiah. The working of miracles and cures was a power equally attributed to many of his contemporaries, who never themselves dreamed, or were imagined by others, to be more than men. The whole teaching of Jesus is founded on the Law and the Prophets, and the Jew of to-day who turns from the Gospels to the doctrines of Christianity, is tempted to wonder what Jesus himself would have thought of the supersession by his followers of the Sabbath,\* that most sacred of Jewish institutions, or of the replacement of the very key-stone of Judaism, its uncompromising monotheism, by a tripartite godhead, to which he himself is made to contribute, and to speculate on how he would have regarded the distinction drawn by some of the less tolerant of his modern followers, between his God and the God of the Old Testament. It is one thing, therefore—he it said with all the reverence which such a subject demands—to speak of the religion of Jesus, and another of Christianity. But from the moral and ethical precepts, which he expounded so forcibly and eloquently, how can we disagree? They are essentially Jewish. They were taught by some of the best and noblest of the Jewish Rabbis. The surprising extent to which this is the case has been shown by Wünsche, who goes through every sentence of the Sermon on the Mount, and for almost every phrase finds a Jewish parallel. This process has been called *mann*, and so it might be if its object were merely to detract from the originality or character of their utterer. But for us there is a far deeper and more important object in the enquiry. For we are told that Christian ethics are something different in nature from, and transcending aught to be found in Judaism; and if we admit (what, as fair-minded persons, we should probably do) that the ethical teaching of Jesus is right and noble, in that it commends itself to our innate sense of truth and equity, and our desire for the welfare of others, we should have to go further and admit the superiority of the Christian faith in a most important respect over our own, if the assertion were well founded. But this we deny.

### The Jewish Elements of Christianity

We say, in the first place, that all that is best in Jesus' teaching is to be found in the utterances of the prophets of the Old Testament. He may have embodied the substance in more modern, and perhaps sometimes in more striking language, yet it was commentary that he preached and not new matter. Secondly, it must not be forgotten that the Rabbis, even before the age of Jesus, were constantly engaged in bringing out the moral truths of the Bible, and in showing how they could be applied to the circumstances of the day. They, too, preached homilies and surrounded themselves with disciples. The lives and recorded sayings of men like Hillel, the very founder of Rabbinism, scholar and saint, yet humble towards all, tolerant of opposition, gentle with the weak, and sympathetic with the lowliest and least-educated who approached him, these are abiding and irrefutable proofs which demonstrate how unfair and inaccurate it would be to regard Jesus' teaching as something of a different class from that of the Jewish Rabbis, and to ignore the fact that it was moulded by, and indeed based upon, their own. "The impression conveyed to the Rabbinic student," says a high authority on the subject, "by

\* It is true that Jesus opposed the rigidity of the Rabbinic rules relating to the observance of the Sabbath, but he never appears to have detracted from its sanctity.

† Professor Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*.

the perusal of the New Testament, is in many parts like that gained by reading an old Rabbinic homily." "The Lord's Prayer"—and I think that no-one has ever doubted the sublimity of its compressed earnestness—is Jewish in every word and phrase. What is perhaps the most striking (and some would say the most characteristic) sentence in it: "And forgive our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors," is an exact parallel with, if, indeed, it is not a reminiscence of, the words of another Jesus—Jesus ben Sirach: "Forgive thy neighbour the hurt he hath done thee, so that thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest." Whether or not Rabbinism is the sordid and arid dogmatism which it has often been represented to be, can only be refuted by studying the Talmud and the Midrash. But let these two quotations alone speak for themselves.

"Who is strong? He who changes an enemy into a friend." (Aboth d'Rabbi Nathan, S., 23.)

"Our Rabbis have learned: they who prefer to be the oppressed rather than the oppressors, who hear an insult without retorting with an insult, who do all for the love of God and rejoice over the sufferings which they endure for His sake, it is they who are the friends of God, and who will yet shine forth as the sun in his strength." (Talmud Babli, *Sabbath*, 88 b.)

It may be true, therefore, on the one hand, that Jesus emphasised the spiritual side of the religion to no small a degree, it may be that he directed his preaching largely to the uneducated, who till then may have been left too much in the cold—women in particular, and "publicans and sinners"—and it may be, on the other hand, that we have not always been true to the best of our teachers, and that we have at times forgotten their teaching, yet these facts would in no way warrant the assertion that the morality of the Gospel is un-Jewish.

### An Unbridgeable Gulf.

Where, however, there is an unbridgeable gulf between the two religions, is in the matter of dogma. The mystery of the Trinity and the apparent arithmetical paradox which it predicates, leave only one clear and intelligible impression upon the Jewish mind; that it is not monotheism. It would be unfitting for us to exult in the superiority, obvious to us, of a pure monotheism over any alloy of it; yet we cannot but feel that orthodox Christianity, being what it is, it would be idle to say that the mission of the preaching of God's unity is a thing accomplished, or to assert that it is a mere philosophic speculation that separates our faith from the dominant religion. Not a whit less important, I venture to think, is the divergence produced by the doctrine of mediation. The whole notion is utterly and radically foreign to Judaism, in essence and effect. It implies: (1) that man does not stand in direct relation to God, but that he needs an interceder through whom he may approach him; and (2) that God cannot or does not dispense mercy gratuitously and without consideration.

Judaism, on the other hand, teaches that every man is solely and entirely responsible to his Maker for his thoughts and actions. His justification cannot be obtained by faith alone, but must be won by good deeds. If he meets with less than his deserts for his sin, it is because of the unrestrained mercy of his Creator who "remembereth that we are dust," and who "delighteth not that the wicked should die, but that he should return from his ways and live." Repentance has therefore bulked large in our religion; for by it alone we are taught, if indeed it needs teaching, that the divine attribute of pardon may be called forth. It provides the great incentive which every human mind needs to direct it, and to keep it in the path of right. At the same time, the notion of a Hell, whether as a place of purgatorial suffering, or as a mere chamber of torture, has never found

\* c.f. the prayer **הוה** which is first met with in the prayer-book of R. Amram: "Magnified and hallowed be the name of the Supreme King of Kings . . . in the world he hath created, this world and the world to come, in accordance with His will and the will of them that fear Him." "Lead us not into the power of sin . . . or temptation or scorn, let not the evil inclination have sway over us." Morning Prayer; see *Berachoth* 60b. "Thine, O Lord is the Kingdom and the Supremacy over all." 1. Chron. xxix., 11.

§ Ecclesiasticus xxviii., 2.

more than a transitory and very partial acceptance among Jewish beliefs, and the best teaching among us has always been, that the true motive for leading a virtuous and moral life, should be neither fear nor precaution, but love, the love of God which impels us to draw ourselves nearer to him by obeying his commands. "Be not like servants who serve their master upon condition of reward."|| It is in this spirit that the contemplation of the back-sliding Rabbi who repented too late, and to whom all share in the future life was supposed to have been denied, evoked the exclamation: "What an opportunity of showing his love for God by serving Him for his own sake!"

### Catholicism and its Effects

I have so far dealt only with the newer or reformed branch of Christianity that goes by the name of Protestantism. Catholicism, however, contains additional divergencies from the cardinal principles of Judaism. It is true that the Virgin Mary has never been raised to the circle of the Trinity, and occupies a theoretically subordinate position, yet (if one may speak from observation) she is worshipped with as great fervour, and perhaps even greater assiduity, than the less intelligible God-head. And the objective reality assigned to the innumerable saints of the Calendar seems inevitably and almost universally to have led to a similar result. How can it appear to an impartial and unprejudiced mind to be other than a logical consequence that the authority and supremacy assigned to the Deity should be impaired by such a division of allegiance? The priesthood, again, and the doctrines of absolution sunder us violently apart. At first sight, these institutions might not appear particularly repugnant to Judaism, but it is by their effect that we must judge of them. It is true that absolution, in order to be effective, must be accompanied by repentance, and that repentance entails reparation wherever reparation is possible; so far, there is nothing between us. But that the priest should be the keeper of the layman's conscience, that he should be God's vice-regent, and that mercy should not be obtainable save through him, these are notions utterly foreign and almost incomprehensible to us. The greatness of the Deity seems to us to be in no degree repugnant to his accessibility. On the contrary, to declare the second quality to be inconsistent with the first, is to ascribe one of man's characteristics—if not one of his shortcomings—to his Maker.

There are other religions and quasi-religions which, perhaps, we ought not to leave out of account in arriving at the distinctive qualities of Judaism.

### Unbiblical Character of Theism.

Theism is a vague term by which no doubt different persons would understand different things. In the main, however, I suppose it denotes the belief in one God and subservience to His will. Yet how is the latter to be manifested? Mr. Voysey apparently takes the promptings of the individual as his guide, assuming that we have all a sufficient nucleus of idealism within us to make that guide safe and efficient. The salient feature about Theism seems to be that it lives in and on the present. It confesses to being imperfect. It has no past. It would be impossible to say that there existed a Theistic morality. The Theist is therefore thrown continually upon himself. He must work out for himself not only his first principles, but every application of them to his life. He has no external authority in revelation or tradition to which he can appeal. Even the consensus of the best opinions of his own time cannot serve him as a safe guide. He has one source of inspiration only—his individual conscience. One would imagine, therefore, that though in the case of a few great souls, Theism might provide a real impetus to right living, yet to the average man with an average mind and average instincts, it would be found painfully intangible and inadequate, like water as a medium of locomotion would be to a man who cannot swim, or like the thin air

|| Antigonus of Socho in Aboth I.

¶ Cf. Psalm cxlii, 5-6.

of the mountain-peak to a dweller on the plains. Whether this be the case or not, the fact remains, that Theism does not take the working part of its religion from the Bible, or from any other book or tradition. Therein alone it differs materially from Judaism.

An ethical cult is perhaps rather a philosophy than a religion. Its followers do not profess to obey a divine will, or to worship a divine power. Whilst not denying the existence, or, at least, the possibility of the existence of a Deity, their attitude seems to be that it is to be regarded as an immaterial factor in life; for such higher Power (if it exists) is assumed to be indifferent to human action. The rule of right-living is sought for in man himself. In other words, the centre of gravity is shifted from God to man. It follows with even greater certainty than in the case of Theism, that man must work out his duty for himself, but in this case, it is the mind that is appealed to, and not the soul—the brain, and not the conscience. To Ethics as to Theism as a guide in life there is attached the inevitable drawback, that there can, ex-hypothesi, be no "norm" or standard of conduct. It is the judgment of the individual and not collective opinion that is set up as an arbiter of right and wrong. So that if either doctrine became general, all that portion of the community whose intuition of righteousness is imperfectly developed, or whose perception of the ultimate good of all is obscured by their over-graphic realisation of their personal advantages—all these, instead of rising to the ideals set up by the greatest and noblest workers in the cause of religion, its prophets and missionaries, would sink to the dead level of their own natures. In the case of Ethics, there is not even the force which exists at the back of Theism to keep its adherents true to the practice of their own principles: there is no sanction and no authority to deter the wrong-doer from evil. There is no higher Power he need fear to offend or can hope to propitiate.

#### The Positive Side of Judaism.

To sum up in a few words the result of the comparison we have been making, we may say that Judaism means the worship of an incorporeal and indivisible God, who is righteous and requires righteousness of mankind, who is just, and at the same time, merciful, and whose mercy requires no mediator. Morality is part of man's worship of Him; it possesses a definite character, and its foundations rest on the Bible.

This morality is the positive side of Judaism. I venture to think that the tendency of modern times is rather to lose sight of this and to whittle our religion away almost to vanishing point. Judaism is not a mere negation. Our creed is not, "There are not more Gods than one"—an assertion that is compatible with Atheism—but "the Lord is our God: the Lord is One." Nor can this sentence be divorced from the next verse of this all-famous passage: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might." There are positive and active duties enjoined by Judaism, quite apart from all ceremonial observances, and they are not less important because they can only begin when the negative proposition is established. The reverence of God and the love of mankind is the sum of Judaism. **יראת שמים** on the other hand, and **נְשִׁיאוֹת חֶסֶד** on the other. The latter phrase is hard to translate. The nearest equivalent in English would perhaps be, "doing another a good turn." Its very difficulty of translation is perhaps due to the fact that it contains so much that is characteristically Jewish. The Mishnah calls **נְשִׁיאוֹת חֶסֶד** one of the foundations upon which the world rests. One of the earliest Jewish prayers asks for **נְשִׁיאוֹת חֶסֶד** from Heaven. To make the meaning of the phrase concrete is easy, if we may proceed by illustration. To save another from danger, to ransom him from bondage, to clothe the naked and to feed the hungry, are obvious examples. To show hospitality to a wayfarer, though he be neither starving nor naked, to keep a friend from temptation by a timely rebuke, to help him back if he succumbs to it, to assist him to dower his daughter, to walk with him on a lonely road, to reconcile him with his enemy—all



these are instances of what the Rabbis thought were the duties, or rather the opportunities, of a good Jew. Each of them constitutes a מצוה and the Midrash is never tired of pointing out how they all come within the golden rule of Micah: "To do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly" with God, or the even briefer injunction of the Pentateuch, to love our neighbour as ourself. The Jewish embodiment of these qualities was Aaron, the weak and human Aaron, who followed the people into Idolatry, and who could not dismiss his private grief from his public office. "Be of the disciples of Aaron," said Hillel, "loving peace and pursuing peace, loving mankind and bringing them nearer to the Law." It is a beautiful, though daring legend which tells that Aaron's death came מנשיקתו של הקב"ה by a kiss from the divine lips.

### Judaism and Brotherly Love.

Judaism lays great stress on the respect which we owe to the feelings of others. Thus we are told that three men have no share in immortality: "the adulterer, the man who puts his neighbour to the blush in public, and he who attaches a malicious nick-name to him." There is a quaint passage in the Talmud,\*\* which interprets the words, "Happy is he that considereth the poor," in the forty-first Psalm, as meaning: Happy is he who takes care to show consideration to the object of his charity. It relates how this was the practice of a certain Rabbi Jonah. If he saw anyone of good family who had fallen on evil days, he would invent some excuse for giving him pecuniary assistance, such as that he had just heard that the other had come into alegacy abroad, but that as it would take time for him to receive the money, he proposed to lend a sum which he could repay when his ship came home. Having thus induced him to accept the money, he would tell him later of the pious fraud he had practised, and insist on his keeping the sum as a present.

Regard for the brotherhood of Israel is another corner-stone of Judaism. "All Israel are brethren." The closeness, too, of the family tie and the sacredness of the home are constantly impressed upon the Jew, and the large part which acts of family worship bear in his life has constantly fostered this ideal. On the highest pinnacle stands the duty which father and mother owe to their children in bringing them up to a sense of true religion, and in fitting them by a practical education for the work of life. "May the All-merciful bless my father, my teacher, and my mother, my teacher," runs the Grace after meals. The Rabbis have even said that no man has done his duty by his children who has not taught them how to swim. And on the other side the child is required to repay this care by a full measure of respect and veneration. Nor does filial obedience cease with his parents' death. For a year he repeats in public worship the exalted words of the Kaddish, and once every year, on the anniversary of their death he keeps that day in the Calendar as sacred to their memory.

### The Cheerful Note in Judaism.

The most characteristic feature of Judaism is its joyousness.†† "Serve the Lord with rejoicing," is its keynote. It does not teach that life is a burden; it knows nothing of the doctrine of original sin. The body, though it may not become the master, is likewise not a slave. Natural pleasures, taken in moderation, are gifts which man should take as freely as they are given. To the pious Jew, every one of them is but an opportunity of showing his gratitude for his Creator's bounty. To spurn them would be to insult the Giver. Food and drink, the hearing of good news, the sight of the sea, flowers and even new clothes, have each of them their appropriate blessings. Sabbath and festivals are days of rejoicing and recreation as well as of sanctity; they are honoured by better fare and better raiment. The mortification of the flesh is an idea abhorrent to Judaism. It is harmful as well as useless, for it impedes the body's efficiency. And since the acts of every day are regarded not as unavoidable sacrifices to

\*\* Baba Bathra 9 b.

†† See an article by Mr. Biddle on "Theism and Judaism" in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* for January, 1907.

mortality, but as needs or pleasures, neither contemptible nor unworthy, Judaism has sanctified the whole of life; for it enters into its every detail and becomes, not a fitful spur to progress, but a calm and well-regulated rule of conduct. "When thou walkest it shall lead thee; when thou liest down it shall watch over thee; and when thou wakest it shall talk with thee."

### Jewish Attitude to other Religions.

It is said that Judaism ignores the Gentile, and there is at least some substance in the accusation. The earlier books of the Bible deal, no doubt, primarily with the duties of Jew to Jew. The reason is obvious. The Jews were confined to their own country then. Relations with the non-Jew were limited to war and commerce. He was either an irreconcilable heathen, or he was a naturalised proselyte. But the prophets, living in a later age, dreamed of the extension of the worship of the true God beyond the narrow boundaries of Judæa into the whole world, without distinction of race or tribe. Nor in such sayings as that of Hillel which I have already quoted, are Jews referred to, but the very widest word in the Hebrew language is employed: *בריות* "fellow-creatures." It could not be expected that the almost uninterrupted centuries of persecution and isolation to which the Jews were afterwards subjected, would foster the spirit of toleration or universal brotherhood among them. The victims of Hadrian's ruthless persecutions, the martyred hundreds of York, the communities massacred by the Crusaders, the hunted quarry of the Inquisition were not likely to proclaim, or to inspire those that were left, to preach the duties which they owed to their masters; nor in the lull of oppression did the Ghetto open its iron gates to allow of that free intercourse between Jew and Christian under which alone the Jews might have learnt to put into general practice the principles which they practised towards one another. Instead, the religion grew inwards. Circumstances, of course, have now entirely changed, and with his wider liberty the Jew may be expected to broaden to its older, and beyond its older, limits the aspect of his obligations to those of other creeds.

### The Jewish Mission Stated.

Let us assume, then, that we are convinced that Judaism is different from other religions, that its teaching is nobler than any of theirs, and that its worship is purer, why (one naturally asks) do we not try to spread it? Is our function simply to live our own religion, or are we to try to influence the world—and how? Missionaries, in the ordinary sense, we certainly cannot claim to be. Missionary work has at times been carried on by our people and not without success. Yet we have generally felt that no permanent good could be effected by this means, and it has seldom had enthusiasts among us. The reason is not far to seek. To Jews their mission has constantly been held up as a national and not an individual undertaking. We think that our duty lies in preaching to the world as a nation. They might refuse to listen to our words. They cannot disregard our existence. The individual dies, but the nation has a life of indefinite duration. We believe that we are a "Kingdom of priests," chosen by Providence, not for our own glory, but to serve as an object-lesson to the world, by which it may learn the true worship of the One God. Our function is to live as a nation, embodying in our lives and thoughts the highest ideals of humanity. To fulfil that object the first requisite is that we retain a distinct individuality amongst the nations, and the second is that the lives which we each of us lead should be such as to win the respect and admiration of those of other faiths for the ideal which inspires us. In order to remain separate, we possess and obey—more or less—a code of observances, valueless many of them if performed without the spirit enshrined in them, but invaluable if we regard them as the sacrifice we are required to make of our personal desires and liberties towards the purposive separation which is enjoined upon us, and which

alone can enable us to fulfil the mission of all these years. We do not seek that the rest of the world should become Jews. It would need a process akin to wholesale naturalisation for that to take place. But we do look forward to the day when they will believe what we have been sent to teach about the nature of God and our duty to Him. As for us, we must remain with the badge of our tribe upon us, prepared, if need be, when the tide sets against us, to be despised and rejected of men. That is part of our work, and it has been our fathers' work before us. Already sects like the Unitarians and Theists have sprung up, whose worship is a pure Monotheism, nor are signs wanting both in this country and in America, of the progress of that movement.

At that rate, it may be objected, our mission will one day be accomplished and done with. It may be so, though we need hardly concern ourselves with the distant future, when so much work remains to be done in the present. And we ask, too, whether the labourer may not cease from his toil when the evening blows cool and his allotted task is done. Perhaps Israel, too, may rest when "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

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**No. 2.**

## **The Worth of the Bible.**

**By LIONEL D. BARNETT, M.A., Litt.D.**

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# The Worth of the Bible.

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In this paper an attempt is made to estimate the value of the Bible for our generation. I shall endeavour to show that, while the claim for its literal infallibility can no longer be admitted, its authority has still a basis as real as ever; that, although it is a message delivered by men, these men spoke under an inspiration which demands obedience for all time.

The popular old conception of the Bible as a work composed under an infallible inspiration from Heaven by certain writers at the times and under the circumstances mentioned by Rabbinic tradition, and consequently as a work of absolute Divine authority in every department of human life and thought, is no longer accepted by scholars. The influences that have militated against it in the last half-century are of two kinds: they are external and internal.

## Influences in Favour of Criticism.

The external causes are the advances made in the physical and historical sciences, and especially in the former. Geology, for example, gives us a theory of the earth's formation which differs in some essentials from that found in the first chapters of Genesis. Still more antagonistic to biblical teaching is the Law of Evolution, which, professing as it does to trace the lines of growth followed by organic beings at every stage of their existence, is tacitly opposed to the biblical idea of God's relation to the world, and, in the extreme form to which it has been pushed by many scientists, denies even the existence of a God apart from the world. Historical science again proves decisively that the biblical writers went astray in numerous details of fact. Indeed, if we regarded the Bible from the standpoint of strict science, we should pronounce it to be a series of works composed in an age of darkness, or at best in a twilight of intelligence.

And no less potent is the internal cause of the discredit of biblical authority, the results of the philological, literary, and historical examination of the text of the Bible itself. The negative outcome of this has been to make it probable that the traditional doctrines as to the dates and authorship of certain biblical books are incorrect, and especially that the "Pentateuch," the foundation-stone of Jewish traditional religion, is to a considerable extent a compilation made after the age of Moses. The positive fruits of these studies are much more doubtful; but they are often very plausible, and equally opposed to traditional doctrines.

Thus we see the authority of the Scriptures on questions of concrete fact traversed at almost every step; and it is suicidal to ignore this opposition and walk complacently along the "ancient ways." Our generation thinks, or at least thinks that it thinks, in scientific form; and we are the children of our age, no matter whether we are satisfied with our parentage or not. Truth, says the Talmud, is the seal of the Almighty; and our first duty is to acknowledge its authority. We have therefore a double task.

Firstly, we must in principle admit the necessity of applying every available touchstone of scientific inquiry to Scripture in order to learn all that science can teach us about it—about its statements as to historical and scientific facts, and about its language and mode of technical composition. This is the province of Reason. Secondly, when we have accepted these results, we must ask ourselves whether they touch the pillars of our structure; and if they touch them, we must build anew, for a house divided against itself, a religious system resting partly on acquiescence in tradition and partly on discredited doctrines, cannot stand. This is the province of Faith.

And what shall we say if the first inquiry leads us to the conclusion that the biblical writers were in many respects the children of their age, possessed by many of its errors, and voicing their moral and religious ideas often crudely and imperfectly? Above all, what shall we say if we find ground for believing that the Torah itself was not delivered in exactly the manner in which it declares itself to have been delivered to Moses? Must we, therefore, conclude—as many, alas, have concluded—that the Bible has no claim to our allegiance, and that its foundations are laid upon a quicksand?

Most assuredly not. The facts do not in the least justify these inferences. Though it may contain certain errors and misstatements, the Bible has the same authority over us as it had over former generations.

#### Continuance of Biblical Authority.

For the Bible is a religious book, a work designed by its writers to show in various ways the dealings of God with His creatures and the duties of men to God. It contains mistakes of fact, as we now know; even its modes of expressing religious truths are sometimes inadequate. But in its leading ideas, its religious purport, it is perfectly clear and divinely inspired, more so than any other message of God to mankind. Its value as an utterance of the most exalted and true Faith is not at all lessened by the occasional errors of its writers' reason. Even if its literary and historical worth were of the lowest, it would be our duty to accept its religious principles with humble reverence. For the moral value of any document written in good faith is in no wise dependent upon its scientific exactness or its literary perfection. "The Merciful One requires the heart;" and the heart-cry of the humblest to Him may have a religious worth that is not to be found in the wisdom of the sage or the grace of the poet. Nay, even the inarticulate cry may sometimes find acceptance when words are powerless; "when the Gates of Prayer are closed, the Gate of Tears is still open."<sup>\*</sup>

But the Bible stands in no need of such an apology. It is literature of the very first order; almost every page is ablaze with magnificent beauties of thought and expression. Moreover, it is incidentally a most valuable historical document; there seems to be no reason to doubt the material truth of most of its statements, and it often coincides in essential points with data from other sources. We shall therefore consider only two problems. The first is the general question—the relation of Faith, as embodied in Jewish thought, to the Reason, represented by criticism and scientific analysis. The second is the question of the peculiar worth, or, as we may boldly call it, the divinely inspired purport of the Bible.

<sup>\*</sup> Talmud Yer., Berakhoth I. 32b.

### Criticism and Faith.

Criticism, the rational determination of values, does not touch the Axioms of Faith. For these—the intuitive knowledge of a Supreme Will wielding a rule of power and grace within the heart and without, consciousness of the Being that is above all personality and yet must be grasped through the emotions of intensest personality, surrender of the carnal self to the guidance of the Law which is the soul's higher self, clear-eyed recognition of the life beyond, for which the life here is the preparation—these ideas, which together make up the sense of God in the world, are realities which are not and never can be weighed in the balance of reason. They are a *Shokhinah*, a manifestation of Godhead, dwelling in the soul, and establishing the Kingdom of Heaven within it.

This spiritual sense, which in truth is the substance of which morality is the shadow, is intuitive; it has direct knowledge of its object. True no mortal powers can penetrate the inward mystery of Godhead; but to the spirit of Faith the Godhead directly reveals Its will and Its love in the human soul. The attributes of God are purely mirrored in the heart of the pure worshipper. On the light of this consciousness reason and doubt can cast no shadow.

Such Faith, mightily active in thought, word, and deed, is indeed the "Holy Spirit" of which pious Jewish writers love to tell. The narratives of the Bible bluntly speak of God revealing Himself to man; but the finer sense of the Tannaim and Amoraim refused to interpret these words literally. It is not the Almighty Himself, but His Spirit, the Word, or the Presence, that is manifested to them that are faithful in spirit and deed; their faith is the present grace, the 'Glory' of God, uplifting them high above the dim half-knowledge of earthly things to that clear consciousness of the Supreme reality which makes them warriors, prophets, or saints, "dwelling in the covert of the Most High, abiding in the shadow of the Almighty."

### Faith and Experience.

The mind of man builds up its knowledge of the world of experience upon three pillars, the conceptions of space, time, and causality. Faith removes these, and places in their stead the idea of a single infinite Will of love and power. It declares that the world known to us is in the highest sense not real at all, that it is true only in relation to man's thought, which the Divine wisdom has mysteriously limited; but it also tells us that the soul, which thus has sight of half-reality only, is itself wholly real, and that from its vision of the world, illuminated by divine grace, it may gather a clear knowledge of its duty in this life and a foreshadowing of the greater light sown for the righteous in the life to come, where the seeming inequalities and injustices of finite being vanish in the harmony of the infinite Righteousness.

These issues are not speculative fancy, but tremendously real. For what is sin, and what is righteousness? Sin is a deliberate assertion by the human soul of its right to follow the impulses of desire and hate which arise from the natural limitations of its consciousness; error consists in unthinking obedience of the soul to these instincts. On the other hand Righteousness, the right state of the soul, is Faith—*Fides*, willing and loyal obedience—the conscious submission of the finite will and understanding to a higher Law, a submission in which the will is not slavishly paralysed but active in cheerful service. It is of this union of man with God, the

true and only "salvation," that the prophet speaks in the words, "the righteous shall live by his faith"; for faith, loyal obedience, is righteousness. The divinity of man's soul lies in its freedom to surrender itself to the Supreme Will, and thus to become, as the Rabbis say, a fellow-worker with the Most High.

### Faith in History.

In Faith the moral forces of man culminate, in critical Reason his intelligent faculties. The former has intuitive vision, and proceeds in accordance therewith to action without regard to other considerations; the latter is discursive, advancing by slow synthesis to induction, thence to tentative deduction, then again to induction, and so onward for ever. And hence it is that, whilst civilisation rises in a steadily flowing tide of intellectual progress, the religious consciousness is no deeper to-day than it was three thousand years ago, nay, rather it seems for the moment to be ebbing.

In a certain sense, all thought is in essence above time. For the imperfect ideas slowly and painfully evolving themselves in the mind of man there exist perfect ideals "in heaven," as Plato would say. But whereas intellectual ideas follow always a strictly regular course of evolutionary development in time, the religious consciousness moves with seeming irregularity down the paths of history. Until a certain grade of culture is reached, it appears to grow with the same logical regularity as intellectual ideas; and then the harmony ceases, and the revelation of God and the Good to men takes place in varying degrees that seem entirely incalculable. We see the wild idolatry of India constantly associated with an intense religious insight little inferior to that of a Jewish prophet; we see the rude nations of Northern Europe rising to spiritual heights never trodden by the more refined Latin races; most wonderful of all, we see the early Hebrews, one of the least cultured of all the Semitic peoples, receiving almost at the beginning of their history a revelation of supreme worth, and struggling to embody it in their historical experience, while the intellectually finer soul of the Greeks remained in outer darkness.

### The God-Idea.

Thus the idea of God is a miracle, and a fact. It dwells in the soul of every man, nay, it is the very essence of his soul and pledge of immortality. It may often happen that men and communities of men fail to realise it, that they imperfectly perceive it, or wholly stifle it. But none the less it exists as the prime law of the soul's being. The sun shines always, whether clouds hide it from the eyes or not; and each of us bears in his heart the sun of righteousness.

In a certain sense, however, the laws of growth which we group together under the vague name of "evolution" apply to religion. The central facts of the latter—the attainment of a sublime God-consciousness by certain marvellously gifted spirits, and the potential existence of a similar though less intense insight in the soul of every civilised man—are wholly distinct in origin, in operation, and in character from the processes implied in the word "evolution." But their action in history may proceed on similar lines. The great finders of God hand over their ideas to other less gifted men, to whole societies, who make them part of their daily life of thought and deed, a substructure on which is built an ever-growing edifice of social habit, rites, ideas and ideals. Thus the life of a



community like Israel devoted to the service of God is really instinct with the ideals of its prophets, though its living voices be those of its rabbis.

And it is from this standpoint that the believer will judge his Scriptures. His idea of God is its own critic, its own criterion; he accepts no revelation save that which is already revealed to himself. But for this same reason he knows also that God's message to man is published by the mouth of man, and therefore that its utterance is crossed by the voices of the thoughts and customs of the age wherein it is heard. These voices of the age it is for Reason—historical and philological study—to distinguish from the grand dominant note of timeless verity, the Voice of God, with which sometimes they sound in harmony and sometimes in discord. And this harmony between the spirit of the age and the Ideal above all time—a relation comparable to that in the physical world between the generic type and its modifying environment—is maintained in each generation by the influence of Jewish tradition.

### The Principles of Tradition.

This is not the place to dwell at length upon the part played by tradition in Jewish history; it must suffice to point out its main principle. And this is pithily summed up in the words of the Psalmist, which characteristically enough form the maxim of that typically "pharisaic" code, the Shulchan Arukh: "I have set the Lord before me always." Tradition strove to unite the historical experiences of each generation with its everlasting ideal of God's service, and thus to weave each age into a "living garment of Godhead." Often blind, perverse and uncritical in details, it seldom erred in its principle; "and ye that have cleaved to the Lord are alive all to-day." The Ideal, clothed in the thoughts and works of successive generations, saved them from destruction abroad and at home. It is only in modern times that it has been driven from this dwelling, and Israel threatened with ruin.

Tradition thus dealt with the Ideal, as a rule, in a "reasonable" manner by bringing it into the daily life of the people. In one important respect, however, we feel that its instinct went astray, in theory, at any rate. Setting itself as its main task to make a "fence for the Law," it blindly followed the Great Synagogue in its uncritical acceptance of the Torah as an objective and literally inspired revelation. But in truth the Torah, both the written and the oral law, is in kind the same as the tradition that begins with the Great Synagogue. It is a mass of traditions, some earlier than Moses, some later, some doubtless his work, which have all grown up in organic obedience to the law of Israel's national being as a "kingdom of priests and a holy people," and these were taken over—somewhat too uncritically, it must be confessed—by the doctors of the Mishnah and Gemara, the Geonim and later Rabbis, who built upon them new customs, new adaptations, and new dispensations in every age, in order that each generation might be able to envisage its ideals in every act of its life. It is obvious that such a process of evolution, carried on for the most part under conditions unfavourable to healthy social development, must have the defects of its virtues, entailing often an inordinate growth of ceremonial and occasional survivals of the unfittest, and ending in hypertrophy; it is, however, equally obvious that in principle it was the only course possible for those who were loyal to their ideals, and that.

under more wholesome conditions, such as the Jew might reasonably demand from the Gentile, the results might have been far more satisfactory even than they were.

### Authority of Scripture.

It may be objected that by treating the written Torah as a series of traditions like the unwritten Law, and at the same time denying its literal inspiration, we are levelling down and cutting at the roots of authority. If this reproach were true, we should be compelled to bear it, for truth is greater than authority. But it is not true. On the contrary, we are levelling up, raising the moral level of the religion. There are hundreds of statements in Scripture which good men in all ages have tortured their wits to justify as a direct utterance of God. These, viewed by themselves, we cannot believe to be God's word. As we have said, the sacred message to man is conveyed by the mouth of man, and often imperfectly, so that its true meaning is hardly understood by its hearers, and even by the speakers themselves. And thus Scripture is the counterpart of the believer's soul; in each is the light of God's revealed will, in each are the shadows of humanity.

The authority of a sacred book is the necessity of believing it. Now, according to orthodoxy, the necessity of believing in the Bible arises from a statement as to historical fact, the delivery of the Law in its present form to Moses. But, with all reverence be it said, this alleged fact is open to doubt; it therefore cannot serve any longer as the final sanction for the authority of Scripture. We must look elsewhere. And we find that the real authority of the Bible is a "threefold cord that may not be divided." The Bible conveys the ideals of inspired thinkers. These ideals are revealed to the soul of every seeker after God as axioms of faith, and thus the divine message within bears witness to the divine message without; "deep calleth unto deep." And lastly, the legends, historical narratives, laws, and customs conveyed by Scripture are all modes of expressing Israel's consciousness of his historical mission to realise and carry onward these sacred thoughts. To a lesser degree, the same may be said of the post-biblical literature beginning with the Mishnah.

### Scripture and Revelation.

The supernatural modes of revelation described in the Bible, and especially the Giving of the Law, can neither be affirmed by us as historical facts, nor denied. But of one thing we may be assured—that they mark real occasions when the consciousness of a divine mission was raised to certainty in the hearts of great leaders and their followers. The Biblical "Revelations" were confirmatory; they did not teach entirely new truths, they strengthened the inspiration of already existing beliefs. On this point Jewish teachers speak distinctly. Even the giving of the Law on Sinai was no new revelation, they said, for already Abraham knew and observed the whole Law;† and the Midrash labours to show in detail that all the ordinances proclaimed on Sinai were practised by the patriarchs,‡ while one Rabbi actually explained Exod. xix. 19 to mean that the Almighty did not declare His commands until Moses said to Him, "Speak, for Thy children have long ago taken it upon themselves."§ The miracle was not

† Talmud Babil, Yoma 28b.

‡ Yalkut Exod. 276 on Exod. xxiv. 7.

§ Yalkut Exod. 284.

in the thunder of Sinai, but in the still small voice of Israel's conscience.

The practical outcome of these reflections may be summed up in a few words:—

1. Judaism is a religious creed inseparably associated with distinctive rites and ceremonies.
2. Its creed is definitively embodied in the Old Testament, and to some degree in post-biblical literature; its rites and ceremonies are traditional, and may vary within certain limits from age to age.
3. The adaptation of the ritual and ceremonial tradition to the circumstances of each age needs the widest knowledge that the age can furnish.

### The Forces of Faith.

I now proceed to show how certain of the Axioms of Faith, or fundamental phases of the religious idea, are represented in the Old Testament.

The familiar words **סוף מעשה במחשבה תחלה** may be taken in one sense as summing up a principle of metaphysic, which again is in opposition to the cardinal doctrines of evolution. In the physical world the germ, with all its potentialities of future development, is but a feeble thing. But a moral thought comes into the world full-grown, with all the strength of creative power which is displayed in its later development; for the development of thought is only manifestation in clearer detail. The fresh inspiration of a great idea works with titanic force, like a flood breaking its banks. The struggles of its young energy are the index of the powers in opposition, of the old order. When it has asserted itself in this strife, it proceeds more peacefully to develop its content; the earlier powers of opposition are no longer equally manifest.

The Bible is a record of new and powerful ideas breaking forth in this manner from men's hearts; and the legends with which their rise and establishment are narrated show most forcibly the energy of the struggles which they had to wage against the old order of evil. A typical instance is the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, a story which is in sharpest opposition to the idea of Mosaism, and for that very reason is plainly in its essentials true, so true that if it were not told to us we should be forced to invent it ourselves.

### The Dawn of Religion.

In the midst of a city of Mesopotamia, already old in the typical Semitic civilisation which in social culture lifted men up to the stars, and in its religious side brought them down to the company of swine, there arose a man who had received an inspiration telling him of the One God who must be worshipped in purity of thought and deed. Unable to tolerate the spiritual abominations which he had no power to reform, the man withdraws into the wilderness, where he lives the life of a Bedawin Sheikh, the Asiatic counterpart of the English country gentleman. Late in his life a son is born to him by his wife. Now begins the conflict between the new inspiration and the old tradition. On the one hand, the universal custom of his race and his own inherited instinct bid him sacrifice the child to the God who gave him; on the other, the new voice within him forbids bloodshed. At length the struggle comes to an end; mercy prevails, veiled under the legal fiction of animal sacrifice, and thus the new creed asserts its first practical principle, the sanctity of human life.

## David.

The story of David again is another precious chapter in the history of the human soul. A new struggle was fought out here, a struggle of the heart; and its issue was the new message of forgiveness for the penitent sinner. It was in truth a new revelation; and it could come only after fiercest conflicts in a great and greatly sinning soul. Immensely strong in the passions of love and hatred, David was possessed always by an equally intense conviction that "the Lord was with him," that his whole powers of thought and deed were inspired and guided by a holy and righteous Will. In the words of the Psalmist, he took up the cup of welfare and called upon the name of the Lord. And when again and again his passionate humanity led him into the ways of sin, his sense of estrangement from his God was such as no other man could feel. And thus he was the typical penitent, the cry of whose heart can force open the closed gates of heaven, whose one hour of repentance and righteousness in this world is fairer than the whole of life in the world to come.||

## The Ethics of the Bible.

Much of the worth of the Bible lies in its wealth of stories of this kind, no less than in its direct preaching. Its ethical issues are quietly stated in aphoristic form by the Rabbis; but the Bible tells us, with its marvellous vigour of style, of the struggles within and without the souls of men which had to take place before they could reach these issues. It touches our imagination, as the bald rabbinical axioms do not; for in the soul of each one of us there must be like conflicts and labours, ending—if so it please God—in successive revelations of the power and love of the Father in Heaven.

"The value of the (Biblical) history," says a Christian critic, "does not depend upon its scientific accuracy in detailed incidents in this remote past. The question to consider is whether the historian is right or wrong in his interpretation of human history, whether God is in His world of men, whether Jehovah is to be reckoned with in national policies, whether moral forces are to be taken account of by wise men in the world's administration; or whether might makes right and God is only on the side of the strong battalions. . . . The purpose of the historical writers of the Old Testament was not to secure infallible accuracy in dates, numbers, statistics, and historical incidents, but to interpret their national history as Jehovah's dealing with his people. Did they interpret it aright? and does this interpretation give us a clue by which we can interpret also the history of our times? If so, the Bible history is true, and its truth is not impugned, and not even a suspicion is cast upon its truth, by the conclusion that certain of the incidents recorded in it are unhistorical, and many of the moral judgments which it records are to be corrected in the light of a later moral development, and by the standards of a later revelation."¶

## The Real Nature of the Torah.

We do well to make the Shema the centre of our ritual; for it contains the essence of Judaism. It first declares the unity of the God of Israel, the Almighty King; and then it bids us love him with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our might. For the Almighty demands a service of pas-

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¶ Pirke Aboth, iv., 17.

¶ L. Abbott, *Life and Literature of the Hebrews*, p. 50.

ssionate love for all time. He revealed Himself in a law of love, not only to a single generation, but likewise to all the unborn ages of Israel, as the Midrash finely says. For His grace and power are revealed in the heart of every secker; and His dispensation of love—whether we hold it to be embodied in the whole of the traditional Law or in but a part of it—must be learned and taught by each generation, as the inheritance of Israel.

The Law which is the peculiar possession of Israel is not merely a command to worship one God and accept certain elementary abstract principles; were this so, Judaism might at once abandon its millennial struggle and sink into the obscurity of the Theistic churches. Nor is it simply a service of the One God in love; for then there would be nothing to distinguish us from a dozen Hindu sects. It is more than even this. It is the consecration of a chosen people's whole being through all ages of the world to a single idea, the love and worship of the Father in Heaven "with all its heart, and all its soul, and all its might." The duty of the Jew is to read the presence of the Father in every act of life, to see the light of His countenance shining in simple humble things, to judge every moral act unflinchingly by the standard set up by His prophets. It is a nation's interpretation of its national life, and ultimately of all history, in terms of God's revelation.

Therefore it is that the Law, the embodiment of Israel's inspired consciousness of his call, is eminently a law of conduct, inward and outward. It lays as the foundation of the Jewish life a spiritual truth—the knowledge both of the unity of God and His perfect Godhead—and it bids every generation of Israel apply this knowledge to purify and sanctify its whole life. The will is to be freely surrendered to the service of the Supreme; thus it becomes truly free, and in the highest sense moral.

### **The Will in Jewish Morality.**

It is a current superstition that the moral will in Judaism is "heteronomous," dominated by external motives such as fear or desire. If we accept the traditional standpoint of orthodox Christianity and Judaism, we shall have to admit that this charge is not wholly unfounded. But we do not accept it, and the accusation falls to the ground. From our definition of the Law of Israel it follows that it is a growth, and as such is composed of two elements, an inward principle and an external investiture of temporal ideas. The fountains of the spirit within us are never wholly manifested to us; the motives to which we ascribe our own moral acts are always inadequate. Thus it was with the Israelites. A simple, half-cultured people, conscious only of a Divine summons, they cast about them to find motives for their mission, and they found them, not always wisely or well. How utterly these imaginary motives sometimes contradicted the true spirit of their summons may be seen from commands such as the bidding to help the enemy in his need (Ex. xxiii., 4-5), or the words, "thou shalt not avenge nor bear a grudge" (Lev. xix., 18). The ideal was present from the first, but centuries of gathered experience and suffering had to pass before it could be plainly realised to the ripened conscience of Israel.

### **Reward and Punishment.**

The same knowledge will give us a deeper insight into the second section of the Shema. The bounties of Nature, as we now know, are by no means the inevitable rewards of man's service of God; and indeed we are

forbidden to serve heaven for their sake.\*\* But yet they are blessings of God—dispensed indeed as He in His wisdom thinks fit, but nevertheless blessings, revelations of the Divine love poured forth in free grace to His creatures. Man cannot earn them, but he can be, and must be, conscious of them, grateful for them. Such consciousness and gratitude arise most surely in the hearts of those who obey a Law which makes them “remember their Creator all the days of their life,” hallowing the daily round by simple acts of thanksgiving and rites of loving devotion. Thus the writer of Deuteronomy, though wrong in his logic, was right in his heart. His words need only the addition of a link to render them a perfect utterance of pure Jewish thought: “And it shall come to pass that if ye hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, that ye shall rejoice in the Lord; for I am he that giveth the rain of your land in its season.” And so likewise with the reverse of the picture. The divine vengeance for wrong-doing may not always be manifested in the order of nature. But “the Lord giveth and Lord taketh away.” His judgments are perfect, and the heart cannot greatly err which sees in His guidance of the world a rule of manifested justice.

#### Judaism and the Bible.

The Bible is the religious history of the ancient Jewish people. It is religious, for it is a collection of books in which the greatest thinkers of our race expressed in manifold ways their thoughts upon the nature of God and man and their relation one to another; it is a history, for its writers found in the fortunes of their fellow-men and in the rise and fall of their own and other states the answers to these questions. This power of tracing the hand of God in the world was not possessed to any comparable degrees by later writers, who merely drew their inspiration from Scripture; hence Scripture must remain for ever the fountain-head of spiritual ideas.

It does not teach a single uniform system of doctrine; for it is the work of a long line of thinkers whose ideals as they travelled down the ways of time were throughout coloured by the varying moods of real experience. But assuredly their changing forms are but modes of more and more perfect expression for the one divine truth revealed in the Covenant to the newly opening eyes of the Patriarch. None of them contradicts the others; the later only supplement and enlarge the earlier. There is one God, beside whom the gods of the heathen are as naught, say the patriarchs; there is one God, beside whom there is naught else, say the prophets. God is a spirit of perfect righteousness, who demands of men obedience to the law of His own nature, said the patriarchs; and the prophets preach the same message. Sacrifice and formal rite are good as symbols of accompanying penitence and return to God's ways, says in effect the Levitical law; yes, but the need for them is as nothing in comparison with the need for repentance and return, say the prophets. And the ancient Law-giver who bade his people love the stranger because they had themselves borne the same burden in a strange land whence the divine grace had redeemed them, was the forerunner of the prophets who told of God's universal love which through suffering redeems from the servitude of sin and gathers the whole world into the fold of His illimitable grace.

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\*\* Pirke Aboth 1. 3.

# **Conservative Judaism and Modern Thought :**

**A Symposium.**

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**No. 3.**

## **The Necessity of Ceremonial in Judaism.**

**By NORMAN BENTWICH, B.A.**

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## The Necessity for Ceremonial in Judaism.

"No religion," said James Darmesteter. "however lofty, can influence mankind without external forms which give it a mould capable of resistance. If prophecy had remained in the region of spirit, it would never have penetrated Israel and through Israel the world." The laws of Exodus and Deuteronomy have always been the bed-rock of Judaism, and the teachings of an Isaiah or a Micah are only the universalised proclamation of the lessons of the Torah. It is indeed a mistake to think, as is often done, that Judaism has no creed, and that it is a mere collection of forms and ceremonies; that, in the words of Leroy-Beaulieu: "it is not so much a faith as a divinely revealed doctrine, a cult, a mass of rites and practices." Against such an incomplete conception of Judaism we may set the dictum of a Rabbi, who declared that the essence of his religion, and its supreme commandment, were to be found in the words of Amos: "Seek the Lord and live." The cardinal principles of the Jewish creed are (1) the existence of one personally conceived God who is transcendent, and at the same time revealed in the universe and in man; (2) man's direct responsibility to God, and (3) God's revelation to man of a law of righteousness by which he may attain earthly bliss. But while Judaism by its conception of God is, as we claim, a purer creed than other religions, it is also a distinctive system of life, which has as its object the realisation of the prophet's ideal by means of concrete practices. And here it is markedly differentiated from the Christian religion which originally separated itself from Judaism by the rejection of the Torah, the Jewish way of life. Paul cast away the law, and the papal synods and councils set up articles of belief as the bond of this Christian world. What ceremonies the Church possesses now are mainly connected with the ritual of divine service: Jewish ceremonies, on the other hand, affect daily life, and are the external forms which give the religion "a mould capable of resistance." Our sages relied on practices more than on dogmas as a means to righteousness; **לֹא הַמִּדְרָשׁ עָקֵר אֵלָּה הַמַּעֲשֵׂה**: and the antithesis between faith and works which is represented also in the New Testament as the contrast between Spirit and Letter has remained true of the two religious systems since the time of the Apostles. Judaism has bound together its adherents in each age, and maintained its continuity throughout all the ages, by a body of ceremonial law founded on the Bible and tradition. The Gentile world has taken over a large part of our moral and ethical laws (**חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים**) but our ceremonies and observances (**עֲדוּת וּשְׂבוּדָה**)



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remain the peculiar expression of our relation to God, the distinctive mark of our religious attitude. So that while we hold that Judaism has a special creed of its own, and a special conception of God, we may, to some extent, agree with Leroy-Feaulieu that "without its ceremonial, it runs the risk of spending all its moral force in a vague Deism."

### The Uses of Religion.

The simplicity of its beliefs and the importance set upon practice not only preserve Judaism from those conflicts between reason and dogma which continually threaten dogmatic creeds, but render it more capable of performing the highest function of religion in life. For that function is not only to give man a true idea of God, but to make him lead a moral life and pursue righteousness. As Spinoza pointed out, "there are but very few compared with the aggregate of humanity who can acquire the habit of virtue under the unaided guidance of reason:"† and the Jewish religion, laying down laws which prescribe the habitual performance of good actions, seeks to do for the whole community what philosophy can only do for the few. The reasoning thinker, too, needs religion no less than the common man, for without it in the first place he cannot bring his lower instincts into subordination to the higher, and without its emotional influence throughout his life, his reason tends to become arid. Each part of our nature requires education before it attains its proper development. We train our reason by mental study, and we must train our moral nature by practice and custom. Religion in one aspect is the educational system by which we build up habits of virtue, and to perform this function religion requires habitual observances. The Hebrew and the Hellene, the upholder of conduct and the upholder of intellect, are at one in holding that goodness depends on good habit, and good habit on laws and customs which regulate daily life. Law is often conceived as something imposed from outside, restricting freedom; but that is a low and imperfect conception of it, and the law of the Bible, as interpreted by the Rabbis, is something very different. It is rather the external representation of man's moral ideal, and it is by adherence to the law that man must realise the divine in him. "For he is neither above nor below the law, neither God nor beast."

### Judaism as a Discipline.

Religion then in its fullest expression is a discipline as well as an ideal subordinating our lower instincts to reason; and our teachers have recognised and developed Judaism in this sense. The Bible expression that Israel is "a holy people and a kingdom of priests" was taken to mean that his daily life was to be sanctified by symbolical observances, his every meal to become a sacrament. In its attitude to bodily desires and material pleasures, religion has two alternatives. It may reject them as altogether evil, and preach renunciation, or it may recognise their place in life and try to control them. After Christianity had abandoned the Jewish discipline it was driven to the former course, and came into conflict with man's reasonable desires. Judaism, on the other hand, by its system of outward observances has throughout tried to regulate these desires, and seeing that they can be influenced only by concrete actions, has devised and developed the ceremonial law to this end. The Jewish child, when impressionable by outward practices, was to be so moulded by the influence of ceremony, that the Jewish man, when he came to consider things by an inner principle of reason, should lead a life of conscious moral freedom under the law. The ceremonial was not an end in itself, a way of righteousness, but a means of impressing the deep ethical

† Theologico-Political Tractate ch. 5.

principles which it embodied upon the unreflecting mind. The virtue of children in all cases and the virtue of many men throughout their lives is not the conscious pursuit of what is recognised as the highest end, but only the habitual practice of certain actions that are recognised as right on the authority of others without deeper reflection. And the grown man, though he has attained to reason, must act rightly, none the less, from habit, immediately and spontaneously without reflection; for if he consciously goes back to underlying reasons he will fail at a crisis. The inward virtue, or the virtue of the spirit, comes only when the reason has matured, and it comes then through the moulding influence upon character of the observance of the letter. If, in nothing else, a purely ethical creed must break down in its relation to children, who require ethical ideas to be embodied for them either in ceremonial, as they are in Judaism, or in a model of life as they are in the founder of Christianity. Although, however, the thought that "we must live for our children" is one of the great arguments for the observance of the ceremonial, it must not be thought that the observance is without value for the adult who recognises the spirit and meaning underlying it. The form remains the symbol of the idea; only it is seen in its true light. And the good conduct to which it conduces acquires a deeper value in that it is supported by reason as well as by habit. Some words of Philo-Judæus, the Jewish philosopher, who devoted his life to revealing the spiritual conceptions which the Mosaic law reflected, bring out the true relation of practice and feeling. "Although the Sabbath is a lesson to teach us the power of the immortal God, and man's right to take rest from his labours, it does not follow on that account that we may discard the laws which are established concerning it, so as to light a fire or carry burdens, etc. Nor does it follow because the feast is the symbol of the joy of the soul and its gratitude to God, that we can repudiate the assemblies ordained at special seasons. We must consider that the ceremonies resemble the body, and their spiritual meaning the soul; and as we take care of the body because it is the abode of the soul, so must we take care of the literal observance of the laws. For, if the laws are respected, the ideas of which they are the symbols will also be more clearly understood."

#### Historical Value of Ceremonial.

The ceremonial, therefore, in one aspect inculcates ethical ideas, and tends to ennoble life. In another aspect it idealises history. Mankind is the child of the past as well as of the present, and Judaism gives this conception a religious value by means of symbolic observances which make the festivals memorials of the great events of our history. The particular observances, too, are the product of a continuous tradition, the outward sign of the historical evolution of our faith. Not only that, but the ceremonial as a whole forms a bond of unity which connects the Judaism of different ages and different countries. Lacking a country, a political society and an ecclesiastical hierarchy, the Jews have retained the separateness of the nation and the catholicity of the religion by means of a peculiar manner of life. No doubt in different ages they have interpreted the ceremonies in different ways, but their common practices have saved them from splitting up into small independent groups, which would not have resisted for long the tendency to merge into the surrounding population. Throughout the Diaspora they have welded together a people scattered in every part of the globe into a close brotherhood, and they have given to the persecuted and despised Jew of the Ghetto, who was excluded from the general political life, a

‡ De Migratione, Abrahami I. 150.

communal life of his own, and made each man feel that he was the inheritor of a great history and great ideals.

### The Dangers of Abandoning Tradition.

When to-day any emancipated Jewish community, considering the ceremonial law as an obsolete survival of Orientalism, and valueless for its new spiritual needs, proposes to recast it in harmony with the most approved modern and Occidental conceptions, not only—as the experience of Germany and America has shown—is it endangering its religious welfare and inviting an unlovely materialism, but it is cutting itself off from the body of the people. To break with tradition is to break with Judaism; and especially where the Jew is emancipated, and there is no strong Jewish public opinion to insist upon the loyalty of the individual and resist the "tendency towards eccentricity," must each man follow the Rabbinical maxim—"Separate not thyself from the congregation."

This consideration brings us to what may be called the negative function of the ceremonial. It has been in the past, and is in the present, the fence of the religion, the safeguard of the separateness of Israel, a separateness which had to be maintained if the Jewish conception of God and life were to survive. Ethical and spiritual isolation was necessary to preserve the existence of our people till the world should be ready to receive our pure monotheistic teaching. The Saturday-Sabbath and the dietary laws thus received a fresh importance; they not only provided a moral discipline, but they maintained the distinctiveness of the people. Anatole France, in one of his novels which deals with the rise of Christianity, puts into the mouth of a Roman philosopher a striking remark about the Judaism of the first century of the common era, which is true of it in all ages. "A faith so intolerant of polytheism and distinguished by so many peculiar customs is not a 'religion,' but rather an 'abligion'"—i.e., not something which binds men together, but something which keeps them apart. It is indeed the unique excellence of Jewish ceremonies that they serve both ethical and separative purposes. It has been suggested that the religious mission of the Jews has to-day been mainly accomplished, and that it would be furthered rather by association with the Christian world than by separateness. Were this so—and I think that the world is far from recognising the Hebrew God of righteousness in his perfect Unity—the ceremonial law would still retain its intrinsic value for us; it would still be a lofty manner of life making for temperance, purity, clearness of mind, family affection and godliness. Progress comes by difference, and the merging of distinctive characteristics to secure comfort and social ease is neither for the good of Judaism nor for the good of the world. Paradoxical as it may appear, the Jew must continue to be a particularist in order to uphold a universal ideal.

### The Spiritual Value of Ceremonial.

Having now set out the general character of ceremonies, we may proceed to examine them more in detail and to trace in each its particular value. For though it may be admitted that this theory underlying Jewish ceremonies is good, still it may be objected that the good theory is not realised in practice, that our customs do not really possess a spiritual meaning, and do not produce a moral effect upon the people. And if that is so, it is a very serious indictment. For the mere observance of the letter which does not have an effect upon moral character is not righteousness, nor will men continue for long to observe ceremonies, merely because their fathers observed them, if they do not feel any moral value in them to themselves. The final sanction of the ceremonial must be its appeal to our reason, our feeling and our conscience; and unless this is established,

observance must die out. I think, however, that the objection which is frequently raised against the traditional law that it is outworn and deadening to the soul arises from a misapprehension of the ceremonies, and that if we interpret them aright, we shall see that they have value for us as they have had for our ancestors for more than two thousand years. The law is still *עץ חיים למחויקים בה* "a tree of life to those who cling to it."

### The Sabbath Ceremonies.

The observance of the Sabbath day is the most distinctive of all our observances, and our most remarkable contribution to the religious institutions of the world; yet I think we often fail to realise its true function.

Some regard it as a day of physical or mental recreation, but in its essence it is more than this. It is a day given up to God, on which man is released from work-a-day concerns and the tyranny of business to have leisure for higher things, and to realise his higher faculties. It is not, be it noted, only *שבת* a day of rest, but *שבת קדש* a holy day of rest. "Holy" probably suggests something unreal or abstract, but put in less lofty language the Sabbath is a day upon which we should seek something above material pleasure and mere repose from business, and realise so far as may be that divine spirit within us. Its rest is one of love and devotion, *מנוחת אהבה ודרכה*. This conception underlies the particular ordinances of the Sabbath about not kindling fire, or not writing even letters which have no concern with business, for these are the occupations of the ordinary day. But the proper observance of the Sabbath does not consist in carrying out certain ceremonies and avoiding certain kinds of action. The ceremonies indeed give a bright colouring to the principle, and make the Sabbath a day more of joy than of solemnity, and turn the meanest Jewish home for the time into a place of beauty and dignity; but underneath them must be the spirit of sanctification, of a day dedicated to God, a day on which "it is enough, not to be doing, but to be."

### The Value of the Sabbath.

Unless this spirit is realised, the forms have only half their value. And of all departures from Judaism "the Sabbathless pursuit of wealth" is the most degrading. It implies nothing less than the rejection of the Jewish attitude to life; and in a people so eager for material success as ours, it breeds a gross materialism which is as repulsive to others as it is unworthy of our religion. Doubtless it will be objected that Sabbath-observance interferes with secular life and becomes an intolerable handicap upon all save the few strong Jews and Jewesses. And it may be that for the poor man there arises at times a serious question affecting the very life of his family if he refuses to work on the Sabbath-day. There is a saying in the Talmud: "Live on the Sabbath as a working-day (i.e., have no better food) and need no other help." (Pesachim 112a). When a poor man to-day is really confronted with the alternative of begging and Sabbath-breaking, we may extend this maxim, and excuse his offence, provided that he *breaks* into the holiness of the day only so far and so long as it is absolutely necessary. But, frankly, the violation of the Sabbath is not the offence of the poor, but of the rich, and the argument from hard conditions is raised not by those who starve for bread, but by those who starve in soul. The Sabbath is and must be a sacrifice, and therein lies much of its religious worth: for it is a sacrifice of the lower to the higher self. "Not by bread alone doth man live," nor does political or social emancipation relieve the Jew from the need of spiritual life. It is the bitterest tragedy of modern Jewry that the widening of the secular life has implied the dwindling of the religious life, and that emancipation

from the Ghetto has led on to the slavery of Mammon. Against such a conception of life the Sabbath is our grandest protest and our greatest safeguard.

### The Festivals.

The festivals of the Jewish calendars serve a very obvious function, marking as they do at once some commanding event in our history and some joyful season of the year. They thus hallow our past and bring religion into relation with nature in such a way as to deepen our idea of God's goodness. Their special ceremonies mark the characteristic of Judaism never to be content with an abstract idea, but to clothe it in forms that appeal to the senses and the imagination. The Bible-command, typical of the Jewish attitude to religion, "and thou shalt rejoice in thy feasts," is through them impressed by means of the senses on the mind. The Seder-night ritual, the Passover cakes, the Shofar of New Year, together with the Minhag of the honeyed apple, the booth and the palm branch of Succoth admirably illustrate this trait; and they illustrate also the importance of the home-worship in Jewish religion. The ceremonial has as its result, if not as its end, the holiness of the home; the house rather than the synagogue is the centre of the religion, the parent is its priest, **the Rabbi its teacher.**

Far more debatable is the observance of the second day of festivals. It is argued that not only has this no spiritual value to-day, but that in the modern conditions of Jewry it conflicts so severely with the claims of secular life that it endangers the observance of the feast altogether. To the first assertion it may be answered that the second day is the symbol of our exile, **יום כבוד שני ער** and that it has behind it a tradition of two thousand years, which of itself should give it a certain hold. As to the second assertion, it is no doubt true that the observance of two days of the feasts is dwindling very much in England, and to a less degree elsewhere, but until a more general movement for its abolition has shown itself among the larger bodies of Jews, it is not for any one community to break away from the general catholic tradition; more especially when the cry for change is mainly based upon a passing expediency. The individual, doubtless, determines for himself how far he subordinates his material advancement to religious practices, but the local and national community cannot change its ceremonies till the conscience of the whole body demands it. Such a demand may come in regard to the second day of festivals, **but it has hardly come yet.**

### The Day of Atonement.

While modern conditions are threatening the observance of the second day of the festivals, the observance of the Atonement Fast remains to many the bed-rock of Jewish ceremonial. The ordinances of the day give the deepest expression to the Jewish conception of God's direct relation with man, and of man's personal responsibility to God for his actions. The ceremony of fasting has as its basis the idea that in order to attain to communion with God, man must drop all bodily concerns whatsoever: it is, in fact, a piece of mysticism universalised in our religion. On one day in the year all Jews aspire to that saintly condition which is at other times the goal of the few true Chasidim. But a danger lurks in the superstitious reverence which the otherwise unobservant Jew attaches to **יום כיפור**. He appears to think that by the strict observance of one day his remissness throughout the year is excused. Such an idea is utterly alien to Judaism. Just as we believe in salvation by works, so, too, we hold to repentance by works. The true atonement must involve a change in practice, and one day of piety cannot be the sin offering for a year of materialism.

The strong sentiment which has clung around the Day of Atonement

has not, in England, at least, remained to the other great fast in the Jewish year, the Ninth of Ab, which commemorates our national downfall. Yet this day of our calendar marks events in our history not less striking if less happy than those marked by the three great festivals. And Judaism weaves into its religious garment our whole history, dark as well as bright; and to neglect the tragic mood of the religion is to miss the comprehensiveness of its spirit. Zionism apart, the Jews are still in Goluth (exile), cut off from their full religious citizenship, and this is the feeling which is impressed by our day of national mourning with its liturgy of laments gathered from the intensest Jewish minds of the ages.

### The Dietary Laws.

Ceremonies connected with special occasions of the year, are not so distinctive of Judaism as the ceremonies which regulate daily life. Of these the dietary laws (Kashruth) are the most noteworthy and the most discussed. What religious purpose do they serve is constantly asked by those who find them irksome in social relations, and would gladly be rid of them. First, let us put aside the doubtful reason which is sometimes advanced to support them:—That they are hygienic, and help to maintain the vitality of the race. No doubt they still perform this function to some degree, but it is not their true religious justification, and it is therefore a treacherous defence. And there is a truer and more valid argument for them. They are a double security for Judaism in that they provide a personal discipline for the individual, and a collective separation for the nation. On the one hand they promote moral purity and an unconscious habit of self-control; on the other, they are one of the chief instruments of our purposive distinctiveness. By exercising habitual self-mastery in the most necessary actions of daily life, the Jew acquires temperance in all things. In the words of the 4th Book of Maccabees:—"The affections of the appetite are resisted by the temperate understanding, and all the impulses of the body are reined in by reasoning. Our laws instruct us in temperance, and exercise us in manliness." It is well said by one of our religious philosophers that we abstain from eating pork and shell-fish, not because they are unhealthy, but because they are the most pleasant of all foods, and we must restrain our sensual pleasures. That the schooling in temperance by the dietary laws is not a mere figment of the religious imagination, or a vague hypothesis of the apologist is proved by the certain facts of Jewish sobriety and Jewish clearheadedness. More than this—these qualities distinguish our people so long only as they remain loyal to the religion. Assimilation involves degradation, or, at least, levelling down.

### The Ceremonial of Prayer.

The last aspect of observance with which I shall deal, is the ceremonial of prayer. Each day Judaism directs a man to lay aside for a space material concerns and commune with God; and if this idea is no longer peculiar to ourselves, we have a peculiarly vivid expression of it in the Tsitsith and the Tephillim. They again illustrate the principle of impressing spiritual ideas by outward symbols, and their spiritual significance should be clearly brought out for the Jewish child, in order to give it an educative influence and prevent them from sinking into formal service. If this is done, their worth is not far to seek. Judaism does not believe in sensuous aid to worship such as incense and images, but in these simple memorials hallowed by a long tradition it finds outward expressions of its moral ideal, the union of man and God. In support of their religious value, I may quote a notable passage in Addison: "Faith is kept alive and gathers strength from practice more than from speculation."

There is still another method which is more persuasive than any of the former, and that is the habitual adoration of the Supreme Being as well in constant acts of mental worship as in outward forms." The Mozuzah suggests a similar idea to that of the Talith. God is about our homes, as he is about us in our daily work, and each room, if we have the right inclination, is a true sanctuary. It is a misapprehension and perversion of beautiful symbols which sees in the one or the other a charm against evil spirits. And it is a prosaic rationalism on the other hand which scoffs at them as childish and trifling.

### Letter and Spirit.

I have gone through the chief heads of the ceremonial, and suggested their underlying religious values. But it may be objected that observance does not in fact produce the spiritual effect which I have attributed to it. "We all know Jews," it will be said, "who observe the law strictly, but who are not good men." To the lax it is singularly comforting to find people outwardly pious but inwardly lacking in goodness! For, illogically enough, it suggests to them that outward laxity is the reflex of inner spirituality. So that every example of barren formalism which they find is carefully recorded, and, it may be, unconsciously generalised until the exception is taken as the type. Yet to some extent the complaint is true, and a mechanical orthodoxy singularly devoid of spirituality may be pointed to among our people. This fact is commonly made to serve as an excuse for a selfish indifferentism, and is used by Jews as well as by Gentiles as the basis of a broad charge that the observance of the letter kills the spirit. The fault, however, lies not in the general nature of ceremony, but partly in the current misapprehension of our ceremonial, partly in the excessive minuteness with which its detail was worked out in a late development of Judaism. Ceremonies require to be re-interpreted to suit the developing culture of the people. And the sudden change of outlook which masses of Jews experience through emigration to a new country and contact with a new intellectual environment, and the distracting influence of political freedom upon a people reared in the Ghetto—all this combined with a lack of good teachers, tends to produce a want of harmony between thought and practice in Jewish communities. The root of the evil may be traced in individual Jewish families. The parents go on observing without reflection the forms which they learnt in different conditions: the children, discovering the insufficiency of the reasons of the parents, and not themselves seeing any spiritual purpose beneath the forms, cease to observe at all. The difficulty is increased owing to our inheritance of elaborate codes of law from darker ages when Jews—ruthlessly persecuted, confined to a Ghetto, and debarred from general culture—extended the prophylactic side of the law. At the time when they were compelled, the codes assisted the preservation of the religion, but they carry the ordered sanctification of life to an excess, and fail to appeal to the needs of those who enjoy more spacious circumstances. To quote the words of a great Conservative Rabbi, "Israel having become estranged from the world and its life, lost sympathy with them."§ He no longer considered them in interpreting the Law. The Rabbis of these epochs in their longing to preserve the faith and strengthen its adherents, multiplied ordinances, and regulated conduct in its minutest details. Modern Jewry inherits their results without their spirit, and either finds the Shulchan Aruch an intolerable burden which is cast aside altogether, or follows it without insight and fails to reach the spirit beneath its crowd of minute ordinances.

§ Rabbi Samuel Rajes Hirsch in "19 Letters of Ben Uziel."

### Spiritual Dilettantism.

Goethe says somewhere "that there are two kinds of *dilettantes* in poetry:—He who neglects the indispensable mechanical part, and thinks he has done enough if he shows spirituality and feeling; and he who seeks to arrive at poetry purely by mechanism in which he may acquire a certain readiness, but is without soul. The first does most harm to his art, the last to himself." So is it with Judaism to-day. On the one hand, we have the spiritual *dilettante* who, regarding Judaism as a lifeless framework, thinks that he has secured the true religion if he shows spirituality and feeling; on the other hand, the man of orthodox practice, who mechanically obeys the manifold precepts of the law without ever seeking or finding its spirit. The one does more harm to his religion, the other to himself. Between the two extreme parties the true conception of the Jewish ceremonial is obscured, and the true Jewish attitude to life is forgotten. The Judaism of the present and the future must be like the Judaism of the past, a religion of daily conduct. The ceremonies ordained by the Bible and early Jewish tradition remain fundamentals of the Jewish religion; and we require a Judaism which shall recommend itself to modern thought—a Liberal Judaism, if you like, —not to cut away, but to reassert their religious value, and to divest them of the exerescence of superfluous regulations which has grown up around them and cast a shadow over their joyous light.

### The Real Liberal Judaism.

Progress in this direction must come by way of individual conviction and individual teaching, not through a world-conference or a representative legislative body or ecclesiastical authority. Judaism has never allowed any conclave or council to mark out its religious development; the Halacha or way of life is developed almost unconsciously by the interpretation of the greater Rabbis, and what appeals to the Catholic conscience becomes law. Varieties of custom and ritual may well arise among the different national bodies of Jews as they arose of old between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, but there remains a catholic feeling through the whole race, which determines the broad movements. From time to time a great individual teacher acquires general acknowledgment for his work by reason of its hold upon his generation, and thus marks out the way of progress; but a lasting development must be true to the fundamental principles and the historic traditions of Judaism. The selection and rearrangement of ceremony made by a community to suit the special needs of place and time, or the spiritual reforms of Judaism, pruned of its ceremony as of some ugly Orientalism, these are creatures of a day in which there is no seed of life, but much seed of mischief, both for the individual and the race. To effect any valuable reform of Jewish practice there must be sympathetic knowledge, what the Rabbis called *חמדה* *חכמה* and what a modern religious teacher called "sweetness and light." Judaism in England wants, above all things, teachers who know the Law and, who, knowing the Law, love it. The real evil of persecution is not the physical suffering, but the mental obscurantism which it produces. Judaism, orthodox and reform, is suffering to-day from imperfect vision, which blinds men on both sides to the true purpose of the ceremonial and the inner meaning of the religion. In a free and emancipated Jewry there should be a liberal Judaism, but that is a Judaism interpreted in harmony with modern thought and culture according to the cardinal principles of our tradition, not according to false principles assimilated from our environment. It must be at once rational and traditional, reformed and conservative of catholic observance.



# Conservative Judaism and Modern Thought: A Symposium.

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No. 4.

## Judaism and Faith.

By H. S. LEWIS, M.A.

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# Judaism and Faith.

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The Jewish religion can be considered under two aspects. It lays great stress upon ethical and ceremonial observances. Traditional Judaism, as our fathers understood it, was a system of life under the Law, which claims to regulate the smallest and most intimate of human actions. It is the purpose of other essays in this series to consider how far this proposition can be rightly asserted of modern Judaism. But, after all, Judaism is more than a religion of action; it is also a religion of thought. It must rest upon a theory of God and the universe, or it becomes, on its ceremonial side, a mere unreasoning round of trivialities. Certainly it is less easy to discover the beliefs of Judaism, past and present, than to conduct a similar enquiry with regard to religious practice, which is so often manifested in actions, publicly performed. The degree of regularity in attendance at synagogue, the extent to which the Sabbath and the dietary laws are observed—such things can almost be measured by statistics and pictured on charts. There may be much doubt as to "What ought to be?" There can be no doubt whatever as to "What is." Changes in belief are far more impalpable; the external observer finds that they elude his attempts to analyse them, and even the believer himself cannot penetrate into the mysteries of his own heart. He may utter his confession of faith, by means of a venerable formula, such as the Thirteen Articles of the creed, but in what sense does he interpret the language which he uses? He does so, most probably, in a different sense from that intended by Maimonides, or even by himself, when, as a boy, he sang the *Yigdal* hymn in the synagogue.

## Has Judaism Dogmas?

Before attempting to determine the nature of modern Jewish belief, it is necessary to refer to the theory, very popular since the age of Mendelssohn, that Judaism has no dogmas, that it lays no stress on belief but only on actions, that it is the "minimum of religion." With what scorn would the old Rabbis have repelled such assertions! The beliefs in the resurrection, in revelation and in tradition were dogmas, essential to salvation. There might be some hope for the *רשע תשוב*, who only sinned because his passions overmastered him, but there could be none for the *רשע להכשיר*, who denied, and defied. Now this position of the rabbis cannot be ours. We cannot believe that God will send his creatures to hell on account of an intellectual error. At the same time it is a much worse error to suppose that beliefs are of no importance. On the contrary, it is belief that can transfigure the most commonplace lives, that makes heroes and martyrs, that constitutes the true pre-eminence of man above the beast. Of this we can be quite sure, that if Judaism has now no faith, it must rediscover one or quickly perish.

## Faith and Reason.

The great cause of faith v. reason is one in which final judgment can never be pronounced by mortal judge; the pleadings will not be completed until human knowledge and insight are made perfect. Some deny the right of faith to exist, because reason is the sole rightful sovereign of our actions and thoughts. This idea is so far true that reason presides over the supreme court of appeal that has to adjudicate upon the claims of the various forces which seek to move us. The blindest adherent to authority does not yield to authority, except as the result of inward reasoning, conscious or unconscious. Still, reason should make no pretension to rule the little world within us, as

an absolute monarch. It cannot claim to be more than a constitutional ruler, that must often obey forces which it cannot limit or even analyse. The greater subjects of speculation and the whole realm of the affections are almost entirely beyond its control. Despite the philosopher, we exist because we feel, just as much as because we think. Can we by intellectual searching find out God, or justify duty and renunciation, eternal hope and eternal trust? In the long run our intellect has to admit that all such endeavours fail, and we must either drift into agnosticism or realise that truth is revealed to us by intuitions as well as by our reasoning powers.

### Faith and Creed.

Still, it is one thing to recognise the need of faith and another to attempt the formulation of that faith in a creed. It is often maintained that religion should be undogmatic. Now dogma is a word which is sometimes used as a mere term of abuse, applied to those tenets of faith, quite arbitrarily selected, which the speaker happens to reject. Objection to dogma may, however, rest upon a more logical foundation, for it may be argued that language is altogether inadequate to express the verities of faith, which can only be perceived darkly and vaguely. Just as the intellect cannot prove the truths which faith discovers, so also it cannot define them in precise terms. Further, faith is, to some extent, individual rather than collective. In the words of Ben Zoma, "Just as no two persons have the same face, so they have not the same ideas." Each of these considerations is sufficient to show that no articles of belief which we may draft will give a final summary of religious truth. Still such attempts serve a useful purpose, because they enable us to realise our outlook on the universe and to compare it with that of others. The objectionable thing is not a creed, but the misuse of a creed. When it is employed as a standard of orthodoxy, by means of which we separate the sheep of our own party from the goats of opposing parties, it becomes a mere instrument of contention and persecution. The worst examples of creeds, that become sectional catch-words, have arisen outside Jewry, but the history of Judaism also supplies warnings against this misuse. The rival formularies of Rabbonite and Karaite, of Maimonist and anti-Maimonist, of Traditionalist and Reformer, have often accentuated differences unnecessarily and prevented the continuance of unity in Jewish sentiment. It would, however, be a mere counsel of despair, if we ceased to give some expression, however imperfect, to the faith which is in us. A little humility and good feeling are alone required, in order to enable us to express our own belief, whilst respecting that of others.

We must guard against another abuse, to which articles of belief are liable. They may become a mere formula, to which we pay lip worship, without any real assent. Language possesses a considerable degree of elasticity, and it is often possible to give a reasonable extension of meaning to an ancient formula so as to make it express our own belief. But this principle has limits to its application. We may continue to affirm the "resurrection of the dead,"\* although we no longer hope for the future reunion of soul and body. On the other hand, it is a mere juggle of words to repeat the eighth article of belief, contained in our Prayer Book, if we reject, in fact, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. That "the whole

\* In the "Union Prayer Book," published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the second benediction of the Amidah is made to read "Praise be to Thee, O God, who hast implanted within us immortal life." The change is unnecessary, for the ancient liturgical phrase, "who quickenest the dead," need not imply a belief in the resurrection of the body.

law, now in our possession, is the same that was given to Moses," is a categorical statement which can only be rightly understood in its natural meaning.

### The Negative Side of Judaism.

We are now led to consider in what the creed of Judaism consists. Some have asserted that this creed is purely negative, and that our conception of Judaism should resemble the theory of Maimonides concerning the Godhead, which, as he supposes, can only be known in so far as we deny to it qualities that would limit its essence. Such thinkers define Judaism as the repudiation of idolatry. We must surely agree that this negative side of Judaism possesses great value, and that "the everlasting Nay" is the first step towards salvation. Better no guide than a false guide. At the same time, a religion, worthy of the name, must contribute some positive teaching concerning action and thought. "The just lives by his faith," and not by his negations, although the latter may well be the condition precedent to his faith. It becomes, therefore, important for us to determine the positive teaching of Judaism; that is, of that form of Judaism which is credible to us.

### Beliefs, Past and Present.

At this point there must be a hiatus in a brief essay such as this. Logically, it would be impossible to sketch the creed of Judaism except after a long historical enquiry and an examination of the dogmas put forward for our acceptance. But I am not writing a treatise on Judaism, and I must ask my readers to allow me to take a great deal for granted. The all-important distinction between the present and the past is the consequence of the changed attitude towards revelation, which is now general throughout the educated world. The ancient theory of Judaism assumed an infallible Bible, or at least an infallible Pentateuch. This "dogma of the Perfect, Immutable, and Divine Code" still lingers amongst Jews not affected by modern thought, but is elsewhere dead. We have come to recognise that our Scriptures include human as well as Divine elements; religious error as well as religious truth. The great doctrine of evolution is seen to apply to the spiritual as to the material world; the idea of progress has superseded the idea of finality. The breath of God stirs within the hearts of men; His light and truth lead them throughout the ages towards the promised land of perfect knowledge. The Bible is a unique record of the past operation of the Divine Spirit. Still, the writers of that record were the creatures of their time, sometimes liable to be misled by ignorance and superstition, by national prejudices and occasional fits of mere passion. It was Divine inspiration which caused the author of Deuteronomy to teach us the unity of God, and to exhort us that we should love the Lord with all our heart and might. On the other hand, he was largely mistaken in his views on the operations of Divine providence. Whilst the connection between the righteousness of a people and its national efficiency is partially verified by history, the somewhat mechanical sequence of events, predicated by the Deuteronomist, does not exist. Virtue must be content to constitute its own reward. The recompense of right-doing is peace of conscience, not rain in its due season and plenteous crops. Instead of believing that inspiration was suspended after the closing of the Biblical canon, we hold that new messages of divine truth reach mankind in every age and that the errors of the past are gradually dissipated. The inspiration of the Bible is only a supreme example of the workings of the divine spirit throughout human history.

### Tradition.

It may be thought that we are travelling somewhat far from the Judaism

of the old school, but there is one unifying idea, which is most valuable in maintaining religious continuity. This is the conception of tradition, which has always played so great a part in the history of Judaism. Of course the Rabbis sometimes spoke as though our oral traditions were revealed to Moses in their entirety, but the principal of development was not excluded from legislation in form but not in substance. Thus our traditions, whether relating to observances or doctrines, have grown and taken shape in the long period when the Talmud was recognised as of absolute authority. The theory of Judaism has always been far more elastic. Respect for tradition and a large measure of speculative freedom have combined to secure a continuity of growth, which was not entirely suspended in the darkest moments of mediæval repression. It is our task to continue the application of these two great principles to the needs of our own times.

#### The "Ikkarim."

Joseph Albo, who has written the most complete, if not the most original, work on the principles of Judaism, declares that revealed religion implies three essential dogmas: there must be (1), a divine law-giver, who (2), declares his will to man, and (3), enforces obedience. In other words, we must believe in the existence of God, in a divine law, in divine retribution. These three principles may well be accepted by modern Judaism as the headings of its creed. Let us try to develop each principle in somewhat greater detail.

#### The Existence of God.

First then, as to belief in the existence of God. This dogma has never been understood by the Jew as the recognition of a mere metaphysical abstraction. Although God is unconditioned and unknowable in His essence, yet He makes Himself known to man. How can we accept this paradox? God is known through His works, say the mediæval Rabbis, and they are able to appeal to Scriptural authority and to the testimony of our own hearts. The question admits of another answer, which is yet more fundamental. God is known to us, because His presence dwells within us, so that "the true Ekeinah is man." Also the saints, whose spiritual experience is deeper than ours, confirm our faith by their assurances: their lives are a revelation of the Divine glory. Thus we are encouraged to have faith in God and in goodness; to believe in the divine perfection and unity and also in the power of man to strive after righteousness, and thus to acquire the sense of God's presence within his soul.

#### The Law.

Albo's second dogma was belief in a "Law from Heaven." As has been already stated, this doctrine requires to be re-interpreted before we can accept it. For us, as for our fathers, it continues to be the central doctrine of Judaism and differentiates our religion from all others. Not only do we believe that God has revealed himself throughout history, but that He has chosen Israel as a people, whose mission it is to teach the world religion and goodness. Thus Israel is an inspired people, with a genius for religion, and that genius has received its highest expression in the Bible. We believe in progressive revelation, which constantly unveils new truths, new symphonies, a wider sense of humanity and justice.

#### Rewards and Punishments.

The dogma of divine retribution has been variously interpreted, sometimes with extreme folly and presumption. It would show a very imperfect

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sense of the mystery of evil, to declare with some of the Rabbis that "there is no death without sin, no chastisement without iniquity." None the less, we can recognise dimly the operations of divine justice, working mysteriously in the affairs of nations and of men. Many of our actions bring with them their own rewards and punishments; the character of a nation goes far towards determining its destiny. Virtue does not always lead to happiness, but it gives men power to bear the burden which is put upon them. So also, the purpose of sin and suffering is not entirely hidden from us. We can understand how the possibility of sin conditions our resistance to sin: because we may fall, we have the power to rise. According to the quaint saying of the Rabbis, "the Torah was not given to the angels of the firmament," but to man, who can only achieve virtue by conquering his passions. And of suffering, it has been finely said that whilst some forms remain dark and inexplicable, others "can be shot through with explanatory and ennobling light which makes them bearable and even good." Although much is hidden, the gleams of light, shed upon many dark places of the earth, help us to trust, where we cannot know. Nor need we restrict ourselves to considerations which are based upon the idea that this life is all. Account must be taken of the great hope of immortality, which ultimately depends upon a belief that God is loving and merciful, and that His purpose in creation endures for ever.

#### The Brotherhood of Man.

But the thought of another existence must not make us forget that earth, as well as heaven, is guided by Providence, which uses human instruments to achieve its purpose. Man can be a partner of God, say the Rabbis, in the work of Creation: they refer, I suppose, partly to the physical life, which should be regulated by a sense of man's responsibility to his Maker, and partly to the moral Creation, to the building up of a holier, happier, better ordered world. Unless the "Mission of Israel" is a meaningless phrase, Jews must take an active share in this work. If the time came for writing a new Jewish creed, one of the articles should be, "I believe with a perfect faith in the brotherhood of man." Indeed, the old Jewish creed, rightly understood, implies as much, for it regards benevolence not as a favour, but as a duty. To deprive the poor of gifts is not merely unkindness, but theft.† The feeling of social obligation is characteristic of Jewish orthodoxy, both in theory and in practice. It has been reserved, however, for modern thought to rediscover the principle of the Mosaic code, that kindly relations between individuals must be supplemented by legal enactments, by means of which the machinery of the State is applied to the betterment of social conditions. The motive power of all such social reform is belief in the brotherhood of man, which can reasonably be held only by those who have faith in the possibility of human improvement and in the coming of a Messianic age. Judaism has supplied the seed from which this harvest will grow: nay, from which it has begun already to grow. The development of social enthusiasm is the most striking characteristic of our generation. It has brought a religious spirit into the lives of many who would themselves repudiate the name of religion, although they supply unconscious testimony to the value of the old Hebrew teaching. The social reformer of to-day can still gain inspiration from the burning words of Isaiah and Amos; the code of laws, current in ancient Israel, will teach statesmen principles of universal application. But no race can live on its remote past, and the value of Judaism to the modern world will be judged by the performances of the modern Jew. We claim to be good citizens of the countries in which we live; too often we

† See "Ethics of the Fathers," ch. 5, § 12 (Authorised Daily Prayer-book, p. 201).

strive to substantiate this claim by exaggerating the national prejudices and sectional selfishness of our Gentile neighbours. It is true that Jewish charity is still worthy of honour, but much more is required of us if we are to be true to our mission. Social evils cannot be cured, except through the spirit of wisdom and justice, which will remove abuses and reconstitute society on better and surer foundations. In such a work, those who called themselves a chosen people, dare not lag behind. By his conduct in all the relations of life, a Jew must prove to the world that his religion makes him a better and more serviceable man. Thus to sanctify the name of God is no small part of Israel's mission. Whether as employer or workman, as landlord or tenant, as debtor or creditor, the Jew must display a sense of honour and humanity. The worst enemies of Judaism are not the anti-Semites, but our own seekers after unfair bargains, our grasping employers and cruel landlords, our book-makers and fraudulent bankrupts. Public opinion within our community must condemn such persons with unmistakable emphasis, if we wish to exercise a good and effective influence on the outside world. Similarly, it is our duty to raise the tone in which public questions are discussed. The principles of Judaism may not always enable us to decide whether we are to be Conservatives, or Liberals, or Socialists, but they should certainly warn us against the selfishness, the claptrap and unvarieties, which so often disfigure all political parties.

#### Israel, a Nation.

Another aspect of Judaism must not be ignored. Israel is only one race out of many, and the ideal of our religion is the good of humanity. In that sense we are, or ought to be, universalists. Without inconsistency, however, we can look forward to the renewal of our national life in the ancient home of our race. The Zionists contend rightly, in my opinion, that resettlement in Palestine would remove racial antagonisms and economic difficulties, and that the peculiar genius of the Jew would be developed more fully than amidst an alien environment. This question is political rather than religious, but one remark about it is relevant here. A believer in the Jewish religion is not necessarily a Zionist, but I do maintain that a Zionist may hold a conception of Judaism, which is not less universalist because it is national. The ultimate ideal of universal brotherhood may well be realised in a community of friendly nations, whose varying tastes and traditions do not destroy their mutual sympathy.

One final question remains. If the conception of Judaism, indicated in this paper, be accepted, how will Jewish observances be affected? So far as regards matters of ritual, the acceptance of historical criticism certainly involves important consequences. It substitutes reasoned fulfilment or rejection of these observances for unconditional surrender to all of them. We can no longer accept each of the 613 precepts as a direct command of God; our actions must be guided by our conscience and not by an infallible book and infallible traditions. As a result, certain ritual observances will disappear, because they no longer serve a useful purpose. Still we may be confident that most of our religious institutions will justify themselves, when they are fairly and impartially considered. The Torah has supplied Israel with rites whose spiritual meaning is as real to-day as ever it was. It includes precepts, which are valuable as a code of discipline and which, when they are performed in the manner sanctified by tradition, constitute a tie between the scattered units of the Jewish nation throughout the world. There is every hope that Judaism will always retain its essential nature and that its adherents will continue to regard as their ideal, a "life under the law." The old faith and the new will in reality be one.