

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION  
IN REFORM JUDAISM

With special emphasis on Geiger, Holdheim,  
Einhorn, Wise and Kohler.

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INTRODUCTION

THE REFORM MOVEMENT AND THE PROBLEM OF REVELATION

## INTRODUCTION

### THE REFORM MOVEMENT AND THE PROBLEM OF REVELATION

The close of the eighteenth century is designated by historians as the birth of the modern age; yet, that which we term as modernity was not the sudden outburst of a new era, but a gradual growth, the result of many forces at work in the process. The Jew has always been susceptible to the changing influences of the environment in which he has chanced to be. "From early time, this has been the case. The Bible indicated in many passages the proneness of the Israelites to adopt the customs of the surrounding people and to accept their view-points of religion and life. The Babylonian civilization with which the Jews came into contact during the exile and after, left more than a passing effect there can be no doubt; the feast of Purim may be instanced as a striking proof of this; Babylonian in origin, it was given a Jewish dress and became incorporated into the system of Jewish observance. Thus, too, the Persian environment in which the Jews found themselves after the passing of the Babylonian empire into the power of Cyrus and his successors left its mark; to mention but one result of the contact with Zoroastrian beliefs, it is only necessary to refer to the influence of the Persian system of angelology and demonology on Jewish thought; the so-called Hellenistic movement among the Jews of the two pre-Christian centuries is indication sufficient of the hospitality afforded to Greek thought; the writings of Philo testify to the welcome which was accorded the Alexandrian Neo-Platonic philosophy; in the Talmud, there are indications that the Jews were influenced by customs and thoughts that prevailed among their

neighbors; traces of Neo-Persian are not wanting; the Arabic philosophical movements are reflected in the pages of Saadian (Faith and Knowledge) and the Aristotelian revival in Europe through the Christian scholiasts finds its Jewish counterpart in the Judea-Spanish medieval philosophers."<sup>1</sup> Thus Judaism was always influenced by these outside forces and mirrored these forces in its religious conception.

But, with the advent of the Ghetto, Judaism, barred from the outside world, gradually became intellectually ostracised from the thought currents of the age. This does not mean that the Jew stagnated intellectually, though his cultural progress was individualistic in character. The era of official ghettoism from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century was coincident with the exclusion of the Jew from all the sympathetic concern with the culture of the world. By the eighteenth century, the Jew had reached the height of his ghetto isolation. It was quite natural. Outside forces were at work which penetrated into his inner life producing startling changes which ushered in the Reform Movement.

As long as Jewry was a closed community without connection with the outside world, the ceremonialism and legalism developed by rabbinical Judaism satisfied the religious consciousness of the people; but, when the Jew experienced the freedom of the emancipation,<sup>2</sup> he had to reinterpret his Judaism in order to meet the perplexing problems of the new age. The traditional interpretation did not harmonize with the new life. A re-interpretation of the

1. Philipson, Reform Movement in Judaism, p.3

2. The emancipation was threefold in character; namely, the linguistic, intellectual and civil. For detailed information see Reform Movement in Judaism by David Philipson, chapter 1, also Jewish Encycl. vol. 10, art. Reform Judaism.

message of Judaism and a re-adjustment of its external expression were imperative in the light of the changed experiences in the fortunes of Jewry. Reform sought to answer this need; and, in the activities of Geiger, Holdheim, <sup>their</sup> ~~his~~ contemporaries and successors, they endeavored to bring the expression of a broader development of universal religious element in Judaism. Reform Judaism broke the shell of legalism by interpreting the eternal verities of Judaism to the thoughts and beliefs of the new age. "Broadly speaking there had been two streams of thought in Judaism: prophetism versus ritualism; Hellenism versus Palestinian Judaism....but, owing to the circumstances of Jewish life during the Christian centuries, the freer movements of thought that of old had flowered so gloriously in prophetism and Hellenistic Judaism could not receive full swing; but, when the revolutions that inaugurated the modern age made of the Jew a free man, the spirit of Judaism soared once more into regions of universal thought and religion. And this is Reform Judaism---a reassertion of the world embracing ideas and the world enveloping hopes of ethical monotheism, an optimistic outlook toward the Messianic age, a substitution of prophetic vision of Oriental legalism and elegaic medievalism, a fearless propagandism of the message that God's revelation is continuous; and, therefore, religion, embodiment of that revelation, must adapt its teachings and its methods to the changing needs and requirements of the successive ages of the world to whom God speaks as surely as ever He did in ages past."<sup>1</sup>

Thus this new movement was not an ephemeral expression, nor was it correctly described when its purpose was declared by one of

1. Philipson, Holdheim as a Reformer, C.C.A.R., vol. XVI, pp. 307-8.



its antagonists to be, "To take a standpoint outside of Judaism, to accept a conception derived from strangers for the purpose of human life and the object of liberty, and then in correspondence with this borrowed notion to cut, curtail, and obliterate the tenets and ordinances of Judaism."<sup>1</sup>

Reform Judaism has often been described as a movement inspired with the desire to return to Mosaism. The doctrines of Reform Judaism give conclusive proof that this is not the truth. Mosaism implies the institution of the Levitical laws and the binding character and immutability of the Torah. Reform Judaism ignores and often abrogates many of the laws of Mosaism.<sup>2</sup>

The pivotal point of disagreement between Traditional and Reform Judaism is the doctrine of authority which in its fundamental analysis involves the doctrine of revelation. Traditional Judaism had no difficulty with the problem. It accepted the Divine revelation as recorded in the Torah without question, obeying and fulfilling the laws and regulations as prescribed therein. Reform Judaism, on the other hand, questioned the authenticity of this account insisting that revelation was not a fixed doctrine. This new interpretation gave it latitude enabling its followers to incorporate and respond to the changing conditions of the environment. Revelation to the Reform Movement was not a memory of the past, but a continual unfoldment of God's presence.

The question may be correctly asked: why did the doctrine of revelation occupy such an important place in a movement that was founded on rationalistic thought. The subject of revelation was always an important problem to every religious group. The desire

1. Letters of Ben Uziel (Eng. Translation, p. 174, New York 1899.

2. Jew. Ency., art. Reform Judaism, vol. X, p. 347.

to know and understand the will of God has been the guiding principle of man throughout the long course of human history. The limitations of his normal knowledge in the face of pressing needs led man to seek the presence of God, who, in turn, would give him a solution to the perplexing problems of the world. Thus, this desire for a direct communication with God has been the imperative need of man if he were to follow the will and dictates of his deity. The means by which he could obtain direct heavenly communication has been the subject of much speculation in the history of religious thought, upon which religions have developed and fallen. Briefly the manifestations of Revelation can be summarized as follows:

"(a). Significant occurrences which are considered signs pointing to the desired information, as in astrology.

(b). Casting of lots or examination of entrails.

(c). Oracles which meditate the will of God directly through specific places or persons.

(d). Dreams or visions which are believed to record realities not accessible to the mind in waking moments.

(e). Ecstasy, in which a prophet is inspired to utter divine truth.

(f). Sacred Books, either written by divine inspiration or divinely authorized."<sup>1</sup>

Revelation, then, can be defined as the process by which God makes known to man the truth which He requires, or, for the body of truth which God has made known.

With the advance of culture, revelation began to be generally located in the utterances of the prophets and the messages of sacred

1. Revelation, art. in Dictionary and Ethics, edited by Mathews and Smith, p. 377.



scriptures. Orthodox Judaism accepted the manifestation of Revelation as described in their sacred books, The Torah, and built up its system of doctrines on the authenticity of those accounts. Their problem was a simple one; but the introduction of the physical sciences, historical criticism, and comparative religions disclosed facts which made it difficult to maintain the doctrine of external authentication and revelation became to be considered more and more as an exceptional spiritual insight rather than a non-human communication of truth. The contents of revelation was restricted to the realm of religious experience disclosing God's character and purpose. "As it carried its own proof with it in the living experience of the first recipients, so must its transcendent meaning still become matter of assurance to those alone who accepted and appropriated its truth by passing it through their lives."<sup>1</sup>

Reform Judaism is not a negation of the Doctrine of Revelation but an affirmation of the term, contending that revelation is not an historical account but rather a continual manifestation of Divine Presence unfolding His Laws before man. The acceptance of this interpretation permits the introduction of changes in the religious belief. Thus, the doctrine of revelation assumes an important place in the development of Judaism. The discussion of this doctrine necessitates the definition of Judaism, for Judaism is founded on the recognition that God has revealed Himself, and,

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1. See Revelation and Religious Certitude by W.B.Ritchie.

as stated in the Reform Movement, is still revealing Himself to His Chosen people Israel.<sup>1</sup>

The definitions and development of this new interpretation is the subject of this thesis. The purpose is to show how the idea of Revelation took final shape in the most spiritual expression of a searching group. The doctrine as expressed by the outstanding men of the Reform movement particularly Geiger, Holdheim, Einhorn, Wise and Kohler, has placed reform on the sound basis of scholarly investigation, philosophical reasoning, and latter-day justification. The treatment of these men will not be taken in chronological or historical order, but, rather their respective conceptions of Revelation will be discussed in the order of their intrinsic progress. Thus, Wise, who, although a reformer of great importance, will be considered first since his conception of Revelation bears much similarity to the Orthodox point of view. Einhorn and Holdheim, opposite extremists in contrast to Wise, though they still recognized the validity of the Torah as divinely revealed, will follow.

Geiger, who in reality is the outstanding scholar in this new movement, will be the next character in the study of this interesting and important subject, as his doctrine of revelation, even though he lived at the genesis of this movement, is the accepted belief in the Reform movement of the present. This thesis will conclude with a discussion of Kohler's conception of Revelation, who, not only reflects the thoughts of his master, Abraham

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1. Reform Judaism accepted the doctrine of revelation and its proof that God did reveal Himself to Israel was expressed by one of its outstanding men in this new movement: "That a revelation actually took place is shown us from History and of which the following indisputable sentences are a result: (1). Before the revelation in Israel occurred, all the nations of Heathendom and Idolatry disappeared. (2). All nations, who did not obtain the Revelation of Israel and who have not as yet obtained it, are even unto this day lost to heathendom and idolatry. (3). All nations who have a clear conception of God, are those who have obtained the Revelation of Israel and it is the foundation of their religion and they acknowledge a moral and social existence." (Philipson, Israel Religionslehre, p. 40.)

Geiger, but was instrumental in formulating the Pittsburg platform which contains the crystallization of the Reform's conception of Revelation.

I

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION IN TRADITIONAL JUDAISM

I.

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION IN TRADITIONAL JUDAISM

The doctrine of revelation in Traditional Judaism is of vital importance since the subject includes in its scope the whole problem of authority. The contention that God revealed His laws to the people, Israel, is the foundation of this view of Judaism. Throughout the ages Traditional Judaism held fast to this doctrine of Revelation, contending that God revealed Himself to Moses and the prophets personally and without any mediator making known His Divine Will. Thus Revelation has become a fixed, unchangeable and positive belief, permitting no change or modification. Without this belief, the laws of the Lawgiver and the prophets would have no authority, neither could the Rabbis make new interpretations, quoting the Divine revealed sentences of the Torah as their ultimate authority.

The doctrine of Revelation was never a debatable doctrine in Traditional Judaism. It was accepted without question. Man was created in the image of God and so had to order his life according to the Divine Will. Thus it became necessary for God to make known His Will to man; man needed a direct communication from God, that is, A Divine Revelation. Maimonides, in formulating his thirteen principles, included the doctrine of revelation as one of the vital doctrines that should be accepted by every Jewish worshipper.

But, everyone was not able to commune or receive the revealed Word of God. The real process of revelation, by what means and in what manner the Infinite and Incorporeal Being made His Will known to man, and how the latter became conscious and convinced of the

fact that a Divine communication had been made, was only possible to a few privileged persons. "As the blind man who had never possessed the sense of sight is incapable of comprehending the actual process of seeing so are we, born without that wonderful prophetic eye, without the prophetic faculty of the mind, incapable of comprehending and depicting the process of inspiration that goes on within the minds of the privileged."<sup>1</sup> When, however, a Divine communication is made known to one privileged individual, through whom it is made known to a whole community, or to mankind, there is no other means of testing the correctness of the revelation than the trustworthiness of the privileged individual.

The first proof given to the Israelites of the fact that such a revelation was not only possible; but, had actually been vouchsafed by the Almighty, was the revelation on Mount Sinai, the *ה'ר סיני*, where the whole people became witnesses to the Divine revelation; and, at the same time, were pledged to observe all the laws which God afterward gave them through Moses.<sup>2</sup> This revelation became the foundation of the faith of Israel. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak with thee and may also believe thee forever."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the Revelation on Mount Sinai is considered the chief corner-stone of the Jewish faith and guarantees the Divine origin of the Law as contained in the Torah. Its importance prompted the rabbis to state that the witnesses at Sinai beheld more than any of the other prophets. "In that hour while stationed at the foot

1. Schmiedl, Studien, p. 183.

2. Jewish Ency., art. Revelation, vol. X, p. 396.

3. Exodus 19:9.

of Sinai, they (the people) saw what neither Ezekiel or Isaiah saw."<sup>1</sup>

Thus Jehudah ha Levi with the rabbis stated that the Lord appeared to the people of Israel on Sinai face to face in order to pledge them for all generations to come to remain true to Him and to worship no other gods.<sup>2</sup> "The Lord spoke with every single Israelite on Sinai, so that each heard him say, 'I am the Lord, thy God; as it is said: the Lord spoke with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire.'"<sup>3</sup>

Jehudah ha Levi is in full accord with the spirit of Judaism when he declared that the revelation on Mount Sinai was the great historical fact upon which the Jewish faith, as far as it is a truth revealed, rested;<sup>4</sup> for, it was at Mount Sinai that the Jewish people received the Divine Word of God---the Torah which is the basis of all laws and dogmas of Judaism. The people were convinced that the Torah was communicated by God to Moses and was not the result of human invention; that prophecy does not consist in the union of the soul of man with the active intellect, in his attaining to great wisdom, or in his mistaking his own words for the words of God---such erroneous opinions were refuted by the revelation on Mount Sinai.<sup>5</sup>

The whole Torah, including history as well as precepts, is of Divine origin and anyone rejecting the integrity and divinity of the Torah forfeits the blessings of the future world.<sup>6</sup> The

1. Mechilta on Exodus 19:11, Jethro III.
2. Jew. Ency., art. Theology, vol. XII, p. 128.
3. Cuzari I:25, 97.
4. Jew. Ency., art. Revelation, vol. X, p. 396.
5. Cuzari I:87, 89.
6. Sanhedrin 99a.



The Mishna emphatically asserts the Divine origin of the Torah and excludes from membership in the Jewish community those who hold contrary opinions.<sup>1</sup> Of the commentators of the middle ages, Ibn Ezra is firm in his belief in the truth of the Divine writings when he states: "We believe in the words of our God and abandon the vain opinions of the sons of man."<sup>2</sup> He further writes in commenting on the 19th Psalm: "The first part shows how the intelligent man can find in nature evidence for the existence and power of the Deity; but, there is a far better and more trustworthy witness - the Law called by David 'perfect' because no other evidence is required in support of the Divine utterances contained in the Holy writings."<sup>3</sup> Jehuda ha Levi explains to the Khazar king his faith as follows: we believe in the Lord of our fathers, who brought the Israelites forth from Egypt by signs and miracles, sustained them in the wilderness with manna, divided for them the sea and the Jordan, gave them the Law through Moses, exhorted them through His prophets to obey his commandments; in short, we believe all that is written in the Torah.<sup>4</sup> Maimonides upholds this belief in the Divine origin of the Torah revealed at Mount Sinai and incorporates this idea in his eighth article. "I firmly believe that the Law which we possess now is the same which has been given to Moses on Sinai."<sup>5</sup> "It has been distinctly stated in the Torah that its precepts remain in force forever without change, diminution, or addition. The word which I command you that you must keep to do, thou shalt not add

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1. Sanhedrin X:1

2. On Genesis 7:19

3. On Psalms 19:8

4. Cuzari I:9.

5. Friedlander, The Jewish Religion, p. 134 ff.



ought unto it nor take any away from it. (deut 31:1). That which has been revealed for us and for our children forever is to do all the words of the Lord (Deut. 29:28). Hence, it follows that we are bound to do according to the words of the Torah. It is further said: an everlasting statute for all generations".<sup>1</sup>

Albo, in criticising the principles of faith laid down by Maimonides, objects also to the ninth principle and contends that it is not fundamental; since the belief in the Divine origin of the Law does not necessarily imply the belief in its eternity; though, he states that "if any person asserts that he is sent by God to repeal the old laws or to alter them, he must prove his divine mission before he can be believed. We are fully convinced of the Divine Mission of Moses, and, on conviction, the Divine Mission of the new prophets must be at least equally as strong."<sup>2</sup>

Likewise Maimonides writes that a "prophet cannot reveal new laws. If, therefore, any man whether an Israelite or a non-Israelite, should rise, perform signs and miracles, and say that the Lord sent him to add one precept, or, to abolish one of the Divine precepts, or, to interpret a precept in a way different from what has been handed down to us from Moses, or assert that the precepts which were given to the Israelites had only temporary force and were no permanent laws—such a man is a false prophet, because he contradicts the prophecy of Moses".<sup>3</sup>

Abraham ben David, in his book *Emunah-raham*, finds in various passages of the Bible indications that the Torah was to remain in force permanently. "Although many of the other nations, especially

1. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, section of *Hilchot Yesode ha Torah* 9.
2. Albo, *Ikkarim* III:XIX
3. Maimonides, *op. cit.*

the Samaritans and Mohammedans have accused the Jews of altering and changing the Torah they have not proved the case. "The divinity of the old covenant or the Torah, has been admitted by both Jesus and Mohammed, we need not prove it. But the Divine authority asserted by them for its abrogation or change is not admitted by us; it must be proved and since no proof has been given, it must be rejected."<sup>1</sup>

Despite these superficial disagreements, all the thinkers believed and taught the Divine origin and immutability of the Torah given by God to Moses. Philo claims that "the Law is the greatest miracle of God on earth, an image of the eternal order of the cosmos, incomparably better than all other laws of the world. All other laws and constitutions were doomed to end: 'but his laws (of Moses) are firm, immoveable, unshaken, sealed as it were with nature's own seal, and they have remained in force from the time in which they are written to this day. And there is hope that they will remain immortal into all coming time - as long as sun and moon and the entire heavens and the world abide. For though the people have experienced very great changes of fortune and misfortune, nothing not even the least of the laws, was changed.'"<sup>2</sup> So does Josephus uphold the traditional belief of the Torah when he remarks: "and even though we might be robbed of riches and cities and of other goods, there remains to us our immortal Law".<sup>3</sup> Ben Sirach praises the Law as the embodiment of wisdom of God, even the Law "which Moses commanded us for a heritage unto the assemblies of Jacob. It maketh wisdom abundant as Pishon, and as Tigris in the days of new fruits".<sup>4</sup>

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1. Friedlander, op. cit., p. 205.

2. C.C.A.R. Yearbook, vol. 13, Detroit, p. 233.

3. Ibid, p. 234.

4. Ibid, p. 235.

But more evident proof of the divine origin of the Torah is the Bible itself, for in it are contained striking passages which discuss its immutability. "I, the Lord, have not changed".<sup>1</sup> "For God is not a son of man that He should change His mind".<sup>2</sup> "Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you. Neither shalt thou diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I command you".<sup>3</sup> In the Pentateuch, there is not the slightest indication that the laws revealed on Sinai might be superseded by a future revelation. The phrases *חוק עולם* an everlasting statute, *לדור ודור*, for everlasting generations, are frequently found.

Much discussion is centered around the authorship of the Torah, though all agree that it was divinely revealed. The Talmud ascribes Moses as author of the Pentateuch. "Moses wrote his book and the Book of Beliam".<sup>4</sup> There is a difference, however, with regard to the last eight verses of the Pentateuch. According to Jehudah (or Rabbi Nehemiah), Joshua wrote the last eight verses. Rabbi Simeon object: "It is possible that the Torah was incomplete when Moses told: take the Book of the Law (Deut. 21:26). God dictated the last eight verses of the Pentateuch to Moses and he later wrote them with tears." Though it is emphasized in the Talmud that the Torah had been given to Israel in its entirety and nothing had been reserved for the second revelation. "The Law is not any longer in heaven, it is entirely in the hands of man."<sup>5</sup> With the exception of Rabbi Jehudah as stated above, no doubt was entertained by any of the Rabbis as to the integrity of the Torah. Rabbi

1. Malachi 3:6

2. Numbers 23:19

3. Exodus 4:2

4. Baba Bathra 14b

5. Baba Mesia, 59b.

Jochanan, following the opinion of Rabbi Banaah, held that the Torah was written by Moses piecemeal at different times, just as events happened or as each law was revealed to him. Rabbi Simon ben Lakish said: it was written by him at one time.<sup>1</sup> But, the Talmud states that the Torah is immutable. "The reading from the Prophets and the Hagiographa may at some time in the future be discontinued but the reading of the Pentateuch will never be abolished."<sup>2</sup>

Traditional Judaism, however, does not confine itself to the acknowledgement of the authority of the Torah in its canonical sense—that is, of the Written Law — but sets up the authority of Jewish tradition — that is, of the Oral Law — besides it as a norm of conduct.<sup>3</sup> This unity of Scripture and Tradition has enabled the growth and collection of a vast literature embodying the interpretation and explanations of Biblical laws and conduct. But the Oral law was just as important as the written law since both were revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai. A very clear assertion of the Oral Law can be found in Friedman's Seder Elijau Zota, chapter 2:

"Once as I was walking on my way, a certain man met me and approached me in the manner of the heretics. He was possessed of Scripture but not of Mishneh. He said unto me, "Scripture was given to us on Mount Sinai; Mishneh was not given to us on Mount Sinai." I said unto him, "My son, do not both Scripture and Mishneh proceed from the mouth of the Almighty....to what can the matter be compared? To a king of flesh and blood who had two servants whom he loved. He gave to each a measure of wheat and to each a bundle of flax. What did the wise servant do? He took the flax and wove it into fine cloth; he took the wheat and made it into fine flour, sifted it and ground it, kneaded it and baked it, and set it upon the table, spread over it the linen cloth, and left it for the coming of the king. But the foolish servant did nothing at all.

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1. Gittin 60a

2. Talmud Jer., Megillah I, 70a

3. Deutsch, The Theory of Oral Tradition, C.C.A.R. Yearbook 1897, p. 129 ff.



In the course of time, the kind returned to his house and said, "My children bring me what I have given you." The one brought forth the loaf of fine flour arranged on the table and the linen cloth spread over it. The other brought the wheat in the barrel with the bundle of flax upon it....."Woe for the shame of it, woe for the disgrace thereof. Tell me, thou, which is to be preferred, is it not he who brought the table with the loaf of fine Bread upon it?....So when the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, He gave it only as wheat from which flour was to be made, and as flax from which a garment was to be woven".<sup>1</sup>

The above quotation gives a clear understanding of the importance of the Oral Law, for traditional Judaism accepts the legal authority of the Torah only as the accepted tradition defines and interprets the Law. The traditional position, referred to in innumerable Midrashim and restated by many medieval codifiers, has in modern times been clearly put in Hoffman's introduction to his commentary on Leviticus:

"If the Torah, a divine revelation, may not contradict itself, neither may it contradict the Divinely Oral Law. Any interpretation of Torah which is directed against the traditional interpretation, or bears a meaning whereby a traditional Halacha is contradicted must be rejected as an explanation and, therefore, as an un-Jewish explanation....We have therefore two complimentary laws, one of which has been preserved in writing, the other imparted orally."<sup>2</sup>

God revealed Himself through certain individuals. A person favored by Divine communication was called a prophet. The selection of the individual for the sanctified office of prophecy, as well as the time and place, and the object of the Divine communication, depends solely on the Will of God; though it is certain that God would not endow any person with this divine faculty unless he was worthy of it. "The Divine Spirit does not rest on man unless he is wise, strong and rich."<sup>3</sup> Ibn Ezra remarked that the sons of

1. Jacob Kohn, Reflection of the Theory of Revelation, Students' Annual Jewish Theological Seminary of America, May 1914, p. 203.

2. Ibid, p. 202.

3. Sabbath 92a.

the prophets led a contemplative life of seclusion in the hope of receiving inspiration, everyone according to his faculty.<sup>1</sup>

Maimonides states his conception of prophecy in his Articles Six and Seven. He regards prophecy "as a certain perfection founded in human nature; the individual, however, cannot attain to that perfection except by means of exercise which causes that which is potentially contained in the species to become actual, provided there be no obstacle arising out of the temperament or some other cause."<sup>2</sup> He cannot ascribe to the opinion that prophecy is purely from Divine intervention without any reference to the capacity of the receiver. "Know that prophecy, in its true sense and character, is an emanation of the Deity which through the agency of the intellect spreads itself first over the rational (logical and intellectual) and then over the imaginative faculty; it marks the highest degree of man and the acme of perfection to which the human species may attain, and this state is the highest perfection of the imaginative faculty. It is something which by no means need be present in every man, nor is it something at which one may arrive through the utmost attention to the speculative sciences or through moral perfection in the imaginative faculty".<sup>3</sup>

Maimonides' view that man after due preparation and training may still be debarred from the ranks of prophecy was severely criticised by the commentators of his Guide. They maintained that after God had invited and encouraged man to approach His Presence, surely He would not thwart the very hopes He had implanted. According to their opinions, God's hand is extended to all; everyone may acquire the prophetic faculty and those who have not acquired it have not been duly qualified for it.<sup>4</sup>

1. Friedlander, op. cit. p. 197.

2. Guide II:32

3. Ibid II:36

4. Friedlander, op. cit. pp. 197-199.

Albo, in contrast to Maimonides, did not consider the prophetic faculty as the natural development of man's intellectual faculties; but solely and directly due to Divine inspiration by means of which man acquires a knowledge of things which are otherwise beyond the limits of human intellect.<sup>1</sup> He admits that it is impossible to imagine a prophet who has not attained a high degree of moral and intellectual perfection.<sup>2</sup>

Jehuda ha Levi describes prophecy as an extraordinary gift granted by the Almighty to such human beings as are qualified for it by the highest degree of intellectual development, moral conduct, and an earnest desire for communion with God.<sup>3</sup> The qualities of prophecy can only be found in a few privileged individuals—the heart of mankind, who, as it were, possessed it as an inheritance transmitted from generation to generation, but it can only be possessed or acquired under certain favorable conditions, e.g., that the prophet live in Palestine, the land of prophecy, or have his attention directed to Palestine.<sup>4</sup>

Maimonides also makes the remark that prophecy is not limited to Israel; it is for the select among mankind in general. In contrast to the amazing rationalism of Maimonides is the view of Jehudah ha Levi, who asserts that the gift of prophecy became the specific privilege of the descendants of Abraham after their consecration as God's chosen people at Sinai and that the holy soil of Palestine was assigned to them as the habitation best adapted to its existence.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Cuzari V:12

4. Ibid I:95

5. Ibid.

But, despite these minor differences, the prophetic faculty was recognized and all ascribed to the words of Maimonides when he wrote his Sixth Article: "I firmly believe that all the words of the prophets are true."<sup>1</sup> The Law demands the obedience to the prophets, except in the case of a prophet preaching the worship of foreign deities.<sup>2</sup> "A prophet who, speaking in the midst of thee, a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying: let us go after other gods which thou hast not known, and let us serve them: thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or unto that dreamer of dreams.....Ye shall walk after the Lord, your God, and fear Him and keep His commandments and obey His voice and ye shall serve Him and cleave unto Him, and that prophet or dreamer of dreams shall be put to death; because he hath spoken rebellion against the Lord, your God, who brought ye out of the land of Egypt....to draw thee aside of the ways which the Lord, your God, commanded thee to walk in."<sup>3</sup>

In order to inspire the people with the faith in the Prophets, God considered it necessary on Mount Sinai to let the whole Jewish people hear that He spoke to Moses, that they might believe him forever: Thus Moses is considered the greatest of all prophets.

The Bible emphatically states that Moses was the father of all prophets and laid down the rules by which the truth of all preceding prophecies could be judged. The trustworthiness of Moses having thus been tested and established, his teaching remained the foundation of the teachings of all succeeding prophets

1. Friedlander, op. cit. p. 131.

2. Deut. 13:2-6.

3. *ibid.*



and the test of their truthfulness and genuineness. A prophet who taught anything opposed to the laws of Moses could not be a true prophet, although he supported his words by signs and miracles.<sup>1</sup> When Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, God rebuked them saying, "If there be among you a prophet of the Lord, I will make myself known unto him in a vision; I will speak with him in a dream. My servant, Moses, is not so; he is faithful in all my house; with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly and not in dark speeches and the form of the Lord will he behold."<sup>2</sup> Such a close communion with God made Moses 'His faithful servant and mouthpiece for all times'.<sup>3</sup> The Torah concludes with the praises of Moses as follows: "And there hath not risen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses whom the Lord knew face to face; in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharoah, and to all his servants and to all his land; and in all the mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel."<sup>4</sup>

The rabbis clearly distinguished between Moses and the rest of the prophets. "All the other prophets saw God through nine glasses, but Moses saw Him through one glass. Or, all the other prophets saw God through a soiled, unclean glass, while Moses saw Him through a clear, finely polished glass."<sup>5</sup>

Maimonides summarizes the traditional viewpoint of Moses in his seventh principle when he states: "I firmly believe that the prpphecy of Moses was a direct prophecy, and that Moses was the chief of the prophets, both of those who preceded him and of those who followed him."<sup>6</sup> The superiority of the prophetic

1. Ibid.

2. Numbers 12:6-8.

3. Exodus 24:15-18; 33:8-11, 28,35.

4. Deut. 34:10-12

5. Leviticus Rabba c.1.

6. Friedlander, op. cit. p. 133.

inspiration of Moses consists according to Maimonides in four points: Moses prophesied while awake, and not in dreams, while the other prophets received the Divine message through the mediating offices of an angel and were obliged to resort to symbolic language; Moses spoke with God "face to face" and saw His very form, understood the Divine Word in its absolute truth without the need of symbols, while the other prophets trembled or lost their bodily strength during the Divine inspiration; Moses stood firm speaking to God "as one speaks to his neighbor"<sup>1</sup>, while the other prophets, prepared though they might be, were obliged to wait until the Deity was pleased to speak to them; Moses was at all times able to obtain Divine inspiration.<sup>2</sup> He, therefore, came to the conclusion that the term prophet when applied to Moses cannot have the same meaning as it has when applied to other Divine messengers and that the prophecies of Moses differed from that of other prophets not only in degree but in kind.

Though this view was not accepted by other philosophers, Albo contended that the prophecies of Moses were of the same kind as that of other prophets though excelled only by a higher degree of prophetic faculty.<sup>3</sup> The Divine character of the mission of Moses was revealed to the Israelites by God Himself and only such a direct revelation could satisfy us as to the trustworthiness of the new prophets.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these conflicting views, all agreed with Maimonides that Moses was the greatest of all prophets. Abraham ibn Ezra explained the words: "and the Lord spoke to Moses" as referring

1. Exodus 33:11.

2. Guide, Chapt. 35.

3. Albo, Ikkarim III:17.

4. Ibid.

to true speech and not to speech with the mouth, which is merely a representation of the other. "God spoke to Moses" as a man speaketh to his neighbor, that is to say, directly and not through a messenger.<sup>1</sup> Moses is to Philo the greatest of all prophets, the latter are but associates and friends of Moses, though Moses was in no way responsible for them.<sup>2</sup> Thus the mission of the prophets after Moses was to exhort the people to obey the Laws of Moses and not to make a new religion or add to that which was given at the Sinaitic revelation.<sup>3</sup> The signs and miracles performed by Moses were not for the purpose of proving his claim to prophecy, as all Israel was a witness of his prophetic communion with God immediately after the Sinaitic revelation.

God, also, revealed Himself to the first man. Adam heard the voice of God; he felt the presence of the Almighty and learned the amount of evil man brings upon himself by disobeying the word of God. Likewise Noah and the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, experienced the direct revelation and Divine communication of the Almighty.<sup>4</sup>

There is another manifestation of Divine revelation which did not find expression in any message to the Israelites or to mankind; but, in a certain supernatural impulse is given to the thought or will of a person. Such an impulse is called inspiration and the inspired person is moved to speak or to act by the 'spirit of God'. The works of these men are incorporated in the Hagiographa and other books besides those found in the Torah.<sup>5</sup>

1. Friedlander, op. cit. p. 197.

2. C.C.A.R. Yearbook, 1903, vol. 13, p. 223.

3. Com. the Guide II:34 and Saadiah's Emunoth ve-deoth III:7-10.

4. Jew. Encycl. art. Theology, vol. XII, p. 128.

5. Ibid, art. Inspiration, vol. VI, p. 607.

Thus the doctrine of Revelation according to Traditional Judaism is a fixed and positive belief permitting no change in the works that bear the testimony of the greatest of revelation—the Sinaitic Revelation. God revealed Himself to Israel and the acceptance of this fact is a cardinal doctrine of Traditional Judaism. "This view of Judaism posits the following thesis about revelation:

- (1). There are two classes of Biblical laws: Logical laws and laws of revelation. The Logical laws are those axioms of the human soul which, though they carry their justification within themselves; yet their chief obligation they derive from this, since God ~~has~~ positively commanded them. The Laws of revelation were first revealed on Sinai and the duty of obedience to them lies in the authority of the Lawgiver, who is none else but God Himself. Nobody but the Lawgiver Himself has the right to change or revoke them. Since God Himself did not change or revoke the laws up till now, then, de jure, the obligation to all mosaic laws still prevails, although, de facto, the necessary suppositions for the fulfillment of some laws are lacking. But should all circumstances be present again, should all Israel be again in the possession of Palestine and national independence, then all the biblical commandments have again to be carried out in practice."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Sind Offenbarungsglaube und Reform zu vereinbaren? Sinai, II (1857), pp. 407-408.

II

ISAAC MAYER WISE'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION



## II.

### ISAAC MAYER WISE'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION

The name of Isaac Mayer Wise<sup>1</sup> will always be linked with the Reform Movement in Judaism as he was one of the outstanding spokesmen of the Reform Movement in America. Wise considered himself as a theologian of the Reform school. His theology bears the imprint of Traditionalism more than it does the modern conception. As a theologian of Reform Judaism and a rather paradoxical one at that, he occupies a position particularly his own; for despite his radical tendencies, he tenaciously upheld and believed in the Traditional doctrine of revelation, believing that his theological arguments would pave the way for a greater and more comprehensive Judaism in this land. His unique views led Emil Hirsch to state that "although there is much originality in his conception, yet it is not that of Reform Judaism. It is at its best a sort of re-vamped and modernized Karaism. And Reform Judaism, at least according to its most scholarly expounders, is not a return to Mosaism."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, Wise was a man of his age who aimed to reconcile Judaism with the age and its needs. He wrote to this end, directing his writings to current problems, the burning issues of the hour.<sup>3</sup> He considered Judaism as undefinable,<sup>4</sup> which was due to its constant development; but, he urged repeatedly, the need for a systematized theology of Judaism, for an authentic statement of Jewish doctrines.

1. Born at Steingrub, Bohemia, March 29, 1819; died at Cincinnati, Ohio, March 26, 1900.

2. Reform Advocate, vol. 17 (1899) p. 100.

3. Morgenstern, Were Isaac Mayer Wise Alive Today, C.C.A.B. (1919), Vol. 29, p. 224.

4. Judaism at World Parliament, p. 6 ff.

He held that Judaism should not neglect its Messianic duties. "It must contribute its full share to the elevation of human nature, the redemption of mankind, the sovereignty of truth and the supremacy of reason and freedom and virtue."<sup>1</sup>

His theology was founded on the unalterable conviction of the belief in the authenticity of the Divine Revelation at Sinai. It is strange that this doctrine of revelation should have been so deeply rooted in an indefatigable spokesman of the Reform Movement. He fought and wrote voluminously to uphold his belief. His arguments and his views of the Sinaitic Revelation are explicitly expressed in his lectures entitled "Judaism and Christianity"; Pronaos to Holy Writ; and hundreds of articles in periodicals and magazines among which are "The Revelation"<sup>a</sup>; "God Revealed in History";<sup>b</sup> "God is Trust"<sup>c</sup>. His reference to this subject is endless. Whatever he wrote, particularly on Judaism, he managed to state his views. Hymns and prayers, especially the poems and prayers for Shevuoth state his doctrine of revelation.<sup>2</sup>

Wise considered the Bible as the greatest book in the world and could not envision the time when the Bible would not be regarded as such. "The Bible is the greatest book in the world", he writes, "and since it has outlived the ages despite the changes of civilization must prove that it is a Divine Book revealed by God to His Chosen individuals. The Bible is a great book, although many critics say it is not. The world does not agree with them.

1. The Word of God, sermon in American Jewish Pulpit, p. 227.

a. The American Israelite, vol. 7, (1860-61), p. 84.

b. Ibid, Number 43, p. 340.

c. Ibid, Number 45, p. 350.

2. See his "Essence of Judaism"; "Judaism, its Doctrines and Duties"; Minhag America; and Hymns and Prayers, pp. 76, 94, 98, 116, 136 and 184.

The world changes and we change with it, still the world did not change in this one point, as it yet maintains that the Bible is a great book."<sup>1</sup> This was one of his dearest beliefs and his writings are voluminous with examples of the authenticity of the Bible as distinguished from all other religious literature;

But, why does the world ascribe so much importance to the Bible? "Because one portion thereof is a direct revelation from on high, it is maintained, a momentary crevice in heaven's impenetrable dome, through which mortals beheld the glory of the Majesty on high; and other portion was written down by men, divinely inspired, for truth, righteousness, the salvation and happiness of man! How do you know that it is so? "reason asks the believing multitude. By the internal evidence which the Book offers is one answer; by the uninterrupted traditions and the common consent of of the civilized world is the other. The book offers the most sublime lessons, most impressively formulated, on the nature and will of God, the duty, dignity and hope of man, and the efficient and final causes of the universe and the cosmos therein; while, similar books of other nations of antiquity contain but grains of the universal truth under a vast heap of chaff rejected by human reason. They represent small creeks, and the Bible is the broad stream of those lessons of salvation which organizes, civilizes, humanizes and sanctifies the human family. This is the internal evidence. The Hebrews, as far as their history reaches, together with the Christian and Mohammedan Scriptures and nations from the respective beginnings to this date testify to the holiness and

1. Wise, Judaism and Christianity, p. 10.



divinity of the Bible, and have established and conducted society on the principles and laws contained in that Book because being of Divine origin, they are considered supreme and universal, and base the duties and hopes of the individual man on those very lessons. This is the historical evidence."<sup>1</sup>

Wise would have nothing to do with the modern treatment of the Pentateuch, contending that Biblical criticism had only a negative side. He had little patience with Graetz as he had with Wellhauser. The Pentateuch is through and through Mosaic. Moses wrote Genesis to Deuteronomy with his own hand; the rest was set down soon after his death from the records which he had left for that purpose. His closing remarks to his Pronaos definitely states that "not only the manuscripts but also the pronunciation and accentuation of each syllable of the Holy Writ were preserved intact, alike in all ages and in all parts of the world, as is evident from the ancient manuscripts extant and especially from the still more ancient commentaries and the united testimony of the Karaites and the Christians of the first centuries. There exists no solid ground on which to base any doubt in the authenticity of the Holy Writ."<sup>2</sup>

In his preface to his Pronaos to Holy Writ, he states that the "authenticity of the Mosaic records is the foundation of all Bible truths.....If the historical veracity of the Pentateuchal records is established, all arguments against the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch are untenable, inasmuch, as in all matters of fact, the direct testimony of veracious witnesses or the documentary testimony of authentic records, are conclusively

1. Ibid.

2. Wise, Pronaos, p. 193 ff.

demonstrated opposite all circumstances evidence of the a priori of the a posteriori category, which after all can prove probability or possibility only, and not certitude, which the direct or documentary testimony establishes. If the advocates of Negative Criticism urges that the author's arguments are insufficient to establish certitude, they must admit their sufficiency to controvert their own. This places the problem upon the status quo of the uninterrupted tradition, and this testifies to the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the foundation of Judaism rests on the Divine Revelation<sup>2</sup> at Mount Sinai. "All divine revelation is contained in principle in the Sinaic revelation and all revelation has for its object the instruction of man in his duties, destiny, and just expectations, to secure to him the highest good, happiness in time and eternity."<sup>3</sup> "The Sinaic revelation promulgates the

1. Ibid, p. 4 ff.

2. The following hymn by Wise gives a vivid picture of his conception of the Divine Character of the Bible and Revelation. This hymn is found in Hymns and Prayers, page 184:

"From heavens high the thunders roar,  
The trumpets sound with might,  
Through clouds condensed the lightnings soar,  
The darkness dreads the light;-  
The Lord of Hosts reveals His Word,  
To man He speaks - Creation's Lord.  
The idols reel, their temples shake,  
Despotic Fate rebound,  
With awe the mountains hark and quake -  
The voice of God resounds;  
From Horeb's height descends His word,  
To man He speaks - Creation's Lord.  
Salvation's sun from Sinai rose  
To guide the doubting mind  
To righteous deeds and sweet repose,  
In life and death to shine.  
Obey, ye mortals! know His word!  
To man He speaks - Creation's Lord.  
Let Judah's harp resound His praise,  
The Father's glory sing;  
For truth and light, for heaven's grace,  
Revealed by God our King.  
Extol His name in one accord --  
To man He speaks - Creation's Lord.

2. (Continued). Similarly Wise expresses his idea of Divine Revelation in the poem "Sinai", pages 94 ff. of the Minhag America, as follows:

On that appalling morn, when Israel woke  
To hear the Lord's omniscient decree;  
When, as though Heaven's loud thunder broke,  
The very air grew rife with mystery;  
When Sinai's Mount, involved in fire and smoke,  
Outswelled the aspring eager of the sea, -  
This be my theme: presuming task! to sing  
The praise of Israel's God, his everlasting King.

O! for a Seraph's tongue or prophet's pen,  
My glorious song, enraptured to exalt!  
Oh! to have heard him "with an angel's ken"  
From yon triumphal wonder-paven vault,  
Come clothed in wisdom to commune with men,  
And bid so near their tents His Seraphs halt!  
O'er sapphire floods, the burning escort rolled,  
Through clouds of roseate fire and molten gold.

Soon from the Mount's crest, fearful sounds began  
To radiate slowly to its hallowed base;  
Through all the mustering tribes one impulse ran,  
One thrill of joy and fear: o'er shivering space  
Pealed the celestial trump, and awe-struck man  
With suppliant eyes, beheld the wondrous place,  
Where eddying mist and lightning's livid stream,  
Cbnfest the Lord of Hosts - the Invisible Supreme!

Pillars of smoke, thick-falling, caught the eye;  
Dense but a moment; for the reddening blaze  
Gushed forth in plunging volleys to the sky,  
Fierce thunders roared, and meteors flashed amaze;  
The unfathomed empyrian gleamed on high  
With hues of amber, dazzling to the gaze,  
And peal on peal, with wild tumultuous din,  
Polled on, far-echoing o'er the Wilderness of Zin.

Then lo! the Eternal's summons loud and shrill,  
Shot terror and dismay through all their bands,  
And waxing longer, louder, louder still,  
Reverberating o'er the desert sands,  
Bidding God's seer ascend the flaming hill  
From which He issued His divine commands,  
And gave them statutes for the Promised Home,  
And lighted heaven with love, through the ethereal dome.

3. Wise, Judaism and Christianity, p. 21.

categories of doctrines and laws covering the entire moral and religious sphere of man.<sup>1</sup>

But there was a problem Wise had to meet. If the Sinaitic revelation was the final revelation, how could Judaism be a progressive religion? He met the situation in this manner. The principle of Judaism was revealed at Sinai rather than the laws themselves. "Moses was appointed by Providence to redeem Israel from Egyptian bondage, was also divinely appointed to organize the covenant people, to represent among men God's will and government, and he did organize it by establishing immediate and prophetic laws and institutions on the Sinaic principle with special respect to time and place, to the outer circumstances and traditional habits which could not be eradicated at once, and to the moral and religious status of the then civilized portion of the human family. Every law of Moses excepting only those which were of momentary necessity, is the embodiment of a Sinaic principle made tangible and effectual to meet emergencies or regulate affairs at that time and place, so that the principle is eternal and referable to the Sinaic revelation, while the law as such is transitory. All new revelations, which Moses is supposed to have had, were of an explanatory nature, to him personally, to assist him in the organization of the covenant people on the Sinaic principles."<sup>2</sup>

Wise was not satisfied with this explanation in toto. He was by nature a rationalist and he sought to prove the validity

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

of the Sinaitic revelation by logical reason. He fought against the idea of accepting the Sinaitic revelation through "the testimony of miracles."<sup>1</sup> "Miracles must be believed they can never appeal to reason. Each miracle requires a separate act of belief. Those who expect us to believe in revelation which is a miracle according to that supernatural standpoint, and then want us to believe another number of miracles in order to establish the fact of revelation, evidently ask too much of the reasoning man."<sup>2</sup>

Just because the prophets told and predicted such a revelation is no evidence that such a revelation existed. There is more direct proof. The Bible itself gives us conclusive proof in its historical evidence which overshadows all doubt. "The Sinaic revelation announces itself in the sources as a fact which transpired in broad daylight before the eyes of a whole nation of men, women, and children. The Book informs us, 'And all the people perceived the thunders and the lightnings and the voice of the cornet and and the smoking mount; the people saw, were moved, and stood afar off'. Also the people said to Moses: 'Speak thou unto us and we will listen, and let not God speak to us, lest we die'. So they said, 'This day have we seen that God speaketh to man and he liveth.' Whoever reads the corresponding chapters of Exodus and Deuteronomy must feel convinced that the author thereof intended to narrate a fact of which he was an eye witness, and this fact is that all the people heard the substance of the revelation, and stood in awe before the accompanying demonstrations. There is no attempt at poetical embellishment or rhetorical ornamentation; it is fact, fact, fact which the author intended to narrate.

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1. Ibid, p. 24.

2. Ibid.



"A whole nation saw and heard the Sinaic revelation. This is one of the main points, for this never occurred again, neither before nor after that memorable event. The witnesses of all miraculous events recorded in the Old and New Testaments were small in number, and the correctness of their perceptions and conceptions might justly be questioned, even if the reports are correct. But in this case a nation is the witness, a nation which by preceding events had been gradually prepared to be the recipient of a revelation prepared by the ancestral traditions and a succession of affairs which raised them from misery and slavery to liberty and triumph, and roused them from despair and stupor to the very pinnacle of enthusiasm and inspiration. Here a supernatural fact announces itself with natural antecedents, a purely intellectual fact with a whole nation as its witness. No other revelation in any sacred book of Jews, Christians, Mohammedans or Heathens steps upon a stage of existence with that force of internal evidence as did the Sinaic revelation. The reader of those chapters of Scriptures is forced to declare the whole as a piece of invention or accept it as a fact, no middle ground is possible. No sane man can prove it an invention, while in favor of its truth there are also the following grounds:

"The second point in the historical argument is the united testimony of the whole Hebrew people during all the centuries after that revelation. The Hebrew people developed itself and its institutions, its religion and its government and its codes of ethics, its character and its entire history from and upon that very foundation of the Sinaic revelation. Three thousand years of a nation's life and history are perhaps the most conclusive evidence to establish a fact, and this evidence supports the Sinaic



revelation. The Hebrews never denied, never gainsaid, never doubted. The Bible is full of glorifications of Sinai, yea, the whole Bible is built upon it. The Apocrypha and the Grecian-Jewish writings know and acknowledge it. The Mishna and the Talmud, the entire ancient Jewish literature is brimful of it. The Jewish metaphysicians and philosophers down to Mendelssohn and Steinheim corroborate and expound it. The most glorious minds of the nation expounded and promulgated it. Prophet and sage, philosopher and historian, reasoner and believer accepted it; what right has any rational man to doubt it? Here is the testimony of a nation from the very beginning and all the centuries of its long history, who, from any standpoint of reason, will gainsay it? 'Guard thy tongue against evil (speech) and thy lips from speaking deceit.'

"That is not all, however, the witnesses are still more numerous and the testimony much stronger. The two systems of Christianity and the Islam are built upon the substance of the Sinaic revelation because it is a fact, consequently all their votaries from the very beginning to this day acknowledge it, and believe it, and stand in awe before the thunders and lightnings of Sinai. The fundamental idea of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, God, man and their relation, human duty, dignity and destiny, 'What man must do to live with them', the guide, the chart, the compass for man and nations, among Jews, Christians and Mohammedans are taken from the Sinaic revelation and based upon the fact of revelation. So God declared we should do, is the fundamental principle of civilization which directs all and to which all conscientious men, consciously or unconsciously, appeal.

"Therefore, while Jew and Mohammedan contradict the special Christian revelation, and Jew and Christian deny the special Mohammedan revelation, and the very nations among whom Christianity was begotten gainsay its divinity; all of them, Jew, Christian, and Mohammedan unanimously affirm, confirm, and indorse the Sinaic revelation. No other revelation is supported by similar pillars of testimony, none rests upon as solid a historical evidence, none can boast upon that argumentum a consensu gentium as the Sinaic revelation, so that the worst of all skeptics, if he reason correctly, and the strictly adherent to the all-sufficiency of human human reason could only come to the conclusion, if any revelation is true, the Sinaic revelation must be; if this is not, all the others are fabrics of falsehood. But then we would have to say, all men are neither fools nor knaves, all men know more than any one, if all men believe and have believed a falsehood, then all of them reason erroneously, consequently human reason must be erroneous, which the advocates of the all-sufficiency of human reason could not admit without gross self-contradiction. The historical testimony as it is undoubtedly before us, confirms the fact of the Sinaic revelation, and this is the only species of evidence to establish a fact in the consciousness of reason."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the doctrine of revelation assumes a logical and reasonable belief. Wise stated further that the Ten Commandments are "the briefest abstract which could be made" of the Sinaitic revelation.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid, 25 ff.

2. Ibid.

But, Wise did not accept the traditional attitude toward the Oral Law. His attitude of the subject is strictly reform. He could not understand<sup>and</sup>/was unwilling to pass without protest, the refusal to draw a hard and fast line between the religious authenticity of the biblical and between that of the post-biblical literature. At the meeting held in Rochester, New York, in July 1895, he proposed for the discussion and decision several questions among which was "What is our relation in all religious matters to our own post-biblical, our patristic literature, including the Talmud, causts, responses, and commentaries?" The committee to whom this was referred reported that "From the standpoint of Reform Judaism, the whole post-biblical and patristic literature, including the Talmud, causts, responses, and commentaries, is, and can never be considered as, nothing more or less than religious literature."<sup>1</sup> It further added that "to have awakened the consciousness of this historic fact is the great merit of Reform Judaism; and the more this consciousness grows upon our mind, the more the conditions and environments of our modern life force it upon us, the more persistently we have to assert: that our relations in all religious matters are in no way authoritatively and finally determined by any portion of our post-biblical and patristic literature."<sup>2</sup> These words expressed the sentiments of Wise and in his Opening Address to the Hebrew Union College he reechoed his attitude toward the Bible and the post-biblical books. "There is no Judaism without the Torah and

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1. C.C.A.R. Yearbook, 1890-91, pp. 31 and 80-125.

2. Ibid, p. 36.

Revelation.....The Talmud of the nineteenth century can claim no higher authority than the Talmud of the fifth century. Biblical criticism is no more than the Talmud of this century; scientifically it does not stand as high as the Old Talmud, which had its fixed rules of interpretation, while the modern Talmud has none; no fixed laws of hermeneutics; it is still in its pulpistic state. Kuenen, Welhausen, Renan, Ewald, or Smith, are no more reliable authorities than the Jochanans, Gamaliels, Jehudas or Rabbina and Ashi. In order to be a very faithful disciple of the sciences, we may maintain the student ought to acquaint himself with them and the Talmud alike, and like Rabbi Meir of old, enjoy the kernel and reject the shell. As free born Israelites we claim this right of free choice."<sup>1</sup>

But, he did not forget his belief in the Divine Revelation and he reminds the students that "where the old Talmud, appears to us contrary to the spirit of the Torah, we reject its teaching. The same thing exactly we do with the new Talmud, and we do it on general principles, not being slaves of any system. Wherever the new Talmud is contrary to the spirit and letter of the Torah, we reject it, and we do so because we are servants of Judaism, and not of any domineering school; and there is no Judaism without this Torah and revelation, except in the unclear minds of the latitudinarians whose faculty of reason is bedimmed by scholastic prejudices, so that they can only think of the when, and never of the what. This Torah is authentic, truthful, perfect or your

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1. Address at Opening of Hebrew Union College, p. 396 in Isaac Mayer Wise, Life and Selected Writings, edited by Philipson and Grossman.

Judaism is a farce also before the judgement seat of reason. We are the expounders of Judaism, so must you be if you would aspire honestly to rabbinical honors."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid.

III.

HOLDHEIM'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION



### III.

#### HOLDHEIM'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION

Samuel Holdheim<sup>1</sup> was one of the most remarkable characters in the history of Reform Judaism. In his life can be seen the gradual evolution from the lowest type of Jewish orthodoxy to the extreme wing of Radical Reform. His beliefs and principles of Judaism are interesting especially after the brief presentation of Wise. Even though he lived before Wise, his doctrine of revelation and Judaism is the next step in the gradual formulation of the doctrine of Reform Judaism. Thus the treatment of his principles is in place.

Samuel Holdheim was a contemporary of Geiger and Einhorn but his method of procedure in introducing reforms was radically different.<sup>2</sup> But he held the same view of Revelation and

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1. Born in 1806 in Kempen, Posen; died as rabbi of the Reform Congregation of Berlin, Aug. 22, 1860.

2. In Geiger the sense of historical development was much stronger than in Holdheim and his practical program was to reform from within; Holdheim on the other hand did not hesitate at the boldest changes and moved rapidly in his religious progress. Holdheim was the arch radical, Geiger the conservative reformer; Holdheim was impatient to have his theories realized in immediate practice, Geiger was content to move more slowly; Holdheim was the iconoclast without mercy, Geiger had a reverence for institutional life as it had developed historically. But Geiger recognized the

(Note 2, continued) greatness of Holdheim and he voiced his sentiments of admiration in the following tribute: over the graves of the past and the present the future will be more and more educated towards a pure recognition. It would be presumptuous to determine now what will be worked out as truth by those who live with and after us. This would be mostly incompatible with the principles of the deceased. Still, even to-day, we are permitted to point out those, who, living before and with us, have honestly and unselfishly searched after truth. And the unbiased future will more and more confirm this. And among these men Samuel Holdheim occupies an important place." (Sinai, vol. VI, pp.302-310).

The temperament of Holdheim was also the opposite of Einhorn. The latter desired to reinterpret Traditional Judaism into a progressive faith purified from its obnoxious restrictions. These two men fought and struggled against each other. The concluding words of an article written by Einhorn against Holdheim gives an insight into the vehemency of the fight. "My eyes are now open as to Holdheim's method of procedure. I and all those who stand for the truth and the honor of the Jew desire to see Traditional Judaism transformed into a progressive faith and purified from its obnoxious and worthless elements, but not slandered and stabbed as by an assassin's hand." (Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums of 1845). While different in temperament and certain theological dogmas they were drawn together by the love of Judaism even though they frankly and publicly criticised and discussed each other. It is interesting to note that after a vehement fight, they clasped hands as friends when they met at the conference at Frankfort.

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(Note 2, continued) Holdheim remarked that we are both working for the same glorious cause. Einhorn became Holdheim's successor of chief-rabbi of Mecklenburg-Schweran, in 1847, and Holdheim dedicated his first volume of sermons to "David Einhorn, his Friend and co-Worker, Rabbi of Pesth." For a more comprehensive comparison, see David Einhorn, Memorial Volume, pp. 419 and "Samuel Holdheim" in Reformed Judaism by Dr. Emanuel Schreiber.

definition of Reform as Einhorn.<sup>1</sup>

His writings give his doctrines in a clear and beautiful style. His most famous book "Ueber die Autonomie der Rabbinen und das Prinzip der Jüdischen Ehe" questions the validity of Talmudical law. His doctrine of revelation found expression in his article Unsere Gegenwart. The principles of Judaism as he conceived them are elaborately treated in his treatise Die Religionsprinzipien des reformierten Judenthums (Berlin 1847), which contains his system of theology .

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1. Holdheim and Einhorn differed on the question of the Messianic age. Holdheim contended that since the ceremonial laws were intended for the Mosaic theocracy, to separate the people of Israel from the rest of mankind, they can have no validity in the Messianic era of universalism which is sure to come and, further, that the character of perpetuity assigned by the Pabbis to these ceremonial laws is inconsistent. Einhorn argues the opposite contending that as to the ceremonial laws they still have a power of expressing vital truths or of protecting them and their bearer against vitiating influences. Einhorn states that reform Judaism does not mean negation but rather a positive and constructive program. But both believed the same in regard to Revelation and the validity of the Torah.

Holdheim, the arch-radical among the reform, was not only progressive but extremely aggressive.<sup>1</sup> He sensed the need of a reinterpretation of Judaism if it would survive the age. He wrote: "I shall attempt to answer the question why our time is so completely different in all its elements and requirements from those of rabbinical Judaism; but one of two alternatives is possible for the Jew, either to be a rabbinical Jew and live aloof from the age, or to live in the age and cease being a rabbinical Jew. The spirit of rabbinical Judaism is diametrically opposed to the spirit of our time. Rabbinical Judaism has converted into religious ideas and tendencies all the exclusive national ideas and tendencies of the Bible which were intended for entirely different conditions and circumstances, and has thereby given them eternal validity. The rabbis have perpetuated as religion the temporary part of Mosaism, the symbolism, and particularism of the theocracy, and, on the other hand, they misconceived and neglected its eternal element, the ideal of universalism, which was in truth the real purpose of the theocracy. Hence the irreconcilable conflict between rabbinical Judaism and the spirit of the modern age."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Holdheim was a prominent figure in the Rabbiner-Versammlung at Braunschweig 1844, Frankfurt-on-the-Main, 1845 and Breslau 1846. Also he took an active part in the Geiger-Tiktin affair.

2. Reformbestrebung und Emancipation (appendix to Das Ceremonialgesetz im Gottesreich, Schwerin 1845), p. 123.

True reform and development consists, not in ignoring the past, but in the re-interpretation of old institutions and ceremonies. "Judaism contains a treasure of ideas and sentiments which has not been exhausted by far, and that these are clothed in forms and symbols which must be brushed aside altogether in order that those deeply-hidden ideas and sentiments may re-appear in their original strength. If it be thought that these forms and symbols must be piously preserved in order that the kernel hidden in them may be gained through observing them, we must call attention to the fact that the standpoint of reform is this, viz., to appreciate the kernel at its full worth and to secure it by breaking the shell; to use these symbols and forms, yes, the whole history of Judaism as means whereby to distinguish between the whole history of Judaism as means whereby to distinguish between the eternal thoughts and the transitory forms, and to attribute (relative) religious value to those forms only which are effective for the presentation of the thought and the awakening of corresponding sentiments. The diligent reader of these prayers, who is not unacquainted with the reform strivings of the recent decade, will find that most of the acquisitions in this territory, the lofty thoughts and sentiments which proved themselves to be truly Jewish in the refining process of scientific investigation, have been combined here into a beautiful bond. We call particular attention to such prayers as have for their themes, the holiness of God and of man, the priestly mission of Israel, the purified Messianic idea."<sup>1</sup> Thus Holdheim considers that the

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1. Introduction to first draft of Holdheim's prayer-book (1845-6).



preservation and progressive development of Judaism is possible then only when "our religion is purified from false conceptions, which are bound to hurl it sooner or later into the open abyss."<sup>1</sup>

Judaism had ceased to be an end in itself for Holdheim. He viewed it as a force in the larger life of humanity. His purpose was to teach the universal in religion as it had found expression in Jewish thought. "In accordance with this principle we have only to set aside the barrier which limits the relation between God and man to the Israelitish tribes and extend this relation to all mankind in order to see the theocracy expand into a universal religion of humanity, the tribe change into a religious community and the reform of Judaism completed in principle. Nothing further is needed if the power of development of the God-idea, the moral idea of Judaism, is granted. But, the God-idea is obscured, if it be assumed that God turned in love to one tribe exclusively, and cast off all the other people in a step-fatherly manner. The moral idea loses its true worth if it is confined narrow-mindedly to the members of one tribe. In other words, the relation of man to God is the absolute religious relation, hence eternal: that of a chosen people to God, the relative religious conception, hence temporary, however, the Divine Covenant with Israel still obtains inasmuch as it is still called to preserve for mankind, the monotheistic belief in its purity, together with the holy moral Law, until such time as it shall have become a blessing to all mankind when it will lose its particularity in the Messianic era."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Holdheim, Das Religioese and Politische im Judenthum, p. 88.

2. Philipson, "Holdheim, Jewish Reformer", in C.C.A.R. Yearbook, (1906), vol. 16, p. 312.

Holdheim took issue with Mendelsohn, who is frequently spoken of as the originator of the reform movement.<sup>1</sup> This is not true as Mendelsohn's conception of Judaism was that of a divine legislation, having been revealed by God and could not be abrogated until a second revelation as clear as the first was given. "The Law cannot be abrogated unless it pleases the Most High Lawgiver to communicate to us His Will in this manner: with a loud voice, as publicly, and in a manner as far above all doubt and scruples as when He gave us His Law".<sup>2</sup> Holdheim's reply is found in a remarkable article, *Unsere Gegenwart*, in which he presents his view of Revelation by writing that God reveals Himself in History. When in this progressive revelation of God, it appears that certain ceremonies and ritual legislations have lost their validity, they should be abrogated as God has so commanded.<sup>3</sup> "The Pentateuch as well as the prophets teach positive religious doctrines; therefore Judaism demands belief as well as practice. As for the contention that another revelation is necessary to repeal the ceremonial laws, Holdheim gave utterance to the striking thought that the spirit of the age is also a revelation of God."<sup>4</sup>

Holdheim, despite his progressive conception of Judaism, believed in a positive revelation. He wanted to save the supernatural conception of Mosaism and Prophetism, for he could not

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1. Philipson, *Reform Movement in Judaism*, p. 12.

2. In Brach edition, see Margolis, *The Theological Aspects of Reformed Judaism*, in C.C.A.R. (1903) Yearbook, vol. 13, p. 465.

3. Philipson, *Holdheim, Jewish Reform*, op. cit. p. 321.

4. Philipson, *Reform Movement in Judaism*, p. 13.

understand how it was possible to declare the Bible as a work revealing the consciousness of God in man and yet speak of revelation. Holdheim's conception of revelation is indeed the conservative view. But the recognition of this Divinely given law did not stop the progressive element in Judaism. "The present requires a principle that shall enunciate clearly that a law, even though divine, is potent only so long as the conditions and circumstances of life, to meet which it was enacted, continue; when these change, however, the law also must be abrogated, even though it have God for its author. For God Himself has shown indubitably that with the change of the circumstances and conditions of life for which He once gave these laws, the laws themselves cease to be operative, that they shall be observed no longer, because they can be observed no longer.....The present age and its guiding principles, as thus formulated recognize the working of God in history; it believes truly and firmly in the providential guidance of the fortunes of mankind; it looks upon the deeds recorded in the history of mankind as the deeds of God, whereby He speaks as clearly as He ever did; a particular revelation of God to a single person is dispensable when God speaks to all and reveals His will to all."<sup>1</sup>.

In his elaborate treatise, *Die Religionsprinzipien des reformierten Judenthums* (Berlin 1847), he establishes the principle of a positive historical development. He makes a positive break with the whole theory of Talmudic Judaism stating that "had the rabbis lived in our time and become imbued with their

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1. Freund's *Zur Judenfrage im Deutschland*, II, 165 f.

tendencies in an equal degree as they did with the tendencies of their own age, they would have explained the Bible in a different manner. Their interpretation, then, is naught else but a product of the religious point of view of their time."<sup>1</sup>

He believed in the principle of the Talmud, that the Talmud was the product of many centuries and of many minds, but he would not adhere to the doctrine of its infallibility as an authority. "All the talk about a Talmudical Judaism is an illusion. Science has decided that the Talmud has no authority dogmatically or practically. Even those who will not acknowledge this go beyond the Talmud. The question is, Who gives us the right to change the liturgy? The question requires an unequivocal answer. The men of the Great Assembly have authority only for their age; what they ordained was timely, and on this the sanction of their ordinances rested. We have the same authority for our age if we give utterances to the consciousness of our age."<sup>2</sup> But he further adds,

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1. Ibid, p. 92.

2. Protokolle, 55; see also his statement, "Der Talmud spricht aus seinem zeitbewusstsein und für dasselbe hatten er Recht; ich spreche aus einem höheren Bewusstsein meinen Zeit und für dasselbe habe ich Recht." - Ceremonialgesetz im Gottesreich, 50, Schwerin, 1845.



which gives an insight of his spiritual love for his religion.<sup>1</sup>  
"even though the Talmud is not authoritative for us we do not wish to disregard the intellectual activity of two thousand years. We say merely this: Anything which upon unbiased, careful criticism contradicts the religious consciousness of the present age has no authority for us."<sup>2</sup>

In 1848 some Jews in the community of Arad desired to form a community of the type of the Berlin reform congregation and submitted a series of questions to Holdheim of which a few gave his doctrine of Revelation and his belief in the validity of the Talmud and the Bible. He definitely states that the Ten Commandments are binding as the revelation of God to Moses.<sup>3</sup> This declaration immediately pronounced the Talmud and all religious observances both, as contained in the Bible and the Talmud as permissible to be changed. He further remarked in reference to this point that "if then the rabbis never assumed a higher authority than they had a right to as men, and took no step without giving the reasons which justified them in taking this step, a later generation can certainly not be prevented from examining the validity of this justification, in order to learn, whether their authority, which was rightfully respected at one time, has not ceased and whether a later age has not an equal right to

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1. Holdheim has been misunderstood. His radical views created many enemies. Graetz in his History of the Jews, vol. XI, p. 563, compares Holdheim with Paulus of Tarsus; calling him a hypocrite and unbeliever.

2. Protokolle, 66.

3. Israelit des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts (1848), 164-5.

determine what is absolutely necessary for its welfare and to satisfy its religious needs in a suitable manner....The Spirit remains the same although the times change. The genius that moved and enlivened the old world of the rabbis moves and enlivens us also. It is the same striving to develop our ancient faith continually and to rescue it from destruction."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Philipson, op. cit., p. 90.



IV

DAVID EINHORN'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION

IV

DAVID EINHORN'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION

David Einhorn<sup>1</sup>, the ~~un~~comprising champion of Reform Judaism in Germany and America has played a prominent part in the thought development of the reform movement. In contrast to Holdheim, Einhorn was at all time a constructive thinker who gave consistency of purpose and firmness of principle to the entire Reform movement in America. While in full sympathy with radical reform in its endeavor to free the spirit of Judaism from all its trammels, Biblical or rabbinical, he was determined to build up, not to tear down, to create not to destroy. A positive Judaism liberal yet loyal to its past, was to be inculcated in the hearts and minds of those who had gone to the very extreme in their assertion of religious independence. His conception of reform and revelation is the next step in the final doctrine expressed by Geiger and Kohler, and the final acceptance of the sublime doctrine of revelation embodied in the Pittsburg platform. The importance of this man necessitates a discussion of his principles.<sup>2</sup>

David Einhorn believed in the progressive element in Judaism. He concentrated all his efforts in the expounding of the Reform movement. He felt called upon to be the herald of a constructive reform, in a practical as well as a theoretical way. His sermons give in lucid and classic diction the principles of Reform Judaism. His articles on the various theological

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1. Born at Dispeck, Bavaria; Nov. 10, 1809, died in New York, Nov. 2, 1879.

2. See Kohler's David Einhorn, C.C.A.R., vol. 19.

issues of the "Sinai" are a mind of profound thoughts for the student. His prayer book *תפילות* mirrors the great mind and man whose very soul, it is not too much to say, found incarnation in the pages of the book. Jewish to the core, deeply convinced of the glorious responsibility incumbent upon Israel for the rearing of the temple of humanity, Einhorn in his ritual has given us in truth, an epitome of the aspirations and beliefs of modern Judaism, which, while conscious of the glories of its past, is at the same time keenly alive to its duty to the larger future of mankind.<sup>1</sup> In his prayer-book Einhorn's conception of Revelation is clearly stated. His work "Das Prinzip des Mosaiomus und dessen Verhoeltniss zum Heidenthum und Rabbinischen Judenthum" formed the theological basis of the Reform movement. His sermons express in poetical style his conception of reform and revelation,<sup>2</sup> especially his Inaugural Sermon at Har Sinai Temple, Baltimore, Md., delivered Sept. 29, 1855 contains his doctrine of Revelation. Einhorn devoted his untiring faculties to the working out of his theological system so as to make it accessible to teachers. So he published the *Ner Tamid* (The ever-burning Lamp) containing his conception of revelation and prophecy.

Einhorn believed in a Judaism that has developed thru the ages. The entire history of Judaism gives evidences of this developing process. "In all its stages, Judaism shows its capacity for continuous development both as to its form and its spirit,

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1. Translator's Preface to Prayer-book, p. III, Emil Hirsch.

2. See David Einhorn Memorial Volume, a collection of Einhorn's sermons.

in so far as the latter become ever clearer and purer in the human consciousness; and no Israelite who knows his religion will deny it the power of perfectibility."<sup>1</sup>

In his inaugural sermon, January 1852,<sup>2</sup> he set forth the ideas and purposes of the Reform movement. He denied that reform meant to break with the past and Jewish tradition. In this sermon he also stated the complete platform of Reform Judaism which he later incorporated in the Philadelphia platform that was unanimously adopted. <sup>2\*</sup> They formed the basic union of American Reform Judaism and consolidated the ideas of religious progress both as to the form of divine service and rabbinical functions outside of the synagogue.<sup>3</sup>

In the program of reform, Judaism must not denounce the past. It must uphold the Tradition of the past. "Judaism may not be deprived of the least of its precious possessions. It is the

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1. Memorial Volume of David Einhorn, p.413.

2. Preached at Pestl. Reform Congregation.

3. This platform defined the main issues of Reform Judaism in (a) declaring the Messianic hope to be universalistic and not national, and Israel's dispersion over the globe to have the fulfillment of its world mission for its object, and not punishment for sin, as was the rabbinical view; (b), consigning the sacrificial cult together with the Aaronitic priesthood and the belief in resurrection of the body to the past, and accentuating the selection of Israel as the priest-people of humanity and the belief in immortality; and finally, (c) urging the necessity of having a large portion of the prayers in the vernacular, in view of the unfamiliarity of the average Jew or Jewess with the Hebrew, etc. (for more details see Philipson, Reform Movement in Judaism, pp. 488.

mission of the present to continue its development, by no means to break with the past, but to enlist the old in the service of the new and to preserve it in transfigured form."<sup>1</sup>

He admitted that the centuries have introduced many changes. "We have come to a turning point", he preaches, "our entire religious and moral life is imperilled. Mere outward forms which render the service more attractive are of no avail. They merely hide the inner decay. Judaism must be reformed from within. The evil which threatens to absorb all the wholesome vigor and marrow must be remedied at the root. Whatever is in a state of decay and has lost its hold on the people must be taken out of the system in order that the religious life be made whole again and healthy. Lest our children emancipate themselves from Judaism altogether, we must emancipate Judaism from such shackles as tend to corrupt the inner life. But in removing the scaffolding we must be careful not to tear down the structure. We want to build up. We do not lack piety. Profound reverence for our religious sanctuary dictates our steps and should direct us to concentrate our energies all the more fully and single-heartedly upon the essences of the Divine law which is far above the changes of time and place, and which will remain in force, even though the earth wax old like a garment, and the heavens vanish like smoke. We want no self-created cult, no Judaism modelled to suit our taste, no stripping off of Jewish characteristics, no straying away into the empty void. No, on the contrary, we want an Israelitism with all its distinctions sharply brought out as rooted in Sinai, and destined to bring forth new blossoms and fruitage upon the lofty heights of

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1. Dr. David Einhorn, Memorial Volume, p. 19.



a four thousand years' history."<sup>1</sup>

Einhorn recognizing these changes, sought to modify his conception of Judaism with the "urgent needs of the present age without deviating from the fixed principles of the divinely revealed word; to maintain undiminished our zeal for these endeavors of ours ---as yet individual by a firm conviction that they must ultimately triumph."<sup>2</sup> It is an established fact that the ceremonial laws of Moses have undergone most thoroughly changes during ~~during~~ the times of the first and second temple, as also during all the periods following our expulsion from the holy land...but...no matter what the degree of culture and civilization will be, ceremonies will always stand as much in need as language. These ceremonies, however, must not become too rigid, nor must they suffer to remain threadbare and delapidated. They must be illuminated by religious thought; they must harmonize with the existing stages of the religious development; they must reflect the glory of Judaism and must keep pace with the duties which are continually required of the chosen people.<sup>3</sup>

He further expounded his conception of reform in a response to a Christian, who had written to him for information as to the meaning and purpose of the new movement in Judaism: "A thorough reform of Judaism based upon the immovable foundation stones of Mosaism, viz., monotheism and revealed religion certainly finds

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1. Inaugural sermon, September 27, 1855; David Einhorn, Memorial volume, p. 436.

2. Inaugural sermon before the Har Sinai Congregation, (Eng. translation), p. 6.

3. Shebuoth sermon by David Einhorn, translated in the American Jewish Pulpit, pp. 235.

full sanction within the bounds of Jewish ecclesiastical history. Nearly all modern Jewish theologians have made such a reform their program, and at the very outset have postulated by silent agreement the following two principles of procedure as demanded by the necessities of the case: first to unchain by the breath of the living spirit the forms that had become rigid and to make them fluid, and secondly to sift these forms according to their antiquity and essentiality, and in accordance with the results of such sifting to reduce their great number, beneath whose burden, Judaism, without a doubt, is sighing and panting. The solution of the latter half of this program is dependent palpably upon that of the first half. First of all, the principle of sincerity as opposed to empty formalism had to be re-established on the basis of prophetic teaching, the religion had to be restored to its original purity, and the relation of doctrine to legislation had to be determined hereby, in order that it would be possible to distinguish the human, political and temporal elements in Judaism from the divine, essential, and permanent.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the basic principle of the Reform movement is the belief in the doctrine of Revelation, modified, of course from the traditional viewpoint. In his inaugural sermon at Peseth, delivered in 1852, he stated that Reform Judaism stands upon the sublime and immoveable rock of "divine revelation and of a four-thousand year old history. To us the Mosaic Law is, if not in the letter, certainly as to its spirit, divine, an ever-progressing educational power, destined to lift humanity in the course of centuries to that lofty pinnacle of moral and religious perfection,

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1. Philipson, Reform Movement in Judaism, p. 61.

which by far outshines our modern culture. And just for this reason we believe in the continuous development of Mosaism, in the mere temporary value of its ceremonies. We claim for our age the same power of changing and abrogating the Biblical laws as had the old-time rabbis."<sup>1</sup>

His doctrine of revelation is clearly discussed in his *Ner Tamid* (The Ever-burning Lamp). Revelation is an eminently human faculty, attained by visions and dreams as well as by the grasp of the intellect-assuming higher and clearer form in the prophets. In Moses the prophetic power attained its highest degree because he received the revelation at the sacred spot of Sinai. Adam represents the original revelation, perpetuated in the **Noahitic** covenant with its humanitarian laws. The patriarchs, Abraham at their head, represent a higher revelation, the **Abrahamitic** Covenant, with circumcision as sign but not a condition of membership. The highest revelation is represented by Moses. The name **Yhwh**, the declaration of Israel as God's first-born son, the Passover feast, the consecration of the first born and the Sabbath day lead up to the Sinai revelation with its Ten Words, the foundation of the entire moral order of the world.

Einhorn considered the Sinaitic revelation as the greatest event in the world but he believed that only the Ten Words were revealed to Moses. "Thruout the domain of history, no event is recorded that has proved of such supreme moment, of such vast compass as the Divine promulgation of the Ten Words. Indeed, the heights where the heavenly Majesty appeared in effulgent splendor to deliver this Law to the people assembled at its base and seal

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1. David Einhorn, Memorial volume, p. 431.

a covenant with them well deserved to be called the cradle of human salvation, temporal as well as spiritual, until the end of time. We can well understand, therefore, the distinctive character attached to the Decalogue. It is marked off from other laws not only because it is the source of other laws, having the revelation on Sinai, as its background; but, also, because it was hewn into the tablets of the Law, and served, in the holy ark, as unimpeachable testimony, as an everlasting covenant between God and Israel."<sup>1</sup>

He further declares "that, the Law of God, with relation to man, consists, like man himself, the child of God, of a perishable body and of an imperishable spirit. The body is to be only the servant of the spirit and must pass away as soon as the spirit ceases to dwell in it. Here the spirit is identical with the system of religion and morality contained in the Bible and based on the principles of the Decalogue and only of the Decalogue....We have here the very essence of the covenant between God and man which is binding for all times, in all places and on all people. This is the covenant that is destined thru Israel to become the common property of mankind, so that in the course of the ages its precepts may find a more unqualified and closer application and, like a stream growing ever wider and deeper, they may at last encircle the entire globe with their blessings. All other divine ordinances are only signs of this covenant, a fence and hedge around the eternal and universal Law; now recalling holy memories, now proclaiming solemn convocations, and now again urging a wholesome separation from heathen customs. By their very nature they cannot

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1. Inaugural Sermon, delivered before the Har Sinai Congregation, Sept. 29, 1855 (English Translation), p. 7 ff.



always and everywhere remain the same, as there is nothing in them of an abiding or universal character. Not that man will ever be able to do entirely without objective signs; but their modes and degree must conform to the different stages of civilization, to national, industrial, and social conditions; in short, to all that is implied by the subjective and objective life of man."<sup>1</sup>

Einhorn, like Wise, never accepted the results of Biblical research though he declared that Judaism is older than the Bible; it created the Mosaic and the rabbinical phase of Judaism and is now creating the new phase of Reform Judaism. Yet he never forgot the needs of the modern age and he sought to harmonize the Bible in the light of modern problems. Even at university, he "accentuated all the more the intellectual and ethical superiority of Mosaism, which to him was not a system of laws fixed for all time, but a system of doctrines in accord with the progress of the ages."<sup>2</sup> But the traditional practices should not be disregarded or changed unless it be the result of honest investigation. In reference to the abolition of the ceremonies, which was after all the great issue between the two parties in Judaism, he says that "the departure from ceremonial laws, which is the result neither of caprice nor frivolity but the outcome of the honest conviction and that such departure is in keeping with the spirit of Judaism<sup>and</sup>/is a pressing demand of its natural development, does not unfit a man for holding the rabbinical office. Naturally such departure may not be merely a matter of fashion or convenience, and may have

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1. Ibid, pp. 8 ff.

2. David Einhorn, Memorial volume, p. 408.



nothing in common with the forcible introduction of un-Jewish points of view into the province of Judaism, nor with mere subjectivity, nor, in short, with a sort of antipathy to inherited conditions; it must be, however, the product of a deep, honest, unprejudiced investigation into the sacred sources, of a pious earnestness, a glowing enthusiasm, and finally of a ripe conclusion arrived at after weighing all causes and effects in company with other competent men, zealous for God and religion. Then will such a departure be not a condemnable but a highly commendable act, the like of which took place frequently in Talmudical and post-Talmudical times. (see Talm. Bab. Jeb. 39b, 90b, Sotah 48a)"<sup>1</sup>

Einhorn was well grounded in Talmud and knew of what he spoke. He did not consider the Talmud divinely given. "The Talmud is for us by no means divine, but a treasure-house full of divine truth, developed from out of the ancient kernel."<sup>2</sup> The attitude of the Talmud has never been stated better than in his own words: "Such an infallibility, such as Tiktin and his supporters claim, we cannot and we may not grant to the Talmud; however strong our belief in its veracity may be, we must refuse and reject such deification; we address the Talmud in these words, 'Israel believes thee, but not in thee; thou art a medium thru which the divine may be reached, but thou art not divine.'"<sup>3</sup>

Einhorn agrees with Wise in the idea that since Israel has experienced the Divine Revelation, it is the chosen people,

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1. Rabbinische Gutachten, I, 131.

2. David Einhorn, Memorial volume, p. 431.

3. Rabbinische Gutachten, I, 127.

and must work together to bring the universal law of God presented to them at the Holy Mount of Sinai. This doctrine forms the basis of Einhorn's theological system and especially his prayer book, the Olas Tamid.

V

ABRAHAM GEIGER'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION

V

ABRAHAM GEIGER'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION

Abraham Geiger,<sup>1</sup> who combined to a degree as did few others of his generation the mastery of Jewish lore with similar learning, was a great scholar, indeed one of the greatest that modern Judaism has produced. He was a man of his generation - a generation which feeling still the tremors of the great spiritual and intellectual upheaval of the French Revolution, visioned a new world hope in which rationalism would reign supreme. He was primarily an historian and his historical temper led him into a scientific investigation of his religion. By a thorough study of the past, he became convinced that there had always been a developing force in Judaism and that Judaism spelt development. He felt that a time had come in the life of the Jewish people when a new interpretation of the eternal values of Judaism was imperative; but he would have this interpretation evolutionary and revolutionary.<sup>2</sup>

He was very productive, so that there are few departments of Jewish science that he has not enriched with his contributions. But he was also an active rabbi, a great preacher, and a most controversialist, figuring as the most prominent leader of the reform movement among the German Jews during the nineteenth century, defending it both in the press and in the pulpit. He was further the editor of two successive periodicals and a contributor to other journals. During the last years of his life, he occupied a chair as professor in the Berlin Hochschule.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Born at Frankfort-on-the Main May 24, 1810; died at Berlin Oct. 1874  
2. Philipson, Reform Movement in Judaism, p. 64-96.

3. Jew. Encycl., art., Abraham Geiger, Vol. V, p. 584.

The general impression received from Geiger's writings, historical as well as theological, is that to the author the whole history of Judaism for more than a thousand years, was a hopeless admixture of superstitious folklore. This is anything but the truth. Geiger was the first to announce that the connection with the past means, not a subservience to the past authority of any kind, but, "the persistence of the living idea which permeated all ages with its vigor"; and, "that Reform means for us, changed, new appearances; a rejuvenated life, forms permeated and saturated with the spirit. The difficult and the easy, the whole and the part, are, to receive meaning and significance, to uplift the spirit, to kindle the heart, in order that religion may influence the entire course of life."<sup>1</sup>

The movement of reform, as he conceived it, was not to be a break with the past;<sup>2</sup> though he felt it was undue exaltation of the past at the expense of the present that gave evidence of an unhealthy state of mind.<sup>3</sup> Israel, accordingly, had to be humanized, or, as the phrase was, to be turned over to the Menschheit, lest "our sins of particularism and separateness delay the event."<sup>4</sup> At all times this is the burden of his thoughts. Reform is a link in the chain of Judaism's development; it is vain to retain such institutions and doctrines that have become moribund, "whatever the spirit of history in which God reveals Himself, has removed and buried, no human skill can resuscitate and revivify."<sup>5</sup>

"We wish to be, we should be children of our time; and, as children of this age, we must strive to realize for our

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1. Raisin, the Reform Movement before Geiger, in C.C.A.R. (1910), vol. XX, pp. 245. Also Philipson, Reform Movement in Jud., p.60 ff.  
2. Judische Zeitschrift fur Wissenschaft and Leben, V, 251; Philipson, Abraham Geiger, in C.C.A.R. (1910), vol. XX, p. 250.  
3. Philipson, Abraham Geiger, in C.C.A.R. (1910) vol. XX, p. 251.  
4. Schechter, Abraham Geiger, in Studies in Judaism, 3rd series, p.71.  
5. Nachgelassene Schriften V, 190.

contemporaries, the true standpoint of Judaism, which has never been content to be a faith divorced from life or a practice at variance with belief: "1 In a hundred and one forms, he expressed himself to this effect: "We want bread for our hunger, water for our thirst; the spirit ought to receive fresh powerful nourishment; and we are being trifled with and flowers are given us and that too of doubtful fragrance; we want faith that satisfies the spirit and inspires us to accomplish deeds for the present day and they rear us to be men who dream only of the past; we want a love that bears fruit and they feed us on effeminate piety and weak, heartless sentimentality. An interest in the past arises only from a living present; if Judaism were to manifest itself as a living force in us, we would know that this force must have been created at all times and we would notice attentively the results of this creative force."2 It was this new interpretation championed by Geiger that helped to check the wholesale conversion to Christianity of that time.3

Geiger never faltered in his faith. He wanted a living Judaism, not a religion that was a mere survival of a vanished past. From the very moment that he entered into the active life of the ministry in Wiesbaden, he committed himself without reserve to the advocacy of the reform movement.4 In a letter written in 1836 to his friend, M.A.Stern, the celebrated mathematician, he

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1. See Geiger's definition of Reform in *Nachgelassene Schriften*, II, 265. *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für Jüdische Theologie*, edited by Abraham Geiger, II, 220.

2. *Israelit des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* VII (1846), 7. Philipson, Abraham Geiger, in *C.C.A.R.* Vol. XX (1910), p. 250.

3. *Nachgelassene Schriften* V, 103. Philipson, A.Geiger, *C.C.A.R.* Vol. XX, (1910), p. 248.

4. Letter to Solomon Geiger of date April 19, 1833, *Nachgelassene Schriften* V, 80.



declared that "not emancipation but reform was the leading issue of the day for the Jews."<sup>1</sup>

In his view, Reform was simply the latest stage in the process of Jewish development. "Every reform," he wrote, "is a transition from the past into a rejuvenated future; such reform does not break with the past; but, rather preserves carefully the bonds that connect the present with the past; it not only continues the once living spirit in new vital forms, thereby strengthening this spirit anew; but it retains all this charming attachment to that which has grown precious and dear in the religious life. Such reform proceeds not with inexorable logic, it follows the law of historical development."<sup>2</sup> "Every era in the history of Judaism is of importance, the present can break with the past as little as any separate limb can dissociate itself from the body without suffering serious injury. Such a connection with the past means not the dominance of dead custom, but the persistence of the living idea which permeates all ages with its vigor, and if it leads to different development, this does not justify that reform alone brings blessing."<sup>3</sup>

With this understanding of Geiger's conception of Judaism, one can easily understand his conception of Revelation which has been practically accepted by all the leaders of reform Judaism. This doctrine is one of Geiger's most illuminating thoughts.<sup>a</sup>

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1. Nachgelassene Schriften, V, 89.

2. Philipson, Abraham Geiger, in C.C.A.R. (1910) vol. XX, p. 251.

3. Philipson, Reform Movement in Judaism, p. 16.

a. His conception of Judaism and revelation are beautifully expressed in the third chapter "Die Offenbarung" in Das Judentum und seine Geschichte. His monumental work "Urschrift und Nebersetzungen der Bibel" presents his historical and scientific presentation of the Bible.

"The spirit of the age was indeed the new revelation."<sup>1</sup> Geiger saw a progressive revelation, a new conception in contradiction to the traditional doctrine of a fixed and positive attitude.

"God reveals Himself constantly in the course of history; if men have ears to hear and eyes to see, they will grasp the constantly appearing revelation; past, present and future are indissolubly connected; we must gain knowledge and insight from the experiences of the past generation and toil intelligently for the future."<sup>2</sup>

With reference to Jehudah ha Levi who declares Israel to be "the heart among nations",<sup>3</sup> Geiger declares revelation to be "an illumination of the Jewish genius by the Divine Mind, which caused the whole people to come nearer to the everlasting truth than any other. Judaism is not a religion given by one man; Israel's God is not called the God of Moses, or of Isaiah, but of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; that is, of the fathers of the nation, who imparted the deep powers of religious intuition and inspiration to all seers, singers and teachers, the framers of the Jewish religion."<sup>4</sup>

"Judaism's doctrine of Revelation has not been spared its battles. By struggle, individual man gains strength, he needs it; but here and there, it will cover him with dust. Judaism also needed such a struggle against the world, and in consequence,

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1. See Philipson, Reform Movement in Judaism, pp. 83-84.

2. "Aus der Vergangenheit schöpfen, in der Gegenwart leben, für die Zukunft wirken"; motto accompanying Geiger's picture 1875, Nachgelassene Schriften, V, 279.

3. Cuzari II:36.

4. Judische Zeitschriften II, 193. Also Jewish Encycl., art. "Revelation", vol. X, p. 397.

many a dust from the earth has settled upon it. In opposition to the whole world, possessed by other conceptions, there arose a small nomadic tribe that had just emerged from a great empire addicted to idolatry. It must need keep keep closely together, lest it be crushed beneath the weight of the outside powers. With the Divine spirit that has been formed into life within it, it intended to proclaim a new faith, preserve it, and make it victorious throughout the world."<sup>1</sup>

Geiger saw in Israel a religious corporation whose purpose in the world was to teach certain dogmas and creeds and whose existence was only to justify in proportion to their success as teachers. He considered the "Jewish people endowed with such a genius, a Religious Genius. It is an aboriginal power that illuminated its eyes so that they could see deeper into the higher life of the spirit, could see more deeply and recognize more vividly the close relation between the spirit of man and the Supreme Spirit, that they could more clearly and distinctly behold the real nature of the moral in man and present to the world the result of that inborn knowledge. If this be so, we may speak of a close touch of the individual spirit with the Supreme Spirit, of the light thrown into individual spirits by the Power that fills everything, so that they could break through their finite barriers; it is - let us not hesitate to speak the word - it is Revelation, and that too, as manifested in the whole nation.

"The Greeks were not all artists, each one of them was not a Phidias or a Praxiteles; but, yet the Greek nation alone was capable of producing such masters. The same was the case in Israel.

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1. Geiger, Das Judenthum und seine Geschichte, vol. I, 38.

Surely not all its men were prophets, and the exclamation, 'would that all the people were prophets', was but a pious wish; the other, 'I shall pour out My spirit upon all flesh', is a promise, it had not become the reality. Nevertheless, Israel is the people of revelation within which the favored representatives appeared; it is as if the sparks of light had been scattered and had been gathered into a blaze in the most favored ones. A thorn bush produces no grape-vine; a neglected people produces no prophets such as the Jews gave to the world. The Historical books of the Bible are full of reproaches about the moral<sup>and</sup>/the depravity of the people of Israel at the time of their kings; the authors want to prepare us for the devastation that came on later as a punishment for their sins. Yet, noble forces in great numbers must have existed within that nation; there must have been a native endowment and disposition, when men of such magnificence could rise and develop out of the people. Judaism was a mere voice crying in the wilderness, and though it did not prevail in all, it was still an energy which existed, though weak in many, yet to such an extent that, concentrating in individuals, it could produce such heroes of the spirit. Nor does Judaism claim to be the work of individuals, but that of the whole people. It does not speak of the God of Moses, or of the God of the prophets, but of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of the God of the whole race, of all the patriarchs who were equally endowed with the gift of prophetic vision, the genius of revelation which was latent in the whole people and found concentration and expression in individuals. The fact that the greatest prophet left his work unfinished contains a great truth: he must not be regarded as the Atlas who bears the world on his shoulders, who completes the work without



the co-operation of others from beginning to end. "No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day", and our ancient teachers remark, 'his grave should not serve for a place of pilgrimage whither people go to do honor to one and thus raise him above the level of man'. Moses did his part of the work according to his great capacity as one of the whole people. Judaism arose within the people of revelation. And why then should we not use the word when we touch bottom-rock, an illumination proceeding from a higher mind and spirit, which can not be explained; which is not a compound produced by a process of development even if it is further developed afterwards; which all at once appears in existence as a whole, like every new certain creation proceeding from the Oriental Spirit? We do not want to limit and define the word in any dogmatic manner; it may be understood in different ways, as to its essence, it remains the same; the point of contact of human reason with the Fundamental Source of all things. High as the ancient teachers estimated revelation, they never denied that it is connected with human ability. The Talmud teaches: 'The spirit of God rests only on a wise man, on a man possessing moral power, who is independent because he is frugal and contented by having conquered all ambition, greed and desire'; a man who bears his importance within him, who feels the Divine within him. Only such a one is capable of receiving the Divine, not a mere speaking trumpet through which the spoken word passes without his being conscious of it; no, a man in the true sense of the word, who touches close upon the Divine and is therefore susceptible to it. A deep thinker and great poet of the middle ages, Jehudah ha-Levi, emphatically designated revelation as a disposition that was present in the whole people. Israel, he says, is the religious

heart of mankind which in its totality always preserved its great susceptibility, and its individual distinguished men were the heart of that heart. Maimonides speaks of a flask-like illumination as which revelation must be regarded; to one the light lasted but for a short time, to another, it occurred repeatedly, and with Moses, it was a lasting one, an illumination which lights up the darkness, affords man a look into the hidden recesses, which reveals to him what remains concealed for others.

"Judaism is such a religion, has grown out of such Divine visions and has connected into a whole all that it did behold; Judaism is a religion of truth, because the view into the essence of things is infallible, beholding the Unchangeable and the Everlasting: That is the everlasting message."<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine of the Mission of Israel was an important doctrine in Geiger's theology. Indeed he exclaimed: "We would have to cease to be Jews were we not to believe that our historical mission in the world has reached its end;"<sup>2</sup> though he was less inclined than Einhorn and others to emphasize the election of Israel.<sup>3</sup> He believed that Judaism would some day become the universal religion because of its closeness with the Divine Spirit. This did not mean that Judaism would become the universal religion; but, rather, a gradual conversion of Judaism to Prophetic religion and, the world, in turn, would adopt the Prophetic ideals of the Hebrew Prophets.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid, chapter Die Offenbarung, vol. 1, p. 33 ff.

2. Judische Zeitschrift, vol. 10, p. 262. Schechter, Abraham Geiger, Studies in Judaism, third series, p. 60.

3. Jewish Encyl., art. "Revelation", vol. 10, p. 586.

4. Abraham Geiger, Schechter, Studies in Judaism, third series, p. 61.



Geiger fully believed that Israel was set apart for a special purpose; but, he contended that all such chauvinistic prayers and expressions which exalts Israel at the expense of the other nations must be changed and eliminated. Just because God has revealed Himself to them should not justify the conception that they are better than other nations. Rather contrawise must this conception be interpreted. God has chosen Israel; therefore, the obligation lay upon this people to attempt to become more and more worthy of this distinction by exemplary conduct.<sup>1</sup>

With this conception of revelation, a serious problem arose that has continued to this very day. The Problem of Divine Authority had to be answered. The whole problem assumed a critical place in the affair with Tiktin. The chief Rabbi of Posen, Solomon Eger, summarized the Traditional viewpoint when he declared that, "only he can be considered a conforming Jew who believes that the Divine Law-book, the Torah, together with all its interpretations and explanations found in the Talmud was given by God Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai to be delivered to the Jews and to be observed by them forever; further, Moses delivered the Oral and Written Laws revealed to him, to his successor Joshua, Joshua to the so-called Zekenim, these to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly. These oral divine traditions are the very same as, collected in the Talmud, we are commanded to obey. He, however, who departs from the paths, who believes in the authenticity of the Written Law alone as Divinely given; but, considers the interpretation of this written law as Talmudically ordained

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1. Gesammelte Schriften I, 208.

and prescribed a purely human work, subject to changes, is not to be considered an Israelite, but belongs to the sect of Karaites, who separated themselves as the Christian religion."<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi of Lissa also upholds this view by stating: "All commandments and prohibitions contained in the Books of Moses, and that, too, in the forms that they have received by Talmudical interpretations, are of Divine origin, binding for all times upon the Jews, and not one of these commandments or prohibitions, be its character what it may, can ever be abolished or modified by any human authority."<sup>2</sup>

These statements represented the standpoints of Tiktin and his followers based upon authoritative Judaism. Tiktin accused the governing board of the congregation of having selected a dayan in disregard of and in opposition to the religious convictions of the entire congregation as well as to Traditional Judaism of a thousand years 'standing; a dayan, who in spoken and written discourse, denies unreservedly the authoritative validity of this Traditional Judaism and whose call and mission appear to be to extirpate its roots and branches for all times."<sup>3</sup>

The vital question at issue was whether the congregation could accept Geiger's definition of Judaism which carried with it the new interpretation of revelation and the Torah. Was the Torah to be considered in a far and deeper meaning than in the past?<sup>4</sup> Geiger carried his historical investigation even into this field of learning. He brooked no limitation to his critical inquiries.

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1. Philipson, Reform Movement in Judaism, p. 82.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Jewish Encycl., art. "Revelation", Vol.X, p397, caption "Torah".

The Torah, as well as the Talmud, he demanded should be studied critically and from the view of the historian.<sup>1</sup> He felt some difficulty in speaking of the Torah as the Word of God. The Rabbis meet this with the words, "The Word of God? Well, indeed, the way in which God speaks, especially in all great deeds of the spirit is in the history of mankind."<sup>2</sup> He then proceeds to remark that "in this Book, legends and myths overgrew the stem as a foliage, that the story of the creation is a part of this, that also matters having become barren by time as the ceremonies from their origin and even more so in the later troubled times, threatened and still is threatening partly to consume the fresh sap. All these facts did not prove detrimental to the vigorous roots and the sound stem. We have conquered for us the right to proclaim such view as public."<sup>3</sup> Thus, he contends that the Bible is a complex of the beautiful and the sublime, perhaps the most sublime of all human books and must cease to be looked upon as Divine.<sup>4</sup>

He differed radically with the traditionalists who claimed that every expression in the Talmud and the codes was authoritative; he would not concede that the possibilities of Judaism had become exhausted with the works of the Talmudical doctors; all ages present and to come had their contributions to make to the religion, no less than the ages that have gone. If the traditionalists were right in their position that all traditions were in the Talmud, then in all the centuries that have elapsed, since the close of the Talmud, Judaism has been merely feeding on the products of a vanished past. Inasmuch as they looked upon Judaism

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1. Jewish Encycl., art. Geiger, vol. V, p. 586.

2. Judische Zeitschrift, vol. X, p. 180.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., vol. 30, p. 29.

VI

KAUFMAN KOHLER'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION

as having slept during all this time, they have no right, "no right to speak of a tradition three thousand years old. When we consider that they have already been asleep for two thousand years. The thread of tradition is fastened to the present. While the people recognized a legitimate religion which had been forming for a long time, another religious view came to life before they had chance to develop their own."<sup>1</sup> "But whatever the Traditionalists may claim, there could be no doubt of the fact that in the conflicts and tendencies of the modern age, the spirit of Judaism was re-asserting itself in a new way and God was revealing Himself in a new manner."<sup>2</sup>

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1. "Man durfe nicht von einer drei Tausend jährigen Tradition sprechen wenn man sie als bereits fast zwei tausend Jahre entschlafen betrachte. Der Faden der Tradition sei in der Gegenwart gerade wieder angeknüpft. Das in gesetzliche Erstarrung gerathene religiöse Bewusstsein der Gesamtheit habe seit längerer Zeit begonnen flüssig zu werden, ~~wieder~~ sei eine lebendige Anschauung erwacht, wenn sie auch noch nicht zur vollen Klarheit sich entwickelt habe.

2. Philipson, Abraham Geiger, C.C.A.R., (1910), vol. XX, p. 252.

VI

KAUFMAN KOHLER'S CONCEPTION OF REVELATION

The name of Kaufman Kohler will always take a prominent place in the Reform Movement of America. He was the true disciple of Abraham Geiger and his religious view reflects the thoughts of that great mind. His work on Jewish Theology is the clearest and most comprehensive discussion of Geiger's beliefs and the theology of the Reform Movement written in the English language. His chapter on Revelation and Prophecy states his view on the doctrine of Revelation. Like Geiger, he never deviated from the contention that the Reform Movement was the latest phase in the constant development of Judaism. "Judaism is a religion of historical growth, which far from claiming to be the final truth is ever regenerated anew at each turning point of history."<sup>1</sup> In his introductory address before the Conference of Rabbis that assembled at Pittsburg, Pa., November 1885, he said: "Judaism is a historical growth and we must find the forms for all its emanations and manifestations, the common feature in all its diverse expressions and forms. We must accentuate what is essential and vital amid its ever changing forms and ever fluctuating conditions. We must declare before the world what Judaism is and what Reform Judaism aims at."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Kohler, Jewish Theology, p. 4.

2. Jewish Reformer I, 1.



The principle of change in Judaism is not an innovation of this age. "Judaism manifested its wondrous power of assimilation by renewing itself to meet the demands of the time, first under the influence of the ancient civilizations, Babylonia and Persia, then of Greece and Rome, finally of the Occidental powers, molding its religious truths and customs in ever new forms, but all in consonance with its own genius. It adapted the Babylonian and Persian views of the hereafter, of the upper and nether world with their angels and demons; so later on, it incorporated into its religious and legal systems elements of Greek and Egyptian gnosticism, Greek philosophy, and methods of jurisprudence from Egypt, Babylon and Rome. In fact the various parties which arose during the second Temple beside each other or successively - Sadducees and Pharisees, Essenes and Zealots -- represent on closer observation, the different stages in the process of assimilation which Judaism had to undergo. In like manner, the Hellenistic, Apocryphal and Apocalyptic literature, which was rejected and lost to sight by Traditional Judaism and which partly fills the gap between the Bible and the Talmudic writings, casts a flood of light upon the development of the Halakah and the Hag-gadah. Just as the book of Ezekiel, which was almost excluded from the Canon on account of its divergence from the Mosaic Law, has been helpful in tracing the development of the Priestly Code, so the Sadducean book of Ben Sira and the Zealotic book of Jubilees - not to mention the various Apocalyptic works - throw their searchlight upon pre-Talmudic Judaism."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Kohler, Jewish Theology, p. 12.

This ability to incorporate the conditions of the age is strikingly noticeable in the methods and terminology of the religious philosophers who "adopted the methods and terminology of the Mohammedan theologians, attempting to present the doctrines of the Jewish faith in the light of philosophy, as truth based on reason."<sup>1</sup>

Thus in view of these facts, Judaism to-day needs reinterpretation of its principles to meet the present problems of the world. "The present age of historical research imposes the same necessity of restatement of reformulation us. We must do as Maimonides did, - as Jews have always done - point out anew the really fundamental doctrines, and discard those which have lost their hold upon the modern Jew, or which conflicts directly with his religious consciousness. If Judaism is to retain its prominent position among the powers of thought, and to be clearly understood by the modern world, it must again reshape its religious truths in harmony with the dominant ideas of the age."<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult for Judaism to introduce new principles as Judaism differs from all religions in that it is neither the creation of one great moral teacher nor does it seek to typify the spiritual sublimity in one single person. "Neither is Judaism the creation of a single person, either prophet or a man with divine claims. It points back to the patriarchs as its first source of revelation. It speaks not of the God of Moses, of Amos and Isaiah, but of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

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1. Ibid, p. 2.

2. Ibid, p. 27.

thereby declaring the Jewish genius to be the creator of its own religious ideas. It is, therefore, incorrect to speak of 'Mosaic', 'Hebrew', or 'Israelitish' religion".<sup>1</sup> And he further states that "Judaism counts its prophets, its sages, and its martyrs by generations; it is still demonstrating its power to reshape and regenerate religion as a vital force."<sup>2</sup>

The essence, then, of the Reform movement in Judaism is the principle of progress and he suggested that the term 'progressive' be substituted for the present term 'Reform Judaism'.<sup>3</sup> Thus "Progressive Judaism of our own time has the great task of re-emphasizing Israel's world-mission and of reclaiming for Judaism its place as the priesthood of humanity. It is to proclaim anew the prophetic idea of God's Covenant with humanity whose force had been lost, owing to inner and outer obstacles. Israel, as the people of the covenant, aims to unite all nations and classes of men in the divine covenant. It must outlast all other religions in its certainty that ultimately there can be but one religion, uniting God and man by a single bond."<sup>4</sup>

With such a progressive conception of Judaism it is quite evident that he did not ascribe to the Traditional conception of revelation. He agreed with Geiger, and he wrote to that effect when he contended that God is forever revealing Himself to man.

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1. Ibid, p. 16.

2. Ibid, p. 326. Also Priest, Prophet, and Preacher, sermon delivered in 1888; Kohler, Hebrew Union College and Other Addresses, p. 109.

3. Mendelssohn and Modern Judaism, sermon preached before the Y.M. H.A. of Louisville, Ky. 1879. Hebrew Union College and other Addresses, sermon on American Judaism, 1911, 195 ff.

4. Kohler, Jewish Theology, p. 51. Backwards or Forwards, series of Discourses on Reform Judaism.

"It is true that the Biblical conception was simple and child-like enough, representing God as descending from the heavens to the earth. Still Judaism has not accepted the cold and distant attitude of the philosopher; it teaches that God as a spiritual power does condescend to man, in order that man may realize his kinship with the Most High and rise ever nearer to his Creator. The earth wherein man dwells and the human heart with its longing for heaven, are not bereft of God. Whenever man seeks Him, there He is."<sup>1</sup> "Only the God of revelation is near to man in his frailty and need, ready to meet his sighs, answer his supplication, count his tears, and relieve his wants when his own power fails."<sup>2</sup>

Then he takes issue with the old belief that Divine Revelation in Israel was a single act; but, rather it was a process of development and its various stages correspond to the degree of culture of the people. "The covenant with Abraham was only the precursor of the covenant concluded with Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai, by which the Jewish people were consecrated to be the eternal guardian of the Divine Covenant with mankind until the time when it shall encompass all the nations."<sup>3</sup> He further states that "God's covenant with Israel is everlasting like that with the heavens and the earth; it is ever to be renewed in the hearts of the people, but never to be replaced by a new covenant. Upon this eternal renewal of the covenant of God rests the unique history of Judaism, its wondrous preservation and regeneration throughout the ages."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Kohler, Jewish Theology, p. 143.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid, p. 49.

4. Ibid, p. 50.



Thus Revelation divorces itself from the supernatural and "passes into sober, self-conscious thought in which the writer no longer thinks of God as the Ego, speaking through him, but as an outside power spoken of in the third person."<sup>1</sup> With this modern view, Revelation is understood in the light of psychology and ethnology, of general history and comparative religion.

This conception created a new problem that was so vital an element to Kohler's conception of Judaism that it had to be preserved at all cost. If the essential truth of revelation is not found in a supernatural and metaphysical sense then revelation is the expression of ethical monotheism. Thus Israel becomes the people with a prophetic ideal "of a humanity united in justice and peace giving to history a new meaning, a larger outlook, kindling in the souls and sages of mankind a love and longing for the broadening of humanity which opened new avenues of progress and liberty."<sup>2</sup> It is an indisputable fact in history that the Jewish people, because of their peculiar religious bent, was predestined to be the people of revelation. "The election of Israel as the chosen people of God, or what amounts to the same, as the nation whose special task and historic mission it is to be the bearer of the most lofty truths of religion among mankind, forms the basis and chief condition of revelation. Before God proclaimed the Ten Words of the Covenant in Sinai, He addressed the people through His Chosen messenger Moses, saying: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if ye will hearken unto

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1. Ibid, p. 39.

2. Ibid, p. 9.



My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be Mine own treasure from among all people, for all the earth is Mine and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless the election of Israel was not the result of a single act of revelation. "The election of Israel cannot be regarded as a single divine act, concluded at one moment of revelation, or even during the Biblical period. It must instead be considered a divine call persisting through all ages and encompassing all lands, a continuous activity of the spirit which has ever summoned for itself new heralds and heroes to testify to truth, justice, and sublime faith, with an unparalleled scorn for death, and to work for their dissemination by words and deeds and by their whole life."<sup>2</sup> The modern view has cast this ancient doctrine into a new form, contending, on the one hand, that the Messianic hope is the highest ideals of a united humanity; and, on the other hand, rejected the entire theory that Israel was exiled from his ancient land because of his sins, and that he will eventually return there and restore the sacrificial cult in the Temple at Jerusalem; but, rather views the dispersion as the means of spreading the ethical monotheistic belief among the nations of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Kohler had much to say about the entire problem of authority which involved his attitude toward the Bible and the rabbinical code. He always upheld the sanctity of the Bible claiming that it generated the moral life of the world.<sup>4</sup> "The Bible contains the eternal verities of the Jewish faith, God's omnipotence, omniscience, and moral government of the world."<sup>5</sup> He acknowledged the gradual

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1. Ibid, p. 323.

2. Ibid, p. 326.

3. Kohler, *The Mission of Israel and its Application to Modern Times*, C.C.A.R. (1919) vol. 29.

4. Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, p. 355. *The Jewish Exponent*, vol. 50, No. 7, Dec. 10, 1909, p. 2, "Kohler answers Critic."

5. Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, p. 43.

development process working in the Bible and wrote that "even conservative investigators, such as Frankel, Graetz, and Isaac Hirsch Weiss, not to mention such radicals as Zunz and Geiger admit the gradual growth and progress of this very system of law, both oral and written."<sup>1</sup> He thus formulates his conception of the Bible which has been the accepted belief in the Reform movement up to date by writing that in Judaism "the Holy Scripture in its literal sense is not the final word of God; the Bible is rather a living spring of divine revelation, to be kept ever fresh and flowing by the active force of the spirit."<sup>2</sup> The Bible should not escape the science of historical investigation. "The time of composition of the various parts of the Pentateuch, including the Decalogue, must be decided by independent critical and historical research."<sup>3</sup> He further remarks that "I do not believe in the divine origin of the Mosaic law and tradition as our orthodox brethren do." He also said<sup>4</sup> however, that the Bible is of supreme value because it contains the expression of the spirit of the Jewish people through whom God revealed Himself. "The Bible rises above the rank of every other literature, sacred or profane, as the inspired Book or Collection of Books, not because God wrote or dictated it...but because it is impregnated with the spirit of a nation that gave to the world the highest form and ideal of religion, the God whom man will forever yearn after, because the spirit of God rests upon its every page and tale."<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid. Also the Bible in the Light of Modern Research, sermon preached in 1887, Hebrew Union College and other Addresses, p. 173.

2. Ibid, op. cit., p. 14.

3. Ibid, p. 46.

4. Unitarianism and Reform Judaism, Amer. Hebrew, July 9, 1889; also see The Jewish Exponent, Nov. 19, 1909, p. 8, Vol. 50.

5. Spiritual Forces in Judaism, C.C.A.R., (1894), p. 136.

Thus Israel lives not by the written word but by the spirit of the Word of God as revealed and developed throughout the ages.<sup>1</sup>

The Pittsburg Conference was called through the invitation of Kaufman Kohler and the president of the C.C.A.R., Isaac Mayer Wise. Kohler delivered the conference paper urging the need of setting forth the aims and objects of the Reform work of Progressive Judaism and offered ten propositions to the conference in which was included a discussion of Revelation and the problem of authority.

" "It is high time to rally our forces, to consolidate, to build.

1. First of all, in order to show that Judaism is a religion of life and not a matter of the past, a system of living faith and practice will offers the guarantee of endurance and strength, it seems to me, we ought to unite on a platform which excludes none of the most radical Jews, which countenances and recognizes every honest opinion and does not denounce modern research, whether in the field of science or in the field of comparative religion, ethnology and biblical criticism, but at the same time positively asserts the Jewish doctrine, a platform broad, comprehensive, enlightened and liberal enough to impress and win all hearts, and also firm and positive enough to dispel suspicion and reproach of agnostic tendencies, or of discontinuing the historical thread of the past.

We can no longer be blind to the fact that Mosaic-Rabbinical Judaism, as based upon the Law and Tradition, has actually and irrevocably lost its hold upon the modern Jew. Whether they have justificatory reasons for doing so or not, the overwhelming majority of Jews within the domain of modern culture disregard altogether the Mosaic-Rabbinical laws concerning diet or dress, concerning work of the kindling of lights on Sabbath, or any other ancient rite.

It must therefore be a matter of deep concern to us to explicitly and clearly state our relation to the Mosaic Law or to Law-Judaism of old and define our standpoint to the world. We cannot afford to stand condemned as law-breakers, to be branded as frivolous and as rebels and traitors because we transgress these laws on principle.

A Decalog-Judaism will not do, for it is either too vague or too narrow; in fact, both. Too vague, for it fails to include some of the most genuine and most important Jewish laws. Christianity also stands upon the Decalog, and, as far as the same presents the laws of morality and humanity, it is the universal religious truth, implied in Pre-Israelitic history. On the other hand, it is too narrow, for as an authentic record of

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1. C.C.A.R. (1910) Yearbook, p. 68.



Divine Revelation it is like the entire Bible too much subject to critical inquiry to form a firm and lasting basis for our entire religious system. For have we not a double version of the Decalog? Or do the various historical and moral reasons given for its commandments today offer the highest standard of morality? Judaism is an historical growth, and we must find the focus for all its emanations and manifestations, the common feature in all its diverse expressions and forms. We must accentuate and define what is essential and vital amidst its ever-changing forms and ever-fluctuating conditions. We must declare before the world what Judaism is and what Reform Judaism means and aims at.<sup>1</sup>

On the Monday afternoon he laid the following platform before the conference for its consideration:-

"In view of the wide divergence of opinions and the conflicting ideas prevailing in Judaism to-day to such an extent as to cause alarm and feeling of uncertainty among our well-meaning co-religionists and an appalling religious indifference and lethargy among the masses, we, as representatives of Reform Judaism, here unite upon the following principles:

(1) While discerning in every religion a human attempt to grasp the Infinite and Omnipotent One and in every sacred form, source and book of revelation offered by any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man, we recognize in Judaism the highest conception of God and of His relation to man—expressed as the innate belief of man in the One and holy God, the Maker and Ruler of the World, the King, the Father and Educator of the Human Race, represented in Holy Scriptures as the faith implanted into the heart of the original man and arrived at in all the cheering brightness by the forefathers, the inspired prophets, singers and writers of Israel, developed and ever more deepened and spiritualized into the highest moral and intellectual power on the basis of Holy Writ by the Jewish teachers and thinkers in accordance with the philosophical and moral progress of their respective ages and under continual struggles and trials, defended and preserved by the Jewish people as the highest treasure of the human race.

(2) We prize and treasure the books comprising the national library of Israel, preserved under the name of the Holy Scriptures, as the records of Divine Revelation and of the consecration of the Jewish people for this mission as priests of the one God; but we consider their composition, their arrangements and their entire contents as the work of men, betraying in their conceptions of the world the shortcomings of their age.

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1. Proceedings of the Pittsburg Rabbinical Conference, Published in 1923 in Honor of the 80th birthday of Kaufmann Kohler, p. 8 ff.

"(3) While finding in the miraculous narratives of the Bible child-like conceptions of the dealing of Divine love and justice with man, we today, in common with many Jewish thinkers of the Spanish era, welcome the results of natural science and progressive research in all fields of life as the best help to understand the working of the Divine Love, the Bible serving us as guide to find the Divine power working from within..

(4) Beholding in the Mosaic Laws a system of training the Jewish people for its mission as a nation among the nations of antiquity, planted upon the soil of Palestine, we accept only the moral laws and statutes as divine, but reject all those social, political and priestly statutes which are in no shape and form adapted to our modern life and to our views and habits as people scattered among the nations of the globe, and standing upon the level of a far higher culture of mind and heart than stood the people for whom they were intended.

(5) All the Mosaic Rabbinical Laws on diet, priestly purity and dress, originating in ages and under associations of ideas altogether foreign to our mental and spiritual state, do no longer impress us with the character of divine institutions, and fail to imbue us with the spirit of priestly holiness, their observance in our day being apt to obstruct rather than enhance and encourage our moral and spiritual elevation as children of God.

(6) While glorying in our great past with its matchless history of one continued wondrous struggle and martyrdom in the defence of the Unity of God, which necessitated the exclusion of the Jewish people from a world stamped with polytheism and idolatry, with all their cruelty and vice, we hail in the modern era of universal culture of heart and mind the approaching realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the kingdom of peace, truth, justice and love among all men, expecting neither a return to Palestine, nor the restitution of any of the laws concerning a Jewish State, nor a sacrificial worship under the administration of the sons of Aaron.

(7) We behold in Judaism an ever-growing, progressive and rational religion, one which gave rise to the religions which today rule the greater part of the civilized globe. We are convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving our identity with our great past; we gladly recognize in the spirit of broad humanity and cosmopolitan philanthropy permeating our age, in the noble and grand endeavor to widen and deepen the idea and to enlarge the dominion of man, our best ally and help in the fulfilment of our mission and the only means of achieving the end and aim of our religion.

(8) We therefore hail with the utmost delight and in the spirit of sincere friendship and friendship the efforts on the part of the representatives of the various religious denominations the world over, and particularly in our free country, towards removing the barriers separating men from men, class from class, and sect from sect, in order to cause each to grasp the hands of his fellowman and thus form one



great brotherhood of men on earth. In this growing religion of humanity, based upon the belief in one God, as Father of men, and the conception of man as the image of God we find the working of the Divine plan of truth and salvation as revealed through Jewish history. (9) In view of the Messianic end and object of Jewish history, we feel bound to do our utmost to make our religious truth and our sacred mission understood to all and appreciated by all, whether Jew or Gentile; to improve and reform our religious forms and habits of life so as to render them expressive of the great cosmopolitan ideas pervading Judaism and to bring about the fulfillment of the great prophetic hope and promise "that the house of God should be the house of prayer for all nations."

(10) Seeing in the present crisis simply the natural consequences of a transition from a state of blind authority—belief and exclusion—to a rational grasp and humanitarian conception and practice of religion, we consider it a matter of the utmost necessity to organize a Jewish mission for the purpose of enlightening the masses about the history and mission of the Jewish people and elevating their social and spiritual condition through press, pulpit and school."

A committee was immediately formed head by Dr. Kohler as chairman, and the following morning the Conference adopted the following declaration of principle, the clearest expression of the Reform Movement that had ever been published to the world.

"In view of the wide divergence of opinion and of the conflicting ideas prevailing in Judaism today, we, as representatives of Reform Judaism in America, in continuation of the work begun at Philadelphia in 1869, unite upon the following principles:

First—We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite One, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended amid continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.

Second—We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as priest of the One God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age and at time clothing its conception of divine providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narratives.

"Third—We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.

Fourth—We hold that all such Mosaic and Rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our day is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.

Fifth—We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approach of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the Kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the administration of the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.

Sixth—We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason. We are convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving the historical identity with our great past. Christianity and Islam being daughter-religions of Judaism, we appreciate their mission to aid in the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth. We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfilment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who co-operate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.

Seventh—We reassert the doctrine of Judaism, that the soul of man is immortal, grounding this belief on the divine nature of the human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism the belief both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (hell and paradise), as abodes for everlasting punishment or reward.

Eighth—In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation which strives to regulate the relation between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion that followed after the reading of the platform is very interesting and gives a clear insight into the unanimous acceptance by the conference. The following is taken from the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference:—

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1. Ibid, pp.24-25.

"After reading of the Platform, the President, Dr. Wise, said: Gentlemen, what are you going to do with this Declaration of Independence?

Dr. Moses: I hail with great joy this able and wonderfully liberal declaration. The platform is admirable and I accept it with both hands, and I move its adoption by this meeting.

Dr. Wise then put the question and the platform as a whole was accepted unanimously, with the understanding that it should be subjected to careful examination by the convention, sentence by sentence. The re-reading of the platform then took place and various amendments and verbal corrections were accepted.

To paragraph 2 of the platform, Dr. Kohler moved that his original words "of Divine Revelation and" be inserted before "consecration".

Dr. Hirsch: I would not use the word, for it stands for an idea which I do not hold. I do not believe in revelation, if thereby is meant what is generally supposed to have occurred at Sinai. Nor does my congregation. They have been taught by myself as well as by my predecessors, that religion is the result of evolution.

Dr. Moses: The word revelation leads us into the domain of mysticism.

Dr. Hahn also objected to the term, stating that the various Jewish philosophers were not clear on that term. "It is a philosophic question which ought to have no place here. The recognition of our priestly mission implies the idea of revelation.

Rabbi Weil: If Judaism is not a revealed religion, what is it?

Dr. Machol wants a definite expression on revelation.

Dr. Kohler: I confess I am an evolutionist, but I believe in revelation, and I am bold enough to say that Torah min hashamayim, which is revelation, must always remain one of the foundation stones of Judaism. Of course, I do not believe that God stepped down in person from heaven and spoke on Mount Sinai, but when a new truth, instead of being sought for, seeks its instrument, taking hold of a single person or a people and impelling them to become its herald, this is revelation, and in this sense I want to have it understood and accepted.

Dr. Sonneschein: Revelation is, like socialism, a tabooed word, truly beautiful in significance, but poorly understood, and for this reason it should be avoided in the platform.



Dr. Hirsch: Revelation through genius, individual or collective, organically developed, none of us rejects, but the technical term does not convey this meaning.

Dr. Kohler: Seeing that the question is not a matter of principle, but that all agree as regards the acceptance of the idea of revelation, and that only the use of the word is disliked in the platform, I withdraw my ammendment, stating expressly, that **we agree** in the principle of a successive Divine revelation as an historical fact.

Paragraph 2 was accepted unanimously, on motion of Dr. Sonneschein the names being called from the roll.

In Paragraph 3, which first read Mosaic Laws, Dr. Hirsch objected to the distinction made between moral laws and ceremonial laws. "Though sanctioned by so great a man as the sainted Dr. Einhorn, it presents difficulties. Are not the holidays ceremonial laws, and would we abolish them? Let us embrace the opportunities to declare openly against legal Judaism. I, for my part, am an adherent of Dr. Samuel Hirsch's views; Judaism is a Lehre; what is called ceremonial laws are symbols representing the idea! Symbols die; those that are dead and, therefore, no longer intelligible, we abolish; those that are still imbued with life, we, of course, retain. Among the former I class all purity and dietary regulations; as laws they are certainly not of Jewish origin. Among the latter I class the holidays. As such, I opposed their transfer to Sunday in my own congregation!"

Whereupon Dr. Kohler moved to substitute the word legislation. Carried.

Paragraph 3 was then accepted unanimously with roll-call and so was Paragraph 4.

To Paragraph 7, referring to immortality, Dr. Hahn raised objection as being too dogmatical, and too much savoring of Sadduceeism.

Dr. Falk wished to have Reward and Punishment accentuated as an indispensable Jewish dogma.

Dr. Wise referred to Maimonides' Yad Hachasak, Hilch. Theshuba as the best authority corroborating the spiritual conception of Retribution expressed in the platform.

Dr. Hirsch: Resurrection was already rejected by the Philadelphia Conference, but eternal punishment and Paradise pleasure must also be discarded. Let our modern Kaddish Jews be reminded that the twelve months burning in Gehenna is probably of Parsee origin. We cannot urge too strongly that righteousness is its own reward, and wrongdoing carries with it its own punishment, and that work is the aim of life.

"The righteous strive forever after higher stages of life- "

Maimonides' opinion of a spiritual Paradise is entirely at variance with the popular notion.

Dr. Kohler: The word "Forever" implies eternal readjustment of man's doings throughout all epochs or evolution of the life of the soul, the soul's ascending from stage to stage with its bliss or its woe. We need no actual or localized rewards and punishments. This is no Sadduceeism. It is the view of Antigonus of Socho in the Mishnah: "Be not like servants who work for their master only for the sake of wages!"

Paragraph 7 was finally carried, and so was Paragraph 8.

Upon acceptance of the platform as a whole, the meeting adjourned until the afternoon."<sup>1</sup>

Thus Reform Judaism gave a clear expression of its doctrine of Revelation which has been the accepted belief in American Judaism. The thoughts and works of the master mind, Abraham Geiger, found expression in the movement of modern Jewry.

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1. Ibid, p. 25 ff.