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THE SERMONS OF SOLOMON PLESSNER

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for ordination

Hebrew Union College -
Jewish Institute of Religion
Cincinnati, Ohio
March, 1953

Referee:
Dr. Israel Bettan

Salomon Plessner.

Prediger in Posen

C O N T E N T S

"Mag das Volk nach beendigten Gottesdienste rasch zu seinen Zelten und zeitlichen Bestrebungen zurueckkehren; der Moses der Gemeinde fahre fort das Goettliche zu warten; Nicht aufhoeren fast darf er zu lernen, zu lehren, Gutes zu Ueben;ja selbst wenn Alles in stiller Nacht der suessen Ruhe pflegt, stehe er und diene noch manches Stuendlein mit ruestiger Kraft; am Tage eine Wolken-, in der Nacht eine Feuersaeule, in welchen die Allmacht wohnen koenne, die Gemeinde schirmend, leitend, segnend und erleuchtend Je mehr Knecht Gottes, desto mehr Herr in seinem Volke..."

SOLOMON PLESSNER

I. INTRODUCTION

Through the greater part of the Nineteenth Century, particularly in the years 1830 to 1860, Solomon Plessner was the acknowledged spokesman for German orthodoxy. Among the first to preach in German in the synagogue, he utilized a modified midrashic method garbed in the dress of the Protestant sermon to champion the principles of traditional Judaism at a time which witnessed the first stirrings of modern religious reform within Jewish ranks.

The primary concern of this essay will be the message of Solomon Plessner's sermons with particular reference to his theology as well as his attitude toward reform. His theory of preaching will be presented and his homiletical method outlined. An attempt will be made to give his ideas historical setting, tracing his thought in the light of the intellectual currents of his day.

All of Plessner's published sermons - there are several hundred of them, in eight major collections[1] - have been carefully examined and constitute the sole source of this study. Biographical material was extracted from the few short sketches and obituaries published in German

periodicals soon after Plessner's death.[2] This date was further supplemented by the personal recollections and family traditions obtained through correspondence with Plessner's descendants: his grandson, Isaac Plessner, still living in Ramat Gan, Israel; his great-granddaughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Tal of Tel Aviv; and his great-grandson, Dr. Martin Plessner, the well-known orientalist at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.[3]

While it is not our purpose to write a biography of Solomon Plessner, a general outline of his life, together with a brief consideration of some of the major forces which molded his intellectual development is in order.

His Life

Solomon Plessner was born in Breslau on April 23, 1797 (19 Nissan 5557). Only seven years before, his grandfather, Solomon Joachim, had been granted the title Schutzjude, a privilege extended by the emperor only to relatively few - one-tenth of the entire Jewish population of Prussia - relieving them from many of the oppressive taxes and residential restrictions generally directed against the Jews.[4]

Plessner's father, Loebel, was a respected merchant who worked by day and studied Torah by night and who strove to

imbue his children, three sons and one daughter, with a spirit of devotion to Judaism. His eldest daughter and the youngest son died at an early age; only Solomon and his brother, Isaac, survived. The two became inseparable.

Loebel Plessner died while the brothers were still in their "teens", and the task of supporting their mother and themselves fell upon their young shoulders. Solomon, as the older of the two, took over his father's business. He continued his studies after work, reading diligently, eagerly, late into the night, and rising early to study before going to the store. Isaac, concerned about his brother's health, often pleaded with him to get more rest. Solomon replied: "...reports concerning my non-sleeping through the entire week are unfounded. I am wont to get up at five or four o'clock. Rarely do I get up earlier."[5]

Plessner's auto-didactic efforts were not without their reward. His writings attest to his great achievement and reveal the wide scope of his preparation. That he was thoroughly at home in Jewish sources goes without saying. Each and every thought of his sermons is supported with a veritable constellation of quotations representing every area of Jewish literary endeavor: the Tannach, Mishna, Gemara (both Bavli and Jerushalmi), Mechilta, Sifrei, Sifra, the Rabbos and other rabbinical-homiletical works, Josephus, Albo, Grescas, Jehuda Halevi, Maimonides,

Abarbanel, Rashi, the Tosafists, all of the liturgy, the Shulchan Aruch, the Zohar, Chassidic writing, and products of the early Haskalah, especially Mendelsohn and Wessely.[6] The great bulk and variety of these quotations proves the thoroughness of Plessner's self-training; the many literary illustrations cited must have been at his finger tips. Had they been the result of painful search in concordances, anthologies or indices he could not have produced so voluminously.

Plessner's knowledge extended far beyond the Jewish field. He drank deep from the Pierian Springs of Europe and the ancient world. He studied Greek, Latin, Arabic, English and French, mastering these languages well enough to read the best of their literary products in the original.[7] Above all ~~else~~ he learned German, studied its literature, made himself a master of its syntax and its idiom and developed a dignified and eloquent style of speech and pen.

Poetry was the favorite pastime of both Plessner brothers, a predilection which appears as an everpresent strain in those who strive for spiritual values. Both Isaac and Solomon wrote poetry, in German as well as in Hebrew;[8] poetic lines, hiw own and those of others, are frequently cited in Solomon's sermons;[9] and many of the scriptural verses, used as text or illustration, were translated by Plessner and rendered in poetic form.[10] Indeed, his very

prose exhibits much poetic imagination and power in metaphor and simile.

Through his unbounded enthusiasm for poesy Plessner encountered two men whose thoughts were to leave an indelible imprint upon his intellectual development: Friedrich von Schiller and Naphtali Wessely.

Schiller's writings epitomized early Nineteenth Century reaction against the scientific method and ideals of the Age of Reason.[11] His conviction that life is broader than reason, that the world is more than mechanical order, and, especially, his insistence that the final test of any belief is not its reasonableness nor its utility, but its origin and history - "Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltall" - found a responsive chord in Plessner's thinking. Schiller's style especially appealed to him; he recognized the poet's dependence upon the ideas and the language of the Old Testament;[12] and he proudly included many of Schiller's gems in support of his homiletical excursions.[13]

Naphtali Herz Wessely was a Hebrew philologist and poet who achieved fame as one of the founders of the Haskalah. Active during the latter half of the Eighteenth Century, he wrote a Hebrew translation, with commentary, of the Apocryphal Book, The Wisdom of Solomon, also a philological ethical work entitled חכמת שלמה or שיר השירים. His Biblical

epic on the Exodus, שירי הבאורים, marks his outstanding contribution to Hebrew literature; its fluent style served as a model for many generations of Hebrew writers, including Solomon Plessner. Wessely's book דברי שלום ואמת had a most marked effect on Plessner. Published on the occasion of the signing of the Toleration Edict of 1782 by Emperor Joseph II of Austria-Hungary, Wessely appealed to his co-religionists to prepare their children for emancipation by reorganizing their educational systems to include the teaching of secular subjects, particularly the study of the vernacular.[14] Plessner held Wessely in highest esteem. Innumerable citations from Wessely's works are included in his writings and are usually introduced with such laudatory apellations as "in the words of the great Israelite of modern times", "of the most profound expert of the Hebrew language and the Holy Writ," "of the immortal singer of our day," et cetera.[15] The apparent contradiction - an advocate of rigid tradition extolling a man who had been condemned as latitudinarian by other leaders of orthodoxy - will be dealt with later.[16]

One more molding force of Plessner's early years - a political event - merits mention. On the eleventh of March, 1812, Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia, anxious to gain popular support in his war of liberation against France and, undoubtedly, influenced by his progressive ministers,

Hardenberg and Humboldt, granted Jews full citizenship excluding only the right to hold governmental positions (but including, of course, the 'right' to serve in the army). Getting their first taste of freedom in many centuries, the Jews of Germany responded to this "burst of desperate liberalism" by flinging themselves full-heartedly into the battle against Napoleon. They hailed the Prussian emperor as liberator and affirmed their faith in Prussia and Germany as a Kulturstaat, a nation of thinkers, poets and dreamers which would eventually grant them complete equality.[17] Plessner accepted this faith and maintained it throughout his life and with an enthusiasm which neither the Congress of Vienna betrayal nor the "Christian Teutomania" of the post-war years succeeded in dimming.

To resume the thread of Plessner's life: while in Breslau, at the age of seventeen, he began an intensive study of Wessely's works. Following his master's footsteps, he prepared a Hebrew translation of the Apocryphal Book Additions to Esther (תוספות מגילת אסתר) which appeared together with a German translation and commentary in 1819 and represents Plessner's first literary effort. The very same year, he made his first public appearance, lecturing on Wessely's _____ at R. Abraham Titkin's Shul between מנחה and ערבית on Saturdays and Holydays.[18]

The warm response aroused by these lectures can be credited to Plessner's talents as well as to the courage with which he voiced his fundamental views. With the founding of the first reform temple in Hamburg in 1817, the movement for ritual innovation and religious reform gained supporters in all the larger cities of Germany. The rabbis and lay leaders who opposed these changes felt the need of a spokesman who could advocate their cause cogently in the German so familiar to the public which for decades now had been exposed to the polemics of the Aufklaerung. Solomon Plessner appeared to fill this need. He was well grounded in Jewish religious literature. His secular knowledge was considerable. And he spoke excellent German. What is more, he seemed willing to accept the role of tradition's champion.

Soon, Plessner, still in his early twenties, was asked to preach on special occasions: a national holiday, the death of a leading citizen, the anniversary of the king. These talks were well received and his admirers demanded their publication. The following sermons appeared in print: "Gottesfreunde sind Sonnen auf Erden" (1820); "Der Tag ist kurz die Arbeit viel" (1821); "Rede am Grabe seines Lehrers R. Abraham Titkin" (1821); and "Die wahre Gotteswuerde", a talk given on the occasion of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Coronation of Friedrich Wilhelm III. Rabbi Akiba

Eger (the Younger), renowned spiritual head of the province of Posen, heard the young man and gave him his blessing.[19] Soon, Solomon Plessner was to sell his store and devote himself exclusively to homiletical and literary endeavors. He was ready to assume his role as prolocutor of German orthodoxy.

Not all was smooth sailing. The more influential members of the Breslau community favored the liberal cause and opposed Plessner's teaching. After a particularly violent dispute concerning the use of an organ during worship service, Plessner was forced to give up his pulpit. Eventually he left Breslau and settled in Festenburg, a small town in Silesia.

In Festenburg, where he remained for seven years (1823-30), Plessner experienced the extremes of joy and sorrow in his personal life. He married Beate Liebermann, daughter of a Breslau merchant, and the two oldest of his children, Rosalie and Loebel, were born. Unhappy moments came with the death of his mother and the sudden passing of his younger brother, Isaac, whom he had loved so dearly. On a professional level, the most significant episode of the Festenburg period occurred when, after the government of Posen had issued a decree banning the teaching of Talmud within its borders, Akiba Eger charged Plessner with the task of drawing up a petition requesting the decree's

rescission. Plessner wrote a short apology, bringing copious quotations from Christian scholars in the Talmud's defense. Akiba Eger forwarded the petition in his own name and the oppressive law was revoked. Some months later, Plessner's apologia appeared in print, together with a Hebrew abstract ("תוכן הדברים") under the title, Wort zu seiner Zeit, oder die Autoritaet der juedischen Traditionslehre.[20] With the publication of this pamphlet some of Plessner's more radical ideas concerning the necessity for secular education came to light.[21] And the fact that he supported his arguments for the Talmud with copious quotations from Christian sources aroused bitter antagonism among members of the orthodox party.[22]

In 1830 Plessner moved to Berlin. For a while he taught at the Jewish Seminary - the institution later headed by Zunz; at the same time he preached at local synagogues and in public on special occasions. Here, his first wedding sermon, his first synagogue-dedication sermon and his first confirmation talk and service appeared in print.[23] His scholarly endeavors were continued with the publication of his Die Apocryphischen Buecher (1833) including a Hebrew translation of Baruch, the Epistle of Jeremy, Additions to Daniel: the prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel, and The Prayer of Menassah.

Plessner left the seminary to devote himself exclusively to preaching. Now he lectured at the Beth Hamidrash regularly on alternate Saturday afternoons. His sermons - or rather lectures, for the sermon was not yet considered part of the service - were well received; their erudition and eloquence appealed to the great majority of his listeners. In the years 1836-37, four volumes (in two series) of his sermons appeared under the general title Belehrungen und Erbauungen. These collections constitute the backbone of his homiletical activities and reveal the essence of his thought.

Plessner was never a candidate for a rabbinic position; he maintained throughout his life the title Religionslehrer. His descendants attribute this fact to Plessner's reluctance to face the personal conflicts and pulpit restrictions which are the inevitable concomitants of a permanent position.[24] Though he was most certainly fit to be a rabbi, we wonder whether an Abraham Titkin or an Akiba Eger would actually have extended Semicha to him. Eger's opposition to Plessner's educational theories is quite apparent from one of his letters;[25] and the deprecatory attitude of most Nineteenth Century traditional rabbis to anything except Talmudic dialectic is well established. They regarded homiletical writings - particularly those in the vernacular - as a pastime if not a waste of time.

In 1837 Plessner delivered a number of highly popular sermons on **prayer** which were published as a unit under the title, Die Kostbare Perle and constitute the third of his "Belehrungen und Erbauungen" series. In 1838, he published a book on religion for youth under the title **Juedischer** Mosaischer Religionsunterricht; and a collection of his Traungs- and Konfirmationsreden, the fourth of the "Belehrung" series were also brought to print that year. His most celebrated volume of sermons, a collection of holyday and pre-holyday messages entitled [illegible] - oder Festreden (the fifth of the "Belehrung" series) appeared in Berlin three years thereafter.

In 1843, Plessner received a call to Posen where Solomon Eger, the son of Akiba Eger, had inherited his father's position. There Plessner remained actively occupied until his death in 1883.

His time in Posen was divided between the pulpit and the teacher's desk. He preached regularly in Posen's three synagogues, delivered semi-weekly lectures on the Psalms and other Biblical books and became the official speaker for various religiously-oriented organizations: the "Peace Society", the "Burial Society", and the "Society for the Remembrance of the Dead (Verrein zum Gedaechtniss Verstorbener)".[26] At the same time, he gave private lessons, asking no remuneration from his many pupils. On

the contrary, he supported poorer students, giving freely of his own not too munificent subsistence.

The doors to his home were always open: young and old gathered about him, to enrich their knowledge and to warm themselves ~~on~~ at the fire of his enthusiasm. And the poor also came. His grandson recalls that a special plate was constantly kept filled with coins to be distributed to all the needy who passed his doors.[27]

Few of the Posen sermons reached print during Plessner's lifetime; he discouraged their publication permitting only the reproduction of a few talks delivered on national occasions.[28] He was disappointed ~~in~~ with the conditions of German Jewish life; more and more of his co-religionists were swept along by the Zeitgeist - some ceded to the innovations of reform, others deserted Jewish ranks entirely. Many of Plessner's later sermons, published posthumously,[29] reflect the bitterness of his disappointment.

As for himself, Plessner ceded nothing either to secularism or to reform, even to the point of retaining in his later years the distinctive garb which his fathers wore when he was young - the long black coat, reaching to his ankles, and the wide-brimmed felt hat. He observed the minutiae of Jewish ritual and maintained his enthusiastic faith in God

as the eventual redeemer of Israel and all mankind. To his very last days, he hurried happily from home to synagogue, from synagogue to Beth Hamidrash, with a smile upon his thin lips, often humming a melody, as if determined to realize in his life the motto he had proclaimed five decades earlier in one of his most celebrated sermons: "Das Leben, ein Gesang" - life is a song, a hymn of glory to God.

On August 28th, 1883, appropriately enough in the Hebrew month of Ab (5643), Solomon Plessner died, mourned by friend and opponent alike as a proud son of his people.

Theory of Preaching

Plessner conceives the task of the Jewish preacher as a two-fold one: to moralize and to teach, to improve as well as to instruct, a theory of preaching which he so aptly summarized in the title of his major sermonic collections, Belehrungen und Erbauungen - 'instruction' and 'uphuilding'.

A preacher, according to Plessner, certainly ought to strive to elevate his people and to improve their lot. However, he has to be careful to address his exhortations not to trivia, but to life's central tasks.[30] He is to help his listeners find their way to God, by motivating them to study, by urging them to heed the Law and to observe the ritual, and by inspiring them to cling to tradition, to emulate the

piety of their fathers,

> "...not just 'forward' but at the same time 'backward' shall our teachers and preachers shout to the army of the Lord, שוב! שוב! Return! Return! was and should still be the clarion call of Israel."[31]

But far more important, feels Plessner, the preacher must be a teacher, an expositor of the written and the oral law. "To educate the uneducated," that must be his real mission,

> "I don't want to preach...I want to instruct. The Israelite must learn something from his teachers; never must he leave the House of God as ignorant as he came."[32]

What good is a Jew - the heir to a proud tradition - without a knowledge of the Law and his religion? What good are sermons without Torah, without "discoveries in the Law"? חדושי תורה give the preacher's message meaning; they make his discourses a product worthy of being presented in a house dedicated to the worship of the One God; they ever exalt the preacher, lifting him to the level of a prophet.[33] "The Law has replaced vanished prophecy"[34] and - חכם עדיף מנביא - the learned man has become more important than the seer. The fact that others do not listen need not faze the preacher. Plessner calls to mind the rabbinic dictum, "He who saves but one soul, saves the universe." No matter how blatant the voice of the Zeitgeist, the preacher must speak up, fearlessly, courageously, ever seeking the applause of God and history rather than the commendation of the masses.

And who knows, says Plessner, perhaps there are those who think as we do, who feel even as we do, but who are afraid to speak, who wait for someone to make a beginning. The preacher must offer such individuals leadership. And even if no contemporaries respond, it is his holy duty to set forth his views. Future generations are at stake. In the final analysis, we work not for ourselves, but for them, "and what the present sows, the future may well reap".[35]

Plessner draws the practical consequences of his theory: If the preacher is to be a teacher, he must be qualified to teach. Thorough schooling is indispensable, and careful, painstaking preparation must precede each and every homiletical effort. Plessner angrily exclaims:

> "I do not believe the one who says: 'I stood without expending effort.' It redounds to no preacher's glory to come unprepared before his congregation or to speak extemporaneously..."[36]

In preaching as in every other human endeavor, the principle [illegible] applies - the reward is according to the pains. No sweet voice, no, nor dramatic gesture can hide the preacher's ignorance.[37]

Finally, if the preacher is to bring his people nearer to God, he must himself be filled with awe and reverence, must himself heed all laws and observe all ritual. Plessner was most emphatic in driving home this point. A preacher cannot be one thing in the pulpit, another in his home,

still another in the classroom. His preaching, his teaching and his doing all must be one. Anything less constitutes hypocrisy and justifies his being deprived of office.[38] On the contrary, the preacher must be more pious, more observant, more devoted to his religion and his people than are others.

> "...at the conclusion of the services, let the people quickly return to their tents and temporal endeavors; but let the Moses of the congregation continue to tend the Divine. Let him never cease to learn, to study and to practice the good; even when during silent nights all else takes its rest, let him stand and serve sturdily for many an appointed hour; by day, a protective cloud, and at night, a column of fire, in which the Almighty can find His abode, sheltering, guiding, blessing and enlightening his congregation. The more he is a <u>servant</u> of God, the more is he a <u>master</u> of his people..."[39]

Notes to Chapter I

1. See Bibliography (Primary Sources) for a complete listing of Plessner's published sermons.

2. H. Hirschfeld, "Solomon Plessner" in Deutscher Volks-Kalendar (Brieg, 1885) pp. 39-51. His, "Nochmal Salomon Plessner" in the Allgemeine Zeitung des Juderthums (1889) volume 62. Also, his article entitled "Solomon Plessner" included in the posthumous publication of S. Plessner's Biblisches und Rabbinisches (Frankfurt a. M., 1897), pp. 5-25. Dov Stock [illegible] pp. 82ff.

3. The author gratefully acknowledges the efforts of his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Philip Hojda of Tel Aviv, who spent much time in interviewing Plessner's relatives and who were helpful in procuring copies of Plessner's sermons not available in America.

4. Marvin Lowenthal, The Jews of Germany (J.P.S., 1944) pp. 208-213.

5. In a letter to his brother Isaac, cited in Deutscher Volks-kalendar, p. 42.

6. We will content ourselves with one reference for each source cited. Many more references can be found simply by glancing through the footnotes of his published sermons.
Mishna, e.g. Belehrungen und Erbauungen, Second Series (Berlin, 1837) p. 56. Hereafter cited as B&E II.
Talmud Babli, e.g. ibid., p. 41.
Talmud Jerushalmi, e.g. ibid., p. 56.
Mechilta, Sifrei, Sifra, ibid., pp. 86ff
Midrash Rabba, ibid., p. 223.
Other Midrashic Collections, ibid., p. 47.
Josephus, ibid., p. 25.
Albo, ibid., p. 359.
Crescas, ibid., p. 41.
Halevi, ibid., p. 318.
Maimonides, ibid., p. 359.
Nachmanides, ibid., p. 223.
Abarbanel, ibid., p. 173.
Rashi and Tosafists, ibid., p. 131.

Liturgy, viz., piutim, Belehrungen und Erbauungen, First Series (Berlin, Second Edition, 1937) p. 66. Hereafter cited as B&E I.
The Shulchan Oruch, [illegible] oder Festreden (Berlin, 1841) p. 373. Hereafter cited as Festreden.
Sohar, B&E II, p. 377.
Mendelsohn, ibid., p. 359.
Wessely, ibid., p. 357.

7. Learned from correspondence with his relatives. Also, Quotations from Greek Literature, B&E I, p. 384;
from Latin sources, B&E II, pp. 186, 218;
English sources, ibid., p. 93;
French Literature, B&E I, p. 343;
German Literature, B&E II, pp. 207, 210, 187, 269 etc.

8. Some of Isaac Plessner's poems are included in Solomon Plessner's Apokryphen, pp. 133-140. For an example of Solomon Plessner's own Hebrew poetry see his Festreden, p. 1, etc.

9. Poetry of Schiller and Goethe cited B&E I, pp. 207, 208, 210, 227 etc.

10. Ibid., pp. 13, 200. Cf. Festreden, p. 282; also in his Die Kostbare Perle oder das Gebet (Berlin, 1837), p. 332. Hereafter cited as Perle.

11. John Herman Randall Jr., The Making of the Modern Mind (New York, 1940), pp. 389-426.

12. B&E II, pp. xii-xiii.

13. See notes #7 and #9, this chapter. For Plessner's defense of the inclusion of secular sources in synagogal sermon, see Chapter II on Plessner's method in paragraphs discussing his sermon illustrations (pp. 40-41).

14. Lachower, F., [illegible] (1928), vol I, pp. 65-77.

15. Again, only one or two examples will have to suffice. In fact, nearly everyone of Plessner's sermons contains references to Wessely. See, B&E II, pp. 172, 301, 323, 357, etc.

16. See chapter on "Emancipation, Tradition and Reform", p. 44

17. Lowenthal, op. cit., pp. 224, 231.

18. Biblisches und Rabbinisches, pp. 7-8.

19. Ibid., p. 9.

20. Published in 1825 together with an introduction by Nauman Simonsohn.

21. See Chapter on "Emanicpation, Tradition and Reform", p. 81

22. Wort zu seiner Zeit (1825), Hebrew section, pp. 5-7.

23. "Gesaenge zur Einweihung der Neuen Synagoge zu Prenzlau" (1831); "Der Wert des Ehestandes" (1832); and several others.

24. Biblisches und Rabbinisches, p. 11.

25. Cited by G. Deutsch in his article on Plessner in the Reform Jewish Advocate of 1897.

26. Biblisches und Rabbinisches, pp. 22-23.

27. Ibid., p. 22.

28. E.g., "Der Israelit als Unterthan" (1861) held during celebrations honoring the King's coronation.

29. Two posthumous collections of his sermons were edited by his son Elias Plessner and appeared under the general title Nachgelassene Schriften von Salomon Plessner. - One volume of assorted sermons, Predigten (Frankfurt, 1884), a series of Sabbath morning talks Sabbath Predigten fuer Alle Wochenabschnitte (1888) and a collection of holyday messages, the [illegible] oder Festreden (1897).

30. Festreden, p. xx.

31. B&E I, p. 326.

32. B&E II, pp. iv - vii, also Perle, p. 315. The quotation is from Perle, p. 2.

33. Festreden, pp. xvff.

34. B&E II, pp. 352-353.

35. Ibid., p. iv, see also sermon "Die schaedlichen Bederklishkeiten", ibid., pp. 405-420. Also, Perle, p. 317.

36. Plessner, Nachgelassene Schriften, Predigten und Sabbath-Predigten (Frankfurt, 1884), p. 3. Hereafter cited as N.S. I.

37. B&E II, p. vii.

38. Ibid., pp. 410-412.

39. Ibid., p. xix.

II. METHOD

As preacher, Plessner stands between the Maggid of yesteryear and the pulpit orator of today - utilizing the language and the form of the one, whilst preserving the flavor of the other. With the modern pulpiteer, he uses the vernacular with skill, and employs illustrations from secular literature and general history; but like the darshan of old, large portions of his sermon are devoted to a resolution of a "difficulty" in some scriptural or rabbinic passage.

General Structure and Themes

Structurally, Plessner's sermons follow the Ciceronic framework as patterned for him by the renowned Protestant preacher and theologian Franz V. Reinhard[1] : beginning with an 'introduction' composed of the exordium, the text and its explanation, followed by the 'body' of the sermon consisting of a proposition and a number of divisions, and a 'conclusion' embodying recapitulation and appeal.[2] The only major variation of this basic outline is the frequent

interjection of the proposition between the exordium and the text; this usually occurs when the text is not bound up with the sermon's body and its divisions but serves instead to re-echo with Biblical or rabbinic authority the theme proposed in the exordium.[3]

Once or twice, Plessner does deviate entirely from this fundamental order, but does so with profuse apologies, explaining that the nature of the subject matter forces him to violate a principle of rhetoric. "At times," he says, "one must follow the natural rather than the artificial way; in this case too, matters of the Divine must be permitted exception." Our Holy Scripture stands unencumbered by accent, punctuation and proper paragraph size and sequence. אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה Not even in its history is the Torah in chronological order. So too, sermons, as attempts to reach Divine heights and to adjoin Divine law and word, must, at times, relinquish earthly order and assume free improvisation.[4]

A suitable title, summarizing either the theme or the occasion, or both, heads each of Plessner's sermons, as for example: "True Consolation," "A Month of Joy," "The Righteous in Moments of Danger," "The Day of Atonement or Life, Death and Immortality."[5] In selecting his topic of discourse, Plessner seems to have been guided by the Solomonic dictum "טוב שם משמן טוב"- how good a word in its

due season". In this manner, the end of the calendar year suggests to him the theme of "A Lighthearted Farewell" - a consideration of parting from beloved objects and persons, why such times bring us so much sorrow, and what we can do to soothe the pain.[6] The change of seasons from fall to winter leads him to discuss the proper ways of spending long winter evenings.[7] The coming of the spring offers an occasion to extol the beauties of nature, the miracle of continuous rebirth and to proclaim the consequent demand for the re-awakening of our own religious feeling and the necessity to serve our God with joy.[8] Holidays, especially, with their distinctive message, prescribe the theme of his sermons. Plessner criticizes those preachers who use the festival texts merely as springboards for their own fanciful ideas instead of addressing themselves to the central thought of the day.

> "Today's sermon, at its best, begins with an appropriate reference to the festival or the Sabbath, or chooses a text remotely connected with it, but then proceeds to leap to other areas of investigation which have no relation whatever with the preceding."[9]

In short, we have too many sermons <u>on</u> holidays, but not enough <u>about</u> them. The עניין המועד, the nature and meaning of the day, must always be the preacher's primary concern.[10] True to his principles, Plessner devotes every holiday to a discussion of its laws, its customs and its import for life. Not only the festival sermon itself, but the Sabbath sermons

immediately preceding and following the day are spent in rigorous examination of the holiday theme and, together with the holiday sermon, form a festival sermon unit.[11] So, for example, a sermon on שבת תשובה immediately before שמע is concerned with the physical and spiritual preparation which ought to be undertaken for a complete involvement in the approaching festival; the שמע sermon itself expounds on the origin of the law and its validity for present days; and the sermon on שבת תשובה following שמע is devoted to a consideration of the Law's demands for year round service.[12]

Exordium

In approaching his text, Hlessner generally contents himself with a statement of problem designed to prepare his listener for the central theme. Thus, in one of the sermons on prayer which proposes that only by meeting certain preliminary requirements - devotion, purity of intention, regard for others, etc. - can our petitions be found acceptable, the exordium develops the idea that man expends effort tirelessly only when the success of his endeavor is either assured, or quite probable. When that success is doubtful, when his efforts show no quick results, man soon tires and ceases in his attempts. In prayer, the effects of constant effort can rarely be seen.

Consequently, man is lax and fails to pray sincerely and devotedly. Why is it that our prayers are so rarely heard? Is it our fault or is it God's? The obstacle must be within us. We probably fail to meet the conditions indispensable to effective prayer. What then are the conditions which make our worship acceptable to God?[13]

Occasionally, the exordium is narrative, that is to say, it gives the historical setting of the דרשה or הפטרה. This is usually the case where the text is not drawn from the day's Scriptural reading.[14] At times, the exordium consists merely of a brief reference to the preceding week's sermon, recapitulating its conclusions and stating just how the sermon to be given will expand or supplement the same thesis.[15]

Not infrequently, Plessner employs the familiar Midrashic method of having a homily on an extraneous Scriptural or rabbinic passage lead to the text proper. Thus, in a sermon on verse 18 Chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes: "By slothfulness the rafters sink in, and through idleness of the hands, the house leaketh," in which the thought is stressed that only through constant vigilance and painstaking effort can man keep from sin, the exordium is introduced with a verse from Job (14,18), "Surely the mountain falling crumbleth away and the rock is moved out of its place."[16] This preliminary passage is interpreted

to mean that everything on earth is subject to external influences. And just as a mountain or a rock can be uprooted or at least affected in some measure by the steady application of powerful natural forces, so too our inner being, our soul, is subject to constant adverse influences which may ultimately impair its purity. Yet, our soul is the dwelling place of the Almighty; it is, in fact, a spark, an emanation of the Divine which we are dutybound to preserve in its immaculate state. Only through conscientious care and industrious endeavor can we hope to protect our soul; if we are negligent in this, our soul's edifice, our Seelengebaeude, will surely crash. As the Scripture has it: "By slothfulness the rafters sink in, and through idleness of the hands, the house leaketh."

One other unique method of approaching the text deserves presentation. For the final sermon of the year on שבת שובה Plessner usually choses one of the Pismonim or Selichot as prologues, rendering them in German in poetic form (his own translations, of course) and utilizing the refrain of the Pismon as text for the entire discourse.[17]

The exordium as a whole is itself frequently preceded by a kind of introduction, sometimes in the form of a preliminary reading of the text or a portion thereof,[18] at other times by a brief German or Hebrew prayer which addresses itself to the particular occasion and suggests the impending topic.

As an instance, a talk delivered before the ברית שלום Society of Posen on the eve of הושענא רבה in which the preacher exhorts his listeners to maintain through the coming year the religious fervor aroused by the Holyday period just past, commences with the following short prayer:[19]

"אדון השלום - יהי נא שבת אחים ורעים אלה גם הלילה הזה לחזון
ולנחת רוח. ברך נא את החברה ואת מנהיגיה והצליחה את עמל יגיעם
לכבודך, פתח נא לנו ולכל ישראל שערי רחמים וברצון והננו גמר חתימה
טובה. ברך נא את אנשינו אשר לספרות שבה והדרם, ולהשביע כל שולחן
דשן לאכול ולשבוע ושלום. פרוס נא סוכת שלומך על ברית שלומינו
וכוננה עלינו מעשה ידינו להשות חיל לכבודך. אנא יחד לבבינו ולב כל
ישראל לעבדך תמיד ולא ימוש מברית בריתך ורוחך מתוכנו לעולמי עולמים.
אמן."

Text and Exegesis

All of Plessner's public discourses, whether sermons, lectures, or talks for special occasions, are textual, that is to say, the fabric of the address is woven around some central quotation. But Plessner apparently regarded the entire range of Biblical and rabbinic literature as an appropriate source for his texts. Sermons on the Parashah or Haftarah of the week are the exception rather than the rule.[20] His central homilies are not just from the חמישה חומשי תורה but also from the נביאים and the כתובים;

or they may be drawn from one of the Tannaitic Midrashim, or from the Rabbos, or from the Mishna, or the Gemara, both Bahli and Jerushalmi.[21] Even the Apocrypha is used as a well-spring for textual material, the Book of Maccabees for Chanuko, The Wisdom of Solomon for many other occasions. Thus for example, a sermon preached on שבת חנוכה [22] and dedicated to the proposition that the giving up of Jewish folkways (Volksthuemlichkeiten) will lead to the disintegration of the Jewish group, is based upon a passage from Second Maccabees (4),

> "They set to naught what their fathers honored and esteemed the glories of the Greeks above all else; hence sore distress befell them; the very men for whose custom they were so keen and whom they desired to be like, became their foes and punished them; for it is not a light matter to act impiously against the laws of God; time will show that."

Or again, in an address which promises that God's blessing will be bestowed on those who trust in Him and who themselves work hard to succeed by acting justly and doing good, the following section from the Wisdom of Solomon is introduced as text[23]: "When a righteous man was a fugitive from a brother's wrath, wisdom guideth him in straight paths and gave him knowledge of holy things. She prospered him in his toils and multiplied the fruits of his labor..."; wisdom, of course, is here identified with the grace and blessing of God.

Several times, Plessner uses two texts, that is, two passages are placed either in apposition or in opposition to each other, and are cited to form the focus of the address. So, in a sermon delivered on Pesach, the first text is from the Book of Wisdom (18,6-9): "That night was made known to our fathers beforehand, so that they should know certainly what oaths they had believed, and rejoice. Then the people saw the preservation of the upright and the destruction of the evildoers. In punishing their adversaries Thou didst call us to Thee and didst glorify us." To this first text is joined the oft recurring Pentateuchal verse (e.g. Numbers 15,41); "I am the Lord your God who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God." In this instance, one text supplements the other. The first describes the enthusiasm and noble spirit of our ancestors at the moment of redemption. The second text, by adding the phrase "in order to be your God", means to say that God desires to be the same to us as He was to our fathers, thus placing upon us the obligation to experience on each and every Passover the exultation our fathers felt when they left Egypt. The sermon then proceeds to outline the ways and means by which this spirit can be recreated in our lives and times.[24] As an example of two texts placed in opposition we cite from a דרשה sermon which speaks of religion's double face, of memory and of hope, of the forward and the backward glance, and of

the joys and sorrows of each.[25] The first text is drawn from Nehemiah (8,11): "So the Levites quieted all the people saying: 'Be still for the day is holy and do not be depressed!" The second text is taken from the Zohar to פרשת פקודי : "R. Jehuda said (to R. Simeon bar Jochai): Master, tell me some of the important comments concerning the New Year. R. Simeon spoke up and said: It is written (Job 1,6) 'היום ויהי' 'and it was one day'. Whenever Holy Scripture employs the term "יום" something painful is indicated. Similarly in the case of Job, (the day designated by) "היום" was a day of suffering; it was Rosh Hashono (cf. Zohar to פנחס) the day on which hard judgment is meted out to the world." The two passages cited seem to contradict each other; one speaks of Rosh Hashono as a day of joy, the other refers to it as a solemn day of judgment. Which is it? The difficulty is readily resolved. To be sure, Rosh Hashono is a time for sorrow; after all, it is a day dedicated to חשבון הנפש , to a severe self introspection; and who can fail to be saddened by the remembrance of sins past. But Rosh Hashono is also the first of the Ten Days of Repentance, the first rung on the penitential ladder which can lead to ultimate pardon. This thought fills us with a spark of hope and happiness even at the moment of despair. Every period of adversity contains the seeds for a better tomorrow; so too Rosh Hashono with all its solemnity, contains the promise of

ultimate forgiveness and hence is both a day of sorrow and a day of joy.

In explaining a text's relation to the general proposition each of its words is carefully scrutinized and subjected to homiletical treatment.[26] Very often, not only the text itself, but the context, the setting of the text, its preceding and succeeding verses, are rigorously examined and explained in terms of the general scheme and theme.[27]

Klessner's homiletical exegesis is so varied that it defies clearcut categorization. Generally, he is satisfied with the פשט , i.e., interpretations which flow readily from the text, which are in fact quite obviously implied in it and merely demand specific application. Thus, for instance, the text (Jalkut תנ"ך, 653)[28], "whosoever observes the commandment of the סוכה will be permitted by God to live in Leviathan's סוכה ," is interpreted to mean that the booth of our harvest festival gives us a picture of existence in the hereafter; that just as the סוכה symbolizes the modesty of our real need on earth, so will our demands in Paradise be modest; that just as the סוכה represents God's Providence on earth, so will our life in the hereafter be guarded and protected by the Almighty, etc." Or again, Isaiah's prophecy (61,9):[29] "all that see them shall acknowledge them that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed" is made to yield the

thought that God's blessing is identifiable, that his gifts have distinctive characteristics, so that we can readily tell just which of our actions and experiences are blessed by the Eternal. And again, as a final example of the simple text, the verse (Isaiah 42,8):[30] "I am the Lord, that is My Name; and My Glory will I not give to another," is applied to the conflict between religion and secularism, tradition and reform, and it leads to the conclusion that any attempt to serve two masters is doomed to failure.

Not always is the text's message so apparent, so that ingenious homiletical devices have to be employed in order to unveil its significance. He takes the verse underlying a sermon on "The Joy before God":[31] " וצדיקים ישמחו יעלצו לפני אלהים וישישו בשמחה - let the righteous be glad, let them exult before God, yea let them rejoice with gladness." (Psalms 68,4). Here, the difficulty is primarily a linguistic one. Why the many synonyms for joy and what their import? Each one undoubtedly represents a different type of rejoicing. " שמחה " designated inner joy and contentment; " עלץ " denoted a higher degree of inner gladness, bordering on enthusiasm, but an enthusiasm not yet outwardly expressed; " שש " refers to overwhelming happiness expressed in language or song. As for the phrase " וישישו בשמחה ", here we have a joining of the first and the third expression and the significance of the combination is

this: vocalized joy can easily lead to boisterous outbursts unsuited to our dignity. The righteous man, therefore, molds his "שיש" into a "שמחה" - and that is the meaning of the text - the just are glad and enthusiastic before God, they even exult, but they express this exultation in an inner, more thoughtful manner.

Another type of homiletical exegesis frequently employed by Plessner is the allegorical method of interpretation in which ideas and concepts are substituted for given words in a passage. In this manner, individual words of a synagogue dedication text (Ezekiel 47,12)[32] "and by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side shall grow every tree for food whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit thereof fail," are given the following alternate meaning: The 'river' refers to God's blessing, 'fruit' designates the necessities of life, 'leafs' are our less essential wants. And the verse's meaning in relation to the theme is this: the sanctuary, the synagogue, is a mainspring of blessing providing our soul with spiritual food - which is a necessity; and with enthusiasm and joy - which are not as essential but completely desirable for our inner well-being.

Still another type of exegesis used by Plessner - and this will be our final general exposition of text use, for anything more would require almost a text by text listing

of all his sermons - is the technique of deriving a meaning from the text's position in the context, that is, from its relation to either the preceding or succeeding verses. So, for instance, the passage introducing a sermon on the need for Jewish education (Gen. 18,17-19) - "and the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him to the end that he may command his children and his household after him that they may keep the way of the Lord;'" - This verse gains significance only through the examination of the surrounding narrative: Abraham has just been told that he is to have a son. His visitors, the angels, after having given him these good tidings, arose, "looked toward Sodom" and departed. Abraham accompanied them for a short distance and here the narrative suddenly breaks off. At this point the words of our text are interjected, "and the Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing? etc." The implication of this sudden interruption is this: we know, first of all, that angels may not speak or look at anyone after delivering their message. Having told Abraham of Isaac's impending birth, they immediately arose, refused to say another word, and "looked at Sodom", proceeding to fulfill the second purpose of their earthly visit. His curiosity aroused by this strange behavior, Abraham

followed them in order to discover their destination and their purpose. Then did God exclaim, "Why shall I hide from Abraham, etc.", and He told Abraham of the projected destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. There was no further need for Abraham to accompany the angels. "The men turned from thence and went toward Sodom, but Abraham stood yet before the Lord." He knew the intentions of God and initiated attempts to alter them. Now, just what qualities in Abraham merited his knowledge of God's plan before its execution? God mentions but one of his virtues, "for I have known him to command his children...to keep the ways of the Lord." Abraham, because he taught his children to heed the words of God, found favor in God's eyes; and so can we, by teaching our young people the love and fear of God, gain the grace of the Almighty.[33]

Development of Thought and Illustrations

After the thorough exposition of his text, Plessner's attention shifts from the verse itself to the theme derived from it. This thought is examined as carefully as was the text. It is discussed with all its theoretical ramifications and practical applications, which are presented in logical order.

Sometimes the structure of the thought development is entirely dependent upon the text, each division thereof being linked to one of the words or phrases of the central Biblical or rabbinic passage. As an example, in a sermon on repentance,[34] Hillel's famous maxim: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? and if I am only for myself, who am I? and if not now, when?" sets the following thought division: אם אין אני לי מי לי - in the matter of repentance, no one can gain forgiveness for himself through reliance upon others; each person must plead in his own behalf, and rectify his own mistakes. וכשאני לעצמי מה אני - yet, we are responsible, one for another and should help each other keep from sin. ואם לא עכשיו אימתי - and if we are not going to repent now, (the sermon was delivered during the month of Elul), when shall we repent? The time is short and the day of judgment near.

More often than not, the text serves merely as springboard to the theme, and the subject matter under discussion alone determines the form of development. There may be as few as three or as many as seven or eight divisions;[35] sometimes, there are two major divisions, each section being treated as a self-contained sermon unit, complete with proposition, subdivisions, recapitulation and appeal.[36]

The body of the sermon is introduced by a proposition, usually a short paragraph stating the thesis and listing its

point by point unfoldment. The central section of a sermon on prayer[37] opens with the following remarks:

> "What then, aside from the usual hope for favorable acceptance, are the various ends of prayer for the sake of which we shall spare no effort to offer fervent devotion? Devoted prayer, my listeners
> 1) purifies the heart
> 2) protects us, at least for a few hours, from the onslaught of sin,
> 3) gives strength to our good resolutions,
> 4) grants us a higher joy,
> 5) makes us worthy to stand near God,
> 6) removes obstacles and actual evil, and
> 7) effectuates the holy union of God and the world."

Whereupon, each of these points is carefully scrutinized, supported by reference to Scriptural and rabbinic passages and expanded by all manner of illustrations.

In looking for acceptable illustrative material, Plessner quite clearly holds that the Biblical text should be more than the fulcrum for the preacher's own ideas.[38] A vast array of Biblical quotations constantly flows from his pen, in order ~~brought~~ to bolster his own ideas with Biblical authority while elucidating and beautifying them. All quotations are translated into German; their relation to the subject ~~at hand~~ is clearly explained, and exact references to the sources are given.

Plessner feels free to disregard traditional interpretations of Biblical passages whenever that tradition does not agree

with, or, at least, does not harmonize completely with, his own thought. In his translations he frequently renders the verse as re-interpreted rather than in its exact German parallel.[39] Plessner defends this practice by affirming his belief in 'progressive revelation', a doctrine which, unfortunately, he did not apply beyond the right for free interpretation of the Biblical text. He writes:[10]

> "Ancient sources of true enlightenment are not yet sealed; they still flow for those who make themselves worthy of them. The sun of a brighter past still shines for those who walk before God in the spirit of that better past. God and His workings are eternally in force; only we who are subject to change build a wall of separation."

In other words, God did not exhaust Himself in sacred antiquity. Upon the contrary, He preserved for posterity much that is true and genuine, so that we have the right freely to interpret the Biblical text.

Rabbinic sources are not relegated to secondary consideration. They are constantly marshalled for illustrative purposes. Plessner holds them indespensable aids for the thorough Bible scholar "which contain even in those seemingly most preposterous remarks deep and significant truths".[11] Undoubtedly motivated by his belief that the preacher is to be a teacher, more rabbinic passages are cited than are actually necessary for support or embellishment. At times, the rabbinic selection, rather

than aiding the sermon, is aided by it. Again and again, Plessner digresses from the natural course of the sermon's development to expound ~~upon~~ an abstruse Talmudic passage which might be clarified by relating it to the point just advanced.[42]

In this connection, it might be well to mention Plessner's use of the Zohar for an occasional text and for illustration,[43] a practice which aroused some criticism and no little misunderstanding. His grandson and eulogist, Dr. Hirschfeld, feels that Plessner was adverse to the mysticism of the kabbalah and used the Zohar "merely as a repository of Hebrew language study".[44] He refers to a passage wherein Plessner is supposed to have made such a statement. A careful examination of the reference reveals that Plessner's meaning was just the opposite. He said: "Ist das Buch Sohar, das oft wahre Fundgruben fuer das Hebraeische Sprachstudium enthaelt garnicht zu gebrauchen?"[45] This is a rhetorical question recommending the Zohar not as "a repository for Hebrew language study" but rather as a work worthy of general use and at the very least as a valid source for exegetical purposes.

Plessner's frequent use of non-Jewish sources also drew much criticism; his traditional contemporaries did not appreciate quotations from Schiller and Goethe in embellishment of Jewish law and lore. In his defense, Plessner reminds his

critics of the rabbinic dictum: "everything God created, was created in His honor," everything, therefore, can and should be utilized to God's honor:[46]

> "Schiller and Goethe too, those highly talented ones, and especially the latter, unwittingly worked for the glory of our God; and one can well cite their finer passages in support of Biblical teaching; for at times like this, Schiller's verses might open the way to the heart for Biblical texts."

Does not the Bible itself draw support from the spoken word of non-Jews? Jethro was an idol-worshipper, and, nevertheless, the Holy Writ does not hesitate to record his testimony;[47] the same can be said for Naaman and Bileam and many others.

> "Judaism, in this respect, is less limited than other religious factions. It enjoins us to learn from all men, to take the kernel and leave the peeling even from the better thought of evil doers."[48]

Plessner does not rely solely on religious or secular literature and its interpretation for an amplification of his thought. Some of his best illustrative material is based on personal observation and records his keen awareness of the world about him.

For one, he was a shrewd judge of human nature and well acquainted with the techniques employed by men to hide their foibles from others no less than from themselves. The scientific terminology may not have been known to him,

still, he records with precision such psychological processes as rationalization, projection, and mass suggestion.[49] To give just one example, speaking of slander, Plessner writes:[50]

> "The world thinks it can wash itself clean by villifying the good; people cannot stand to be surpassed by others. They want to see others at par with them...no wonder, then, that our generation chooses its spiritual leaders in such a manner that these form no contrast with them, chooses them to be enabled to commit its transgressions less secretly, yes, that it can even hope to see these transgressions crowned with the ratification of legal sanction."

The beauty and glory of nature forms the central core of Plessner's non-literary illustrative matter. His sermons abound in metaphor, simile, and apt analogy, derived from his reactions to nature and its changes. Thus, God's Providence in hours of darkness is likened to the "stars of heaven which glisten through the foliage of the Sukkah's roof".[51] Wisdom is compared to the "rays of the sun" which chase away the "mists" of superstition and unbelief.[52] Passover is brought into comparison with "the first beams of the vernal sun", announcing a "day of joy and beauty" after the "dark night" of servitude.[53] Prayer's effect on the soul is made analogous to "rains and thunderstorms" which clear "the steaming air of sultry summer days".[54] The confusion resulting from superficial

thought and planning is likened to the "weeds of the field... which grow haphazardly" and also reveal superficial care.[55]

As a final example reflecting Plessner's poetic response to nature, here is his description of the "heavens" to which man's physical and spiritual eyes ought always to turn.[56]

> "In all its magnificence, this crystal expanse arches over our heads; an ocean of light and sun by day, and even in the dark silence of the night a carpet spanned from pole to pole, embroidered with glimmering stars which smile in gentle peace, and from which enthusiasm - divine, exalted enthusiasm - wafts toward us..."

Plessner, generally, concludes his sermons with a few well-chosen words of recapitulation and appeal. Sometimes, this summary statement is in the form of a Hebrew or German prayer;[57] at other times, it consists of a few exhortative sentences ending with a verse from Scripture. As one example of the latter, one could point to a sermon advancing the proposition that we ought to avoid transgression, if only for the sake of innocent men and women who might otherwise be punished with us or might be drawn into sin because of us so that their value as a protective force in the world would be impaired. It concludes with the following remarks:[58]

> "May then this address have taught us to be heedful of transgression; if for no other reason than to avoid harm to innocent men whose loss is harsher than the destruction of the Temple - than the decline of our

glory called to mind by this month of sorrow (אב). May we prepare for the re-attainment of our national greatness by revering the men who at all times are sanctuaries of God, in whom He dwells and through whom He is also near unto us. As it is written: 'אך קרוב ליראיו ישעו' "Surely His salvation is near to them that fear Him; that glory may dwell in our land." For that which is alike always touches: 'חסד ואמת נפגשו צדק ושלום נשקו' "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Amen."

The following address, one of Klessner's more characteristic sermons, is taken from his collection of holyday messages, the Festreden, and was, by Klessner's own testimony,[39] his favorite. Unless marred by the author's translation, it should serve to illustrate Klessner's homiletical method, and to reveal the depth of his feeling and the power of his literary expression.

LIFE - A SONG[40]

Sermon delivered on שבת נחמו - 5597

(Tisha B'Av)

"Into a song, o listeners, into holy and exultant tones of joyful thanks and enraptured enthusiasm did our fathers' burdensome stay in Egypt resolve itself. Such great moments of resounding song made two centuries of suffering almost worthwhile. No! - Such moments never came again to our fathers. They encountered great glory; they saw mighty

empires tumble to their feet; they watched the morrow of the giving of the Law break over Sinai; unheard of signs and miracles marked their pathway through the desert; they lived to see a Solomonic Temple-dedication in all its supernatural awe-inspiring splendor; but moments such as these at the banks of the Red Sea - called to our mind by this festive day of rest - never ever came again. No such rapturous torrents of love ever again pounded through their hearts; no such ecstacy of heaven-soaring spirit ever again lifted their breasts; no other prophet ever again rejoiced in a face to face sight of the Divine (Sota, p. 30). Thus, the Psalmist, remembering those glorious never recurring moments sings (Psalm 66,6) "then he turned the sea into dry land... there we rejoiced with him." The poet means to say: this was a joy which never occurred again. In a word, it was a bliss of childlike innocence, a heavenly rapture of youth ("eine Kindeswonne, ein Jugendhimmel von Hochgefuehlen") which men and peoples can experience but once, and never twice in life. This, Israel's heavenly fervor which brought forth the most beautiful of songs on earth, is brought to mind by our day of rest, a day with which, as in days of yore, our yearly festive period commences.

"Come then with me, my brothers, come in spirit, behold the enchanted thronging of our singing fathers, come with me to where Israel's mighty God, in the company of myriads of His

angels, shone forth over foaming floods! Come with me and hearken to the roaring song which drowned out the rumbling of fleeing waters! Let us hearken to the song which animates spirit, which is animated with words of prophecy, with the power of the Lord, come and let us learn important things for life! But what is it; what is the lesson this song and our Sabbath day named after it comes to bring?

"It teaches us something great, something important, but, unfortunately, rarely recognized; it teaches us:

that the life of the Israelite

must be a song!

"The resolution of this curious theme, I have set as the task of today's contemplation. I say a 'curious' theme; but as curious as it may sound, there is hidden in it profound truth, a truth which we will readily recognize the moment the riddle of this picturesque sentence is resolved. A song, o listeners, is the Book of God - a song in the nobler sense of the word; a song, our language; a song even in many ways are our Talmud and Midrashim; a song, our secret lore, our prayerbook; a song, our history, the name of our God; a song, creation, all nature when understood in the Israelitic spirit; yes, a great song, especially, the great time which we await; a song of songs, for then the souls of all the living will praise the name of our God and the spirit of all flesh will glorify and exalt Him. All

these are manifestations which mirror themselves in the life of the Israelite; all are hints that his life, deed, and striving must be a song.

"I set the following passage as text for my discussion:

The Midrash to Psalm 87,7:

[illegible]

"Whether singers or dancers, all my well-springs are in Thee." Concerning this, R. Yehuda, the son of R. Simon said in the name of R. Meir: Just as the well is replenished with fresh water every single moment, so too Israel strikes up its new song every single moment. As it is written: "whether singers or dancers, all my well-springs are in Thee."

"Surely, Israel cannot literally sing new songs every single moment! But when the entire life of the Israelite is a well-spring of song, then he is a constant hymn of praise to God, his life an incessant Hallelujah to the Creator. That this is the correct interpretation of our verse is proven by the content of the entire psalm; and the content is: among the peoples of the earth there are only a scant number of important men. But in Israel, they are a constant phenomenon. The psalm begins: "His foundation is in the holy mountains," denoting: God's resting place on Zion is well founded and enduring, and not as temporary as among the nations where

the Divine rarely seeks out individuals; there, on Zion, His castle (יסודתו) is His constnt abode. Whereupon it is written: "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than the dwelling plnces of Jacob," for concerning you, o Zion, "glorious things are spoken constantly" - (מדבר) not just now and then as among the nations. Thus the psalmist adds specifically: "I sing" - (אזכיר) as was customary with rare phenomena - "concerning Egypt and Babylon in front of all my friends wherever an (important) man is born." "But of Zion it is said daily" - (יאמר) it is not hailed as a rnrity - "that many an (important) man was born there." And that is why "the Most High Himself did establish" His stronghold (יכוננה) there. The poet then proceeds to interpret heretofore seemingly inexplicable expressions and figures of speech. "The Lord counted when He registered," that is to say, scantily did He allot the nations men of importance, so few, in fact, that they can readily be counted. But in Zion "all well-springs are sweet singers," that is to say, that you, o Zion, are filled with God intoxicated singers, that in you everything is song and praise of God, that each of your inhabitants is a song of praise to God.

"Our psalmist himself was just such a song of life. That poet of the Moshanot called him a "singing dancer before God" ([illegible] מכרכר לפני) etc. David's soul was a constantly

playing instrument before God. In this manner, he refers to himself in a verse (Ps. 57,9): "Awake my glory, (soul) psaltery and harp." And that also is the real meaning of that beautiful Talmudic passage (Berachoth 3b): "A harp hung over David's couch and, at midnight, the northwind struck up against it so that it began to play by itself." The harp over David's head is a God inspired soul (Zohar Vaera p. 22). At midnight it was touched by its divinely emanating spirit, awakened and inspired to its holy devotion in which, till break of dawn, the psalmist persisted in songs of praise. Thus, and in this manner shall the life of the Israelite be a song.

"But what does it mean to be a song before God? Does that mean that one be merely a singer before God? But singing is only a reflection of inner song life. To be a song before God does not mean that one be a cold, dry rationalist, a man whose entire relationship with God is restricted to cold brooding and research; it means, rather, that one be a man who has a heart for God, who is affected and moved by His cause, a man who serves willingly and with joy, who constantly lives in a sort of festive mood in relation to the Divine, in whose soul there is continuous rapture and bliss, a man who during hours of Divine service and study flames into a mighty fire of enthusiasm, yea, he, he it is who is a harmonious sweet sounding song before the Lord; his soul is

called "כבודי" and concerning him it is written in the Psalm (30): "So that my glory (soul) may sing praise unto Thee and not be silent."

"He whose life is such a song, stands before God; he does not make a profession of his relationship to the Divine. He does not study the Law - as our sages say (Sifra ב,ז) - in order to be called "Rabbi" - ! No, he studies the Law because he is consumed with the passion to be a servant of the Eternal, to attain to truth, and to walk in just and purposeful ways. Aside from serving God, singing to God, loving God, teaching God, nothing else matters, everything else on earth is of inferior worth. - ! Each day spent, by his standards, in earnest service of God, spells to him the realization of life's purpose and leaves nothing else to be desired - ! On such holy mountains stands God's fortress, His foundation; on men of song such as these is the world and all of happiness established. In them God finds His dwelling place in life; nor is clever, cold speculation the throne of God: where there is joy, here there is enthusiasm, there dwells the Invisible. This, also, is the import of the Midrash to the words of our text: "Then sang Moses, etc. To this, one can apply the words of the Psalmist (93,2) 'Thy throne is established since then'... even though Thou art of eternity, Thy throne had no firmness and Thou wast not recognized in the world until Thy children sang this song."

"This is a difficult passage demanding exposition. Worship of God, in a strict sense, consists of prayer and song - the former to a lesser degree since it is usually a product of human needs (Jes. 26,16). The one who prays thinks more of himself than of God; and when his wish is granted, he does not think of prayer any more. Song, on the other hand, is noble worship, it rests upon the contemplation of God's works and similar noble matters, it is the service of angels, service with the higher powers of reason. The singing worshipper does not think of himself, but of God, he hovers in higher spheres and does not press the feeling of devotion into the narrow bounds of need. - Song, therefore, is a mighty weapon, more effective than all praying. - Until the time of Moses and the occurrence of the miracle at the Sea, no one ever sang to God, though people had prayed since Abraham's days. But the one who prays does not think of God's dominion, of higher interests, but of his own, the lowly ones. Therefore, the throne of God is not established through him, and he does not win for God's Kingdom a firm place on earth; only the singer attains these nobler, more exalted aims of worship.

"But what raises our lives to such a song, or, in other words: what are the means by which we are to reach that state? They are

1) Innocence,
2) Faith,

3) Trust,
4) Gratitude, and
5) Higher Enlightenment.

1.

"The one whose life is to be a song before God must, first of all, guard his innocence. He who surrenders his childlike spirit, who comes before God with clever, speculative views, his life is deep prose and no song, the blossoms of his poetry are faded and withered. The Israelite cannot guard his innocence, his childlike spirit carefully enough. - In this manner, Jacob's life was a song before God, even if frequently an elegiac one; and singing, he passed into that other life for he was an innocent man. So was the life of Moses; till the very last his steps were resounding melodies, and he too passed singing into the bright hereafter. And similarly, the life of David was a pious, God intoxicated song. Even as a grown man, as husband, as monarch was he able to jump before God in the spirit of his childlike enthusiasm. And because Michal shamed him when he behaved in this manner, she was punished with barrenness (2 Sam. 6,23). Because she mocked his childlike spirit, the bliss of fondling a child was denied to her.

"Let us guard our innocence; for only then can we feel with our fathers who sang by the Red Sea. The hearts of

children, aroused by joyous feelings, often swell into enthusiasm and the children themselves do not know exactly why. It is their clear conscience rejoicing in their innocence, having intuitive knowledge of a happy future; in the words of the poet (Schiller): "What the reason of the rationalist cannot see, the simplicity of the child's soul often may." Happy are we when we give our souls such joy! Correct, therefore, is the remark of the Midrash: "The pious are called boys, children." And it is written: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou founded enthusiastic praise (עז)."(Ps. 8,3). The Mechilta and Sota (p. 30) apply this very passage to the singers by the Sea who through their childlike enthusiasm were fired into song. Thus also, the Wisdom of Solomon, referring to that enthusiasm, calls them (our fathers by the Sea) children, minors. A clear indication, therefore, that he who is innocent, who has a pure heart, can be a song before God. And this singing of children destroys God's adversaries, it conquers Goliaths; its effect in quiet chambers is more formidable than the world resounding clatter of arms, more sublime, more feared than conquerors and regents in secret cabinets. Out of the mouth of these children comes forth all of life's manifestations; it is the kind of music to which all the world alike must move. That is why the psalmist adds to the passage just cited: "...because of Thine adversaries, to destroy the enemy and avenger." Such song

crushes mountains and cliffs of granite; removed from its proximity are those unworthy to stand in the presence of the Holy - the appearance of the Divine in their midst frightens them away, drives them to far distances, or tears them out of a domain for which they are unfit.

"Laugh then at those who mock such innocence in you, at those who pride themselves of 'clear insight' and 'enlightenment', who consciously remove themselves further and further from the views of their childhood days! If they only knew the darkness in which they wander - not unlike the Egyptians of today's Scriptural reading - they would die of shame and they would despise none more than those who preach this false enlightenment, who, with such pleasant delusions lead them away from life's true goal! Innocence is the first pillar of the life which is to be a song.

2.

"Faith - usually bound up with innocence - is the second girder of a life of song. Only he who believes in God, only he who believes what Holy Scripture reveals, only he who believes God a Being as described by Judaism -- no denial of the beneficial effects of <u>any</u> people's faith is here intended -- only his life can truly be a song. To be sure, Jewish religiosity does not depend on faith alone; but faith occupies a very high place. Faith is no small matter; often,

especially with average people, it presupposes a complete suppression of rational views. Faith commonly results in pious, warm enthusiasm; it may be a fleeting sensation, but at the moment of experience it is a conviction, an attitude shared by the whole of man, demanding no proof whatever - for then man feels, sees, and grasps the truth with his very hands and is capable of undertaking the highest in its behalf. Faith creates men of song; quite literally, it breaks forth into a devoted song to God, it gives **vent** to enraptured melody. And that is the import of the verse juxtaposition in today's Scriptural Selection, "and they believed in God and His servant Moses. Then Moses sang, etc." This thought was already suggested by our sages ([illegible]); and this, also, is the meaning of the passage (Jerushalmi [illegible] Chan. 6 and [illegible] Chap. 23): 'When Israel's returning exultants will reach the mountain of Amana, they will **break** forth in song, etc.' To be sure, the mountain of **Amana** is a beautifully situated elevation in our Holy Land whose sight might well enthuse approaching pilgrims into joyous outbursts of hymns. However, this passage seems to have a more fundamental, figurative meaning: When the Israelites, God's promise having been fulfilled, will attain to the top (the apex, end, realization) of the faith to which they clung during the period of their imprisonment, then, lifted by enthusiasm, they will break forth in happy song. So too,

the comment of the Midrash to the opening words of the song in today's Parasha is applicable: The expression "בו" means (באמונה) "faith." The particle "בו" always designates the consequence of something that has occurred. Generally, faith ensues only when proofs of Divine help are evidenced, so that the song by the Sea was primarily the consequence of the miracle that happened. But if faith is the consequence of experience, then surely it should be less difficult for us to believe than it was for our fathers. For what proofs of Divine Power have we not experienced in the course of the millenia and in our various situations! And nevertheless, the state of our faith is not well. How much effort our orators and teachers are forced to expend merely to elucidate the Divine, to prove it and, by means of a variety of persuasive techniques, to make it affable to heart and mind. No, that is not faith! Faith is the innocent, upright acknowledgment of that which is told in Scripture; it is the acceptance of records as they appear. Had these meant anything else, had they been of the character which we like to ascribe to them, the Holy Writ would not have lacked for adequate words. Only honest appeptance such as this, can awaken a life of song within us. All sophistry is mistrust, shows small belief, and will never exalt us as bearers of the Glory of God. Let us apply ourselves to faith and our life will be a song before the Eternal.

3.

But also Trust

"Much depends on this virtue. Faith is the acknowledgement of what was, trust is faith in what will be. Only he who trusts God can be enthused, and only his life can become a song. The future must not frighten us: with faith in God, we must await that which is to be and we must live with the conviction that everything will come in its due time and will turn to our best.

"The confidence with which our fathers left Egypt kindled the fire of enthusiasm within them even before they reached the Sea; and at the Sea this smoldering fire had merely to break forth into open flame. The song itself expresses trust, trust in the future or the end which was to be realized through the Exodus from Egypt, and which was glorified in the concluding words of the song: "Thou wilt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance...The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."

"In this connection we must touch on an important passage of the Mechilta to today's Sidra. Referring to Exodus 14,14, "The Lord will fight for you and you will hold your peace," it is written: "The Israelites put the following question to

Moses: what shall we do? Moses answered: exult, strike up in song and praise to the One who is the God of War! For thus is it written (Psalm 149,6): 'The high praises of God in their mouth are a two-edged sword in their hand,' similarly (Ibid. 57,6): 'Be Thou exalted, o God, above the heavens, Thy glory be above the earth.' (Meaning: our glorification of God in song and praise brings it about that He glorifies Himself for us on earth.) And similarly (Isaiah 25,1): 'O Lord, Thou my God, I exalt Thee, I praise Thy Name, for Thou doest wonderful things, even counsels of old and loyal faith'..." This last verse is the main support of the entire comment. Moses told the people to praise God while they were still in danger and far from the counsel of God; he told them to praise God in a d v a n c e, out of fidelity to Him and faith in Him. In this manner, the psalmist was wont to conclude all his songs of adversity with words of praise even though salvation was still far off!

"Trust, also, was meant to be developed through practice by means of the manna mentioned several times in our Scriptural reading. Here, nothing was to be saved for the next day - God was to be relied upon to give again. There, nothing was to be gathered on the day of rest - God was to be trusted to provide on the sixth day enough for the seventh.

"Have confidence, then, my dear ones, and your life will be a song of praise to the Eternal. Trust is the prime requirement of that state of song; no one can be in harmony with God if he lacks trust, no one can offer heartfelt worship service if he cannot overcome moments of depressing adversity with the hope that they will resolve themselves into a happy future. Surely not even Israel, when the pressure was so heavily upon him, believed that he would live to see an exodus from Egypt so rich in joy; and yet, he lived to see it. He lived to see that great moment at the Sea which is glorified by today's Scriptural Selection; he lived to see it and from then on he was required to trust. Most certainly, we fail to encounter happy times only when we fail to place trust in God and do not believe that we will encounter them. It is the same with our destinies as it is with our dreams; as we interpret them to ourselves, so do they realize themselves. Be happy, then, with God, think of better things and you will live to see them. Fortified by trust in the Lord, the psalmist struck up a joyful hymn of thanks, pierced the host of the enemies, and leaped over the wall with his God. His life was a constant song. Yes, confidence courageously takes on all adverse destinies, and, extolling the Heavenly Savior in the midst of bloody danger, winds wreaths of triumph around the brow.

"No, we cannot wonder why, nowadays, so few souls of song exist. How can a generation have many such spirits, if it does not trust a thing until its wish is fulfilled? The Israelite always trusted, and his trust never deluded him, and ever and again he will live to see whatever he placed in God's trust to see and for whose sake he willingly suffered all the blows of his destiny. Have trust, I say, and your path of life will be a path of roses through life. With the echoes of hymns about you, shaded by God's visible magnificence, surrounded by His protecting angels, liberated from pursuing adversaries, enriched by inner and outer treasures, you will travel toward your life's goal and live to see the fulfillment of the proclamation "The Lord redeemeth the souls of His servants; and none of them that take refuge in Him shall be desolate."

4.

"If life is to be a song, g r a t i t u d e is required. He who enjoys God's gifts without acknowledgment, without feelings of thanks, or he who thanks God only for great, obvious deeds of kindness, but does not deem the seemingly lesser benefi~~ce~~ces worthy of thanks, his life will not be a song before God. If this high aim in life is to be attained, we must thank God for everything; for everything, exclaim heartily: "Praised be God," with the firm conviction

that God does intend everything for our benefit. R. Akiba used to say (Ber. 60): "Everything which comes from above, comes for the good." His teacher (Tan. 21) before him used to say with regard to all that happened to him, "this too is for the good." Such contented observance makes life a song. The Talmud speaks well, therefore, with reference to the verse, "I will sing of mercy and of justice": "If things go well with me I will sing, if God's evil decree strikes me, I will sing less...Man shall get used to say: 'Whatever God does he does for the good.'" He who daily feels himself constrained to thank God stands on a very low plane. We never lack cause to speak with full heart the prayer formula "we thank Thee, o God," - for every moment a miracle occurs to us. Certainly it is this to which the psalmist summons us with the words: "Proclaim from day to day His Salvation," "Lord, my God, forever will I thank Thee," and the like. How is it possible for our soul to elevate itself to a song of God, to become a harp which sounds eternally, if we enjoy the Creator's gifts with so much indifference; if we believe these gifts to be the works of our own hand, or if we regard fortuitous circumstances or other men the ultimate source of good fortune, then, most certainly, our whole life must take the wrong turn. Men and the natural course of things are but tools utilized by the Creator for our good. Mortals who do us good, merit reverent recognition and even our thanks as heavenly messengers, but our hymns of praise are due to God alone.

"I have always been curious just why, in the Song at the Sea, the singular - I sing unto the Lord, as if Moses alone had sung - is used. It seems that Israel nearly committed a grave error. It is written: "They believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses." It would have been easy for them to direct their song to both (God and Moses). Therefore, Moses wisely anticipated the people's enthusiasm and possible error and quickly broke forth with these words: I! I myself, sing unto the Lord!

"I was pleasantly surprised, therefore, when, after the lapse of some time, I came across this passage from the Mechilta to today's Scriptural reading: " אשירה לה׳; לה׳ ולא לבשר ודם ," "I sing unto the Lord, to the Lord but not to a creature of flesh and blood." How does the Mechilta arrive at such an interpretation? It seems to hint at the mistake to which Israel, in the fire of his enthusiasm, was exposed and which Moses, the leader of the song, forestalled. Gratitude, I say, can exalt our life into a song.

5.

"Finally, also, the Israelite should strive for h i g h e r e n l i g h t e n m e n t. Such influence of Divine Spirit touched our ancestors who had already been aroused by innocence, faith, trust, and gratitude; and this slight

touch of the spirit of higher enlightenment had its great effect. Mightily, the roaring stream of song rushed forward, the prayers soared aloft to the throne of God with wings of eagles, and wonderful was their effect. You can hardly imagine, o listeners, what the Israelite is capable of doing with the devotion of heartfelt singing. Aloft it soars like the jet of high-spraying fountains, places itself before God and effectuates its desires; and if not always that - because we, in our short-sightedness do not always ask for what is pure and for our good - then, at least, it smashes, in its lightning ascent, the mountains which separate God and the world; it carries away evil, opens a path, builds worlds, tears the scepter of world dominion from the claws of vice which clasp it so tightly to the vexation of virtue. And how efficacious it is when all of life is such a song! Your thought alone has its effect in heaven, your will, your slightest move, your very glance upwards. - It is written: "Thou shalt decree a thing and it shall be established unto Thee!" Through you, the living and the dead will become righteous, heaven and earth will be blessed. Through you, life will be a dance to which, as at Sinai, the world below and the world above will move in happy, mystic harmony. A higher enlightenment, touched by the spirit of God, creates a life of song. In actuality, it created the Song of today's Scriptural narrative. Our sages and the Wisdom of Solomon already have said it, that at that

moment (by the sea) the Spirit of God rested upon Israel and called the Song to life.

"That all might partake of this Spirit was the fervent hope of the lawgiver: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them" (Numbers 11,29). That, eventually, all will partake of the Spirit was foretold by Joel (3,1): "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour my spirit upon all flesh." This spirit constitutes the greatest proof of God and the Divine which conquers all doubts. Without such Spirit, the unbeliever's proofs built on human reason are but playthings. Only higher enlightenment can serve as satisfactory evidence. And this, most likely, is the meaning of the maxim (Jerus. Horajoth, Chap. 3): אין ראיה אלא נבואה which would have to be rendered, "only prophecy can serve as proof". Yes, this higher contemplation is so related to song that the hebraist has one and the same expression for 'contemplation' and 'song'. Higher contemplation stimulates song, song effects higher contemplation, and the God intoxicated singer contemplates while he sings.

"May God soon pour out over us a Spirit such as this, which will consecrate our entire life to a song of praise! A spirit which will create in our life a sweet harmony between God and man, between heaven and earth. And may we all soon sing a new song unto the Lord, a song in which all the world

will join! May Israel soon rejoice in his Maker, may the children of Zion be joyful in their King!

Amen."

Notes to Chapter II

1. See B&E II, p. vii. Franz Volkmar Reinhard (1753-1812), professor of theology and philosophy at Wittenberg, later on in Dresden, the most renowned Protestant preacher of his time, published 43 volumes of sermons.

2. Nachgelassene Schriften: Festreden (Frankfurt a.M.,1897) pp. 22, 41, 53, etc. Hereafter cited as N.S. II.

3. B&E I, pp. 103 ff; B&E II, pp. 229ff; Festreden, pp. 168ff.

4. Perle, p. vi; Festreden, p. xxii.

5. B&E I, sermons VI, XVIII, XVII, IX.

6. Festreden, pp. 203-320.

7. B&E II, pp. 101-119.

8. B&E I, pp. 275-292.

9. Perle, p. 227.

10. Festreden, p. viii-x.

11. Ibid., all except first sermon.

12. B&E II, pp. 333-348, 349-372, 373-388.

13. Perle, pp. 19-24.

14. Ibid., p. 1-4; B&E I, pp. 67, 170, 195, 207.

15. e.g. Perle, p. 39.

16. Festreden, pp. 19-21; N.S. I, pp. 61, 99, 508.

17. N.S. I, pp. 681-684, 695-697.

18. B&E II, pp. 1. 17.

19. N.S. II, p. 52; N.S. I, p. 1; Perle, p. 41.

20. Parashah - N.S. I, pp. 318, 396, etc.
Haftarah - Ibid., p. 1.

21. Nebiim - Festreden, p. 221.
Kethubim - N.S. I, p. 320.
Tannaitic Midrashim - ibid., p. 298; Festreden, p. 403.
Rabbos - B&E I, p. 103.
Mishnah - N.S. I, p. 356.
Gemarah - Festreden, p. 353 (Babli), p. 107 (Jerushalmi).

22. B&E II, p. 138.

23. N.S. I, pp. 63-64.

24. Festreden, pp. 93-95.

25. B&E II, pp. 51-52.

26. Ibid., pp. 351-358.

27. B&E I, pp. 37-40.

28. Festreden, pp. 325ff.

29. Ibid., pp 369ff.

30. N.S. I, pp. 4-6.

31. Festreden, pp. 339-341.

32. B&E I, p. 20.

33. Ibid., pp. 188-191.

34. Ibid., pp. 127-146.

35. Three divisions - N.S. I, pp. 314-331.
Six or more divisions - B&E I, pp. 211(b)-225(b).

36. Festreden, pp. 221-241.

37. Perle, p. 93.

38. Deutscher Volks-kalendar, p. 39.

39. e.g. Festreden, p. 8, where Psalm 8, verse 3 (מִפִּי עוֹלְלִים וְיוֹנְקִים יִסַּדְתָּ עֹז) appears as "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou founded enthusiastic praise," precisely because the traditional rendition of "עֹז" as strength does not conform with the thought development.

40. B&E II, pp. xiv-xv.

41. Ein Wort zu Seiner Zeit, pp. 12-34; B&E II, p. xv.

42. B&E II, pp. 95ff.

43. N.S. I, p. 3; N.S. II, p. 133, etc.

44. Biblisches und Rabbinisches, p. 23.

45. B&E II, p. 118.

46. Ibid., p. xii.

47. Ein Wort zu Seiner Zeit, Introduction to Hebrew appendix.

48. B&E II, p. xii.

49. Festreden, p. 204; B&E II, p. 37; N.S. I, pp. 471, 479.

50. N.S. I, p. 464.

51. B&E II, p. 89.

52. B&E I, p. 91.

53. Festreden, p. 91.

54. Lerle, p. 95.

55. Ibid., p. 114.

56. B&E I, p. 198(b).

57. N.S. I, pp. 19, 40.

58. Ibid., p. 507.

59. Festreden, pp. xxi-xii.

60. The author has scrupulously followed the paragraph structure and special type settings which appear in the original text.

III. EMANCIPATION, TRADITION AND REFORM

Solomon Plessner's half-century or more of activity as preacher and teacher in Judaism was marked by far-reaching changes in Jewish life. The tide of revolutionary liberalism which swept through Europe in the latter part of the Eighteenth and the beginning of the Nineteenth Century was to tear down the ghetto walls, the ramparts of segregation which had repressed the Jew within narrow physical bounds, but, at the same time, had acted as a protective barrier about his autonomous religious and cultural existence. The old social and religious order declined and disappeared; new institutions and new belief structures had to be built up, designed to enable the Jew to adjust to his new role as the eager but unwanted member of the European community.

True to his principle to speak "a word in its due season", Plessner addressed himself to many of the problems of these decades of acclimatization. He took a definite stand in the religious conflict engendered by emancipation, championing tradition against reform in his struggle to harmonize Jewish and European cultures.

A brief consideration of some of the major developments and questions of his day will help us gain a clearer understanding of Plessner's teaching.

The Setting of his Thought

"Emancipation" is the key word to Nineteenth Century German Jewish history. All of the stresses and strains, the movements and institutions of this period can be explained as manifestations of the Jew's struggle to free himself from Medieval bondage.

The story of German-Jewish political emancipation begins with the French Revolution in 1789 and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars which spread the ideal of 'liberty, equality, fraternity' to every nook and niche of Europe. Not that there had not been earlier cries for freedom. The Philosophers of Enlightenment, culminating Humanist revival, had posited the supremacy of reason and, its logical corrollary, toleration; but reason alone was not enough; only a handful of people were capable of thought, the rest lacked the will and the mental resources needed to establish reason's rule. Reformers in the field of religion, deists and heretical sectarians, had affirmed their faith in One God and One Humanity; but all too soon the faith in God was displaced by faith in the state, and

faith in the state demanded no equality for all. Only the oppressed of France, led by the rising bourgoisie recognized that "they could liberate the fellows ~~on~~ at the bottom of the heap only by plucking off the fellows on the top", and they resolved to upset the existing social order.[1] They succeeded, and, in 1791, the Jews of France were granted equal standing with their fellow human beings.

The kings of Germany were not too eager to follow suit. In 1789, even while the French populace stormed the Bastille, Friedrich Wilhelm II told the Jews of Germany that they could be given freedom "only in the measure that they attained a culture like the Christians",[2] a process of adaption which he believed would be consummated in about seventy years. Napoleon's approaching armies speeded this process. Wherever they went - and all of Germany, except a decimated part of Prussia became their vassal - they instituted complete equality, the inalienable rights of men. Even unoccupied Prussia, now ruled by Friedrich Wilhelm III, was forced to initiate a "revolution from above", the Hardenberg-Humboltian reformation, which, as far as the Jews were concerned, culmirated in the Toleration Edict of 1812 through which they were granted complete equality (barring service in the State but including the right to serve in the armed forces - which they did with fervor and devotion). [Plessner was a

fifteen year old lad at the time and watched Friedrich Wilhelm bless the volunteer armies in the streets of Berlin.[3]] The force of the emancipated repaid the emperor handsomely and helped him win his War of Liberation against Napoleon. But after the War came the Congress of Vienna and "rude awakening" for Jew and Christian (the latter had been promised constitutional government as incentive to die "fuer Kaiser und Vaterland"). The Christian received no constitution and the Jew no emancipation. Metternich and his cohorts ruled that the Jews be permitted to retain those rights granted by the German States, but since most rights had been granted by Napoleon's officers and not by Germany's kings, the Jews all too soon were driven back into their ghetto, the Judengasse. Again they were told that Jewish culture was not good enough for Deutsche Kultur.[4]

The Jews of Germany took this charge to heart and tried hard to overcome the internal "obstacles" which presumably barred their entrance into the European community. The paramount problem of the day became: how can Jewish tradition be adapted to modernity? Some sought their answer in the realm of knowledge - knowledge of Jewish History and Literature - which they felt would give the Jew a spiritual self-respect (that sine qua non of physical survival) and so Die Wissenschaft des Judenthums was born.

Others found their answer in reform of customs and manners, beginning with the introduction of the vernacular and music into the synagogue. They hoped to demonstrate visibly to the Germans that the Jew was really not so different - and in this process reform and its spiritual off-shoots: neo-orthodoxy and conservativism came to the fore. Nearly all the Jews of Germany, whether "enlightened" or more traditional, whether neo-orthodox or conservative, or reform, urged the study of secular subjects to prove to one and all that they were Germans first last and always. Some Jews gave up the ghost, of course; not a few emigrated to America and many, many others bought their Eintrittsbillet to European Christian civilization with baptism.[5]

The outward battle for liberation continued. Gabriel Riesser fought by word and pen for unconditional political emancipation. His efforts were reinforced by the writings of Boerne and Heine, the spiritual leaders of republican "Young Germany", who lived in exile in Paris. The hope of these liberals suffered serious set-backs with the abortive revolutions of 1848. But then the Industrial Revolution came to Germany and "machines which made money and the middle classes who possessed that money" achieved what no spoken or written word could: constitutional government, and with it emancipation for the Jew. The King of Prussia joined hands with the rising business class to accomplish

their common aim - the unity of Germany. The one sacrificed absolute monarchy for the financial and political support of the bourgoisie; the other surrendered republicanism and democracy in return for equal civil and limited political rights. In 1869, after the Bismark-Liberal Alliance, the North German Federation granted Jews unconditional equality by declaring "all hitherto existing restrictions of civil and political rights based on religious differences" to be abolished. The Jews of Germany were again permitted to leave the ghetto.[6]

The political emancipation of the Jew revolutionized his cultural and religious life. The Einheitskultur, the all-embracing culture of the ghetto was rapidly transformed into a splinter culture called into being by the introduction of the Jewish group into the European community. Life in the ghetto had been well integrated; its core was the religion of the Jew, his belief in a God who singled out Israel for special destiny. This belief molded every aspect of the Jew's being: his social life, his education, his law, his mores, his manners, his language, even his dress. The walls of the ghetto, enforcing strict segregation and marking Jewry as a mutually responsible group, had nourished the existence of such an undivided uniform community. But once the walls were down, once the gates barring entrance to and exit from

the Judengasse were opened, the hitherto religious Jew found himself an integral part of a so-called "secular" world which still showed many of the scars of its own tumultuous religious history.[7]

What was the Jew to do? Was he to compartmentalize his religion - to be half-religious and half-secular? Protestantism faced with a similar problem of adjustment had made religion a matter for the individual soul, had subjugated the authority of the Church to the will of the state, but could the Jew do the same, the Jew to whom Judaism was the well-spring of all life and the Torah a constitution prescribing all his actions? Just how much of tradition could be harmonized with the modern spirit without doing violence to that tradition? Exactly what is religion, what Judaism, in its essence? And underlying all these questions was the hard and brutal fact that the Jew who tenaciously obeyed all of the Torah's injunctions did not eat as well as the one who surrendered those of the commandments that conflicted with his economic pursuits.

The many answers given to these pressing questions by the religious leaders of the day focused - in the beginning at least - upon two opposite and mutually exclusive points of view. One, offered by the founders of the reform movement, affirmed progressive revelation and proposed to distill a spiritual religiosity from the complex of Jewish existence.

The other, later known as neo-orthodoxy, proclaimed the Torah as revealed law and aimed to preserve for modern times traditional Jewish life in its entirety. In practice, of course, neither view prevailed. Orthodoxy never succeeded in barring the inroads of European culture, and reform failed in eliminating entirely Jewish ritual and custom, so that, ultimately, both extremes had to be modified, and a third school, conservativism, a compromise between the two made its appearance. But in the early Nineteenth Century these diametrically opposing philosophies of Judaism were expounded, with the question of the Torah's revelation as the prime point of their divergence.

Solomon Plessner held with those who wanted to see as much as possible of traditional Jewish life and practice retained. He believed that while Judaism accorded with reason it was primarily a revealed religion presenting a body of revealed legislation demanding strict obedience. To promote the acceptance of his view he had to perform a double task: he had to establish the reasonableness of the Jewish religion and its accord with German **Kultur** and the demands of the German state. And he had to attack those who proclaimed Judaism essentially reason and spirit and, hence, proposed major modifications of Jewish practice.

The Reasonableness of Judaism and the Jew's Loyalty to the State

The Torah, as a divinely revealed code of legislation, constitutes the nucleus of Plessner's Philosophy of Judaism. All of his exhortations revolve about the Law, all go back to it, all flow from it. All of his admonitions derive their justification from his belief in the Torah as the embodiment of Divine Will as revealed to Moses and through him to Israel. In establishing the reasonability of the Jewish religion, therefore, Plessner's primary task is to demonstrate, by reason, the Divine authorship of the Law.

His arguments are simple and, in the main, have recourse to the Law itself and the evidence offered in Scripture. He finds his first proof in the open, public promulgation of the Torah. כלם שמעו מסיני אנכי ה' אלקיך. All the people heard the voice of God and we cannot dispute the testimony of the masses,

> "All the Israelites were eye-witnesses to the giving of the Law; in the presence of all did the Heavenly Lawgiver speak to Moses. The restless contemporaries of Moses, considering all the other reproaches they heaped upon their leader, would surely have disputed the Divine authorship of the Law had not they themselves been witnesses to the Revelation... Yet, as often as Moses referred to the revelation - and he did so frequently,

> precisely because he spoke to eye-witnesses - no one dared dispute him...The public giving of the Law is the strongest proof of its Godly origin."[8]

More evidence is provided by the character of the Law itself. No mortal, without heavenly accord, would have dared say what Moses said. How could a man have set the punitive provision of barrenness for violations of Marriage Law? (Lev. 20) How could a man have predicted rain and dew or have threatened the witholding of these natural forces? (Lev. 26; Deut. 11) How could a man have ruled a Sh'mitah year and at the same time have promised that the produce of the sixth year would suffice for three more years until the new grain could be harvested? (Lev. 25, 20-22) How could a mortal have instituted the water test of adultery where droplets of identical liquid would determine life or death and even assure fertility? (Num. 27-28) How could a mortal have presumed to command all men capable of bearing arms to leave home and hearth three times a year, together with the daring prediction that "no man shall covet thy land when thou goest up to appear before the Lord thy God three times a year"? (Ex. 34, 23-24) No, Moses commanded all these laws because the word of God was on his lips. No mortal lawgiver would have risked life and honor, would have jeopardized a laboriously constructed law code with bold utterances which could so readily be proven or disproven! God was the real Lawgiver and not Moses.[9]

Moreover, - Plessner points out, - the Scriptures frequently record that Moses hesitated in answering questions of the Law. Again and again Moses is reported as saying to those who make inquiry of him: "Stay that I might hear what the Lord will command concerning you." Had Moses himself created the Law would he have wavered in giving answer! Again, had Moses and not God been giver of the Law, why did Moses not appoint his own sons as his successors? Finally, according to the Pentateuch, Moses was anxious to enter the Holy Land; why then, if he was really a law unto himself, did he not speed Israel's progress through the desert, why did he have to plead, and plead in vain for permission to enter the yearned-for land of promise![10]

Still further proof of the Torah's Divine origin is provided by the fact that it was maintained through centuries of Jewish persecution. "The Law always was and is practiced faithfully till this very day - <u>individual</u> transgressions of recent years may well be disregarded." No human product could have survived this long, no human law would have been kept if its people had been exposed to constant suffering and torture.[11] Finally, if the Torah is the product of human reason and not the word of God, why is it that no other lawgiver promulgated a similar code. What man can invent once, he can invent again. "But the

thoughts of God are not the thoughts of men, neither are His ways our ways; they are above us, even as the heavens are higher than the earth."[12]

Plessner concludes, therefore, that the Jew, living in modern, "enlightened" times need not hesitate to heed the Torah's injunctions. Belief in its divine authorship has been proven reasonable. Obedience to its laws, therefore, also accords with reason. And, by extension, since Rabbinic Literature merely elucidates Scriptural text and serves to its clearer understanding, even obedience to rabbinic commandments does not conflict with the modern spirit of enlightenment.[13]

Jewish folkways (Israels Volksthuemlichkeiten), that is, Jewish language and dress, Jewish food and manner and lore, all the many things which mark Jews as a distinctive group, ought not to be surrendered either. Plessner avers that they too were enjoined by God through our sages, and that their neglect constitutes revolt against the Deity, the public profanation of His Name.[14] Nor is the observance of these customs in conflict with life in a European community; there is nothing in the modern spirit which demands uniformity. Without differences life is dull; there can be no rhythm with only one beat; there can be no harmony with only one tone, and the most beautiful of pictures is always in a rich variety of colors:

> "That which distinguishes one group from another, the diversity and variety, is necessary, is natural, is - as Mendelsohn has already taught - one of the spices of life."[15]

This does not mean that Plessner proposes a voluntary segregation for Jews. On the contrary, he urges that they intermingle with others and learn from them:

> "To be sure...we should learn from everyone. 'Who is a wise man - he who learns from everybody.' One must take the good and true from wherever one can find it."[16]

כל מה שברא הקב"ה לא ברא אלא לכבודו - "Whatever God created, He created in His honor." Each people on earth was given certain advantages and privileges which were denied to others. "Each nation has its particular virtue, which we should discover, value, and accept."[17]

Plessner favored the inclusion of secular subjects in the curricula of Jewish Schools. He feels that the study of German language and literature, of science and of art ought to be made an integral part of every Jewish child's education. But more than that, and here Plessner presages the תורה עם דרך ארץ message of Samson Rafael Hirsch: the Jew ought to learn good manners from his non-Jewish neighbor.[18]

> "Learn science from others, learn art, but learn also modest conduct...and, with particular reference to worship in the House of God, those who are not used to it, might well learn outer discipline and decorum."

Loyalty to the Jewish religion and to the Jewish group and its ways in no way clashes with love and service of country:

> "A true devotion to the faith of Israel is in perfect harmony with devotion to the state; we can be faithful subjects of the one without neglecting or being unfaithful to the other; we can wear the uniform of citizenship without discarding the white and clean Sabbath garments of Judaism."[19]

As a matter of fact only a <u>true</u> Israelite can be a good citizen. Jewish history proves conclusively that the very Jews who were most constant in their religion, who offered themselves willingly to the service of their people and their God, were the ones who served their king and country best. (Mordecai, loyal in his adherence to the second commandment, refused to bow before Haman, yet he saved the life of his king.) Conversely, Jewish history shows that those who hated the Jews and sought their destruction were, at the same time, the most dangerous enemies of their country. (Haman not only wanted to destroy the Jews, he plotted to usurp the throne.)[20]

Jewish law makes allegiance to king and country the highest duty of man. It teaches fear of God and unquestioning obedience to His will, and only he who fears God can truly fear his king. But even more important, the Torah specifically enjoins constancy and singleness of heart to Fatherland and ruler;

> "It (the Torah) calls the king the Annointed of God, the very image of the Heavenly Father...it prohibits the cursing of the king even in one's heart...it places God and King on an equal level by ruling: "My son, fear thou the Lord and the King and meddle not with them that are given to change." It commands us to pray for the king's welfare, ...to make the following blessing whenever we see him: 'Praised by He who imparted of His Glory to another.' It even teaches us to regard each official of the King as a king."[21]

Consequently, the Jew who teaches his child the love of God and the ways of the Torah proves his good faith to his native country and its ruler. "Jewish education is the highest service of the state."[22]

Plessner waxes exuberant in expressing his own feelings of fidelity to Germany and his love for its King and Emperor:

> "Hail and three times hail to the beloved Friedrich Wilhelm III, the gracious king, the just and sweet father of his country! Hail to him and hail to his fatherly representative, the chief administrator of our province, the Knight Flotwell... Hail to all the praiseworthy administrators and rulers of our land."[23]

Indeed, a Jew who keeps faith with his religion and maintains the ways of his people is loyal to the state and stands in perfect harmony with the "enlightened" temper of the times.

Opposition to Reform

A comparison of Plessner's sermons in defense of Judaism's modernity and the Jew's loyalty to the state with those diatribes which he directed against reformers and their innovations offers a strange study in contrast. In voicing his opposition to reform, Plessner seems to have forgotten almost everything he said when affirming the "reasonability" of the Jewish religion. Not that he ever contradicts himself; but in his polemics against the Zeitgeist an entirely new note is sounded. Here, faith is extolled at the expense of reason, the dangers of too much secular education are stressed, even the Jew's loyalty to the state is limited by the demands of his religious life.[24]

A lion's share of Plessner's writing against reform is devoted to an attack on its leaders. Apparently, Plessner blamed them and their "irresponsibility" for the innovations in Jewish practice. He failed to realize that the advocates of reform were merely justifying changes which had been decades in the making and which were the direct outgrowths of the spiritual unrest of the times. Plessner likens the spokesmen of reform to the Baal-worshippers of Elijah's time who stand פסחים על /ג and know not where to turn, "half God, half Baal; half synagogue, half church...they know

neither what they are nor what they want to be". At another time he compares them to the serpent who seduced Adam and Eve. He warns that their glib tongues and seductive misrepresentations will bring about the downfall of Judaism.[25] He deprecates them as hypocrites who call themselves "enlightened and well-learned", when they have no knowledge at all. They seem intelligent, because they are shrewd and artful, but in reality they are quite ignorant and lazy.[26]

> "Nowadays, with reference to the religious, we hear nothing but a criticism of what is, a mocking and belittling of that which merits veneration; and yet, all these views are not the consequence of insight and careful examination, they are not the result of searching erudition; most of the critics are lazy people who know neither through study nor through practice that which they censure."[27]

The reformers are not to be trusted, no matter how serious their countenance and how warm the tone of their voice. They are doubly dangerous because what they say contains an admixture of good and evil, of truth and falsehood, and nothing is as bad as a half-truth.[28] They are, probably, God's messengers of evil sent to test the loyalty of the Jews.[29]

Turning from this torrent of broad invective to more specific criticism, Plessner resents, first and foremost, change in worship service, both in outer form, viz., bare heads, artificial decorum, employment of musical

instruments etc., and in inner content, that is, the willful revision of traditional prayers.

That the use of the organ and other musical instruments is strictly prohibited by law needs no elaboration. The non-wearing of hats, the robe of the "rabbi", the removal of the Bimah from the middle to the front of the prayer hall, are all violations of tradition. They are an imitation of the Christian way; they represent an assimilation of the worst, not of the better elements of our environment; and they gain for us only the contempt of the people we ape and whose favor we so desire.[30]

The artificial attempts to "dignify" the service in no way contribute to the beauty and enjoyment of worship. On the contrary, they stifle the Jew's natural way of expressing his devotion to God. There are Jewish ways of doing things; and there are Christian ways of doing things. The non-Jew shows his respect by removing his hat; the Jew honors God by keeping it on. The non-Jew sits rigidly in his pew or kneels on command; the Jew gives free reign to his emotions and moves his entire body in worship. No one can say that one of these ways is proper and the other is not, that one of the ways is dignified and the other is not. Both are proper and both are dignified, but the Jew does things the Jewish way.

> "True worship, whether expressing sorrow or joy, should be a lively physical reaction to one's emotion. To prohibit such natural movements (shockl'n) which break forth unwittingly in prayer would mean either to set artificial barriers of restraint to devoted prayer...and that is something we should not do, or, if we do not want to ~~satisfy~~ the gesture at the expense of devotion, it expects of us something we cannot do. For who can withstand the storm of lively emotion?"[31]

In matters of religion, all laws and all customs are of equal value and importance. As has been observed before, Plessner stresses that the folkways which the reformers consider marginal to Judaism are an integral part of our religious life. They too, together with all the Mitzvos were commanded by God to Moses and through him to our sages and on to us, and their transgression is as serious as a violation of one of the Ten Commandments.[32] No innovation whatever can be countenanced, for a change on any one level of Jewish life will bring changes in the total structure including its essential core of belief. The reformers proclaim that Judaism is a religion of action, that at its essence it demands ethical behavior. But is there such a thing as morality without religious practice? Of course not! There is no morality except the word of the Torah. A violation on the level of practice - any violation, even a minute one - will bring about a collapse of what reformers themselves regard as the core of Judaism - morality.

> "Only those congregants who serve God and are unaffected by the temper of the times, only they serve also humanity and do good; those who bear the yoke of religious duties, bear also with love...the obligations of morality. Who gives alms to all, homeborn and stranger alike? From whose door does no porter chase away the needy? Who can always be approached and never tires of doing good? Who invites the hungry to his table and does not hesitate to place them next to the tender members of his family?...Only the Israelite who supports the synagogue with his presence and with his money. Always and ever, unto all eternity, virtue and morality revolve about God-fearing men whose doors are never locked to the stranger; whereas the withdrawn, so-called 'enlightened' man only rarely admits the poor into his presence and satisfies all his charitable deeds with scant gift to the congregation to which he belongs."[33]

Even more reprehensible than changing outer form is the reformers' attempt to alter the content of prayer. Plessner reminds his listeners that the Jewish prayerbook is the property of all Israel, and that it provides the greatest single force for unity among the Jews of the world. "A congregation in the lands of the North Pole addresses the same words to God as does a congregation at the South Pole." The prayerbook makes for common aim, for common attitude, for common soul and heart, so that its willful alteration by any one group is a threat to the unity of all of Jewry.[34] The traditional prayerbook contains in concise form and masterful, lucid style all that man could ask of God. "It is reasonable, a compendium of human wants in accord with enlightenment...and deserves neither to be removed nor to be deformed by changes or dismemberment."[35]

The attempts of reformers to render traditional prayers into German translation is absurd. While it is true that prayer in any language is acceptable to God, and also that many Jews no longer understand Hebrew properly, translations of traditional prayers can only result in a distortion of their real meaning. "Our prayerbook was written in the language of the Holy Writ, and thus it became a Holy Writ, as it were, and must be understood in a like manner." The Hebrew language alone is the language of prayer; it is the real language of the soul; it alone is able to arouse the true and pure feelings of devotion and to give these feelings appropriate expression.[36]

In the process of shortening the service, the reformers have discarded much that is valuable. There is no reason, for instance, why Piyutim should be omitted. Masterpieces of Hebrew poetry, they help us to distinguish one holiday from another, they teach us much that is indispensable toward a proper understanding of the holiday message; and they constitute the heart and center of synagogal song.[37] Nor is there any excuse for eliminating the second day of [illegible].[38]

Reformers are entirely too much concerned with the comfort of their adherents. In fact - so Riessner emphasizes - reform seems to be nothing but a religion of convenience catering to the lowest in its followers and pampering them.

Judaism is not for the lazy. It demands sacrifice. "If one wanted to shun everything that is difficult, one would have to throw over the entire structure of Jewish law and Divine service."[39]

Plessner castigates the reformers for surrendering so lightly and without compulsion the law for whose loyal observance thousands upon thousands of Jews were slaughtered. More important, he challenges their authority to make those changes. "The poets who composed Jewish liturgy and the rabbis of old who interpreted the Law were no ordinary men." They were God-inspired - intoxicated by the krowledge of the Divine. Do the reformers think that they themselves are more intelligent, more learned, more deserving of Divine inspiration than our vererable ancestors were?[40] Reformers say that Jewish tradition is old-fashioned, outmoded; it is high time that they learn to revere and not to despise that which is handed down from generations past,

> "Let us not be ashamed of the old...Let not our law be inferior to museums of antiques for which we give up treasures. Surely only the ignorance of common people can give precedence over time-honored theories to the green wisdom of immaturity that is appropriate only to a boy, though its false glitter makes it so attractive to the man in the circle of the unlearned."[41]

Notes to Chapter III

1. Lowenthal, op. cit., pp. 216ff.

2. Cited, ibid., pp. 220ff.

3. See introductory chapter on "Life" of Plessner, pp. 6-7.

4. Lowenthal, op. cit., pp. 216-230.

5. Ibid., pp. 231-250.

6. Ibid., pp. 251-269. See also, Albert Lewkowitz, Das Judenthum und die geistigen Stroemungen d. 19 Jahrhunderts (Breslau, 1935), pp. 304-322.

7. Max Wiener, Juedische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation (Berlin, 1933), pp. 1-18.

8. B&E II, pp. 355-356.

9. Ibid., pp. 357-358.

10. Ibid., pp. 358-359.

11. Ibid., pp. 367-368.

12. Ibid., p. 359. See also, B&E I, pp. 54, 350, 376f.

13. Ein Wort zu Seiner Zeit, pp. 16-17.

14. B&E II, pp. 137-146.

15. Ibid., p. 324.

16. Ibid., p. 150.

17. Ibid., loc. cit.

18. Ibid., p. 151.

19. B&E I, p. 294; N.S. I, p. 577.

20. B&E I, pp. 293-305; B&E II, p. 260.

21. B&E I, p. 105. Quotation, ibid., pp. 305-307.

22. Ibid., pp. 203-205.

23. Ibid., p. 27. Also, "Zum Denkmal im Tempel des Herrn" (Berlin, 1840); "Der Israelit als Underthan" (Posen, 1861).

24. B&E I, pp. 341 et. seq.; Festreden, p. 376; N.S. I., pp. 84-90, 97, 396-405.

25. N.S. I, pp. 1ff; B&E I, pp. 173, 179.

26. B&E I, pp. 174-178.

27. Perle, pp. 211-212.

28. B&E I, p. 181; N.S. I, p. 9.

29. B&E I, p. 178.

30. N.S. I, pp. 452, 453, 560-561; B&E I, p. 205; B&E II, pp. 148ff.

31. Perle, pp. 78-80.

32. B&E II, pp. 137-152.

33. B&E I, pp. 203-206.

34. Perle, pp. 137-138. Quotation, page 137.

35. Ibid., pp. 138-145. Quotation, page 139.

36. Ibid., pp. 147-154. Quotation, page 147.

37. Ibid., pp. 159-322.

38. Festreden, p. 198.

39. Perle, p. 194; B&E I, pp. 170 et. seq.; N.S. I, pp. 20-29.

40. B&E I, p. 234; Festreden, pp. 88, 89, 148; Perle, pp. 155-158.

41. N.S. II, p. 64.

IV. THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF JUDAISM

Plessner was not a philosopher. Nor was he a theologian. He created no new thought. Neither did he offer a methodical presentation of doctrinal belief. This does not mean, however, that he was without a definite world view of his own. And his sermons - if not in concise and continuous form, then at least in their totality - reveal a consistent and comprehensive concept of the world and of Judaism.

Theologically, Plessner held a position very much akin to that of his co temporary, Samson Rafael Hirsch. He believed Biblical-Talmudic Judaism to be inseparable, revealed, and inviolate, the fountain of absolute truth. All his religious doctrines are drawn from the pages of the Bible and of Rabbinic Literature. Any attempt to give a thorough presentation of his dogmatic, ethical and ritual doctrines would be tantamount to reconstructing Jewish Theology, an impossible and unnecessary task. In the following pages, therefore, we will limit ourselves to an exposition of those of his theological views which are marked as characteristic by constant repetition in his sermons.

God

In wrestling with the central problem of theology, the God concept, Plessner evinces a strong distaste for philosophical speculation. Apparently he shared Nineteenth Century Romanticism's contempt for the ideas and methods of the Newtonian World. He proclaims a frank supernaturalism, a belief in a transcendent Deity Who reveals Himself through nature, through His prophets, and through the Law.

Not that Plessner rejects reason entirely. His attempts to prove Judaism consonant with the rational temper of the Enlightenment have already been noted.[1] However, he feels strongly that acceptance upon faith must precede rational cognition and, therefore, that philosophy is to be subjugated to theology.

> "A few moments in the presence of God, teach us more, are more wholesome and beneficial than a thousand years in the natural school of life and investigation. There one grieves, spends sleepless nights at ones desk, passes days in the lecture halls of philosophy, works - often in a frenzy and until one wearies - over innumerable books and still one is never wise, one throws over on the morrow what one builds today, one marks only the exterior formation of things or recognizes the essence of but a few irrelevant matters... However, moments spent in the true presence of the Divine, have a monotony-shattering power which blasts the house of cards - the systems of trifles and errors; and one learns not only in quantity, but matters of importance."[2]

And even when reason does lead to knowledge of God, it results in a cold, dry, **heartless** acceptance of the Deity; whilst the man who builds on faith has a heart for God, is moved by his love for Him and serves Him willingly and with joy.

> "In his soul there is continuous rapture and bliss and during Divine service and study he flames into a mighty fire of enthusiasm."[3]

Revelation is the bedrock of all belief. God leaves well-marked traces which attest to His existence and which tell His will.

Nature offers primary and overwhelming proof of God's Being. Its loveliness, its beauty, the miracles of growth and continuous rebirth unmistakably show God's Hand. In words re-echoing the thought and matching the poetic power of the Romantic Idealists, Plessner exclaims:

> "Here (in Nature) we behold an all-pervading power in the life that awakens from the chrysalis, in the bud that is shooting up, yea, in every sprouting blade of grass. The red-hued mountain reflecting the golden rays of the vernal sun, the mighty waters surging forth from the icy, iron bonds of glaciers, both bring to our hearts a reborn consciousness of the Divine. קול ה' בכח. His voice roars over raging waters; קול ה' גאות. He speaks in the mighty, booming crash of thunder; קול ה' בהדר. He speaks where the soaring lark comes into sight from its lofty heights! Even there is heard the voice of God!"[4]

Revelation of nature is re-inforced by the testimony of prophets, men, deserving because of their piety and

devotion, to whom God speaks directly. Actually God would willingly reveal Himself to each and every one of us; but, because of our sins, we do not merit His favor. Nevertheless, the attestation of others can lead us to a knowledge of God. We cannot doubt their word. The constant realization of their prophecies assures us of the Divine origin of their message.[5]

For Klessner, the giving of the Law at Sinai was the Revelation par excellence. מעמד הר סיני provides him with the most significant proof of God's existence.

> "The giving of the Law taught first and foremost the existence of God. At Sinai, who could have doubted the reality of the Highest Being? One heard, one saw, one was affrighted and at the same time enchanted by this lofty apparition. What thousand-year-long study had taught incoherently and inconvincingly, was taught most clearly and undeniably in one single moment: namely, that there is a God."[6]

Before Sinai, God could only be found through nature and, hence, was recognized only as a God in nature. At Sinai, He called Himself the God of Israel and revealed Himself as the master of the universe, capable of directing nature's forces to suit His will.

What does the Torah revealed at Sinai tell us concerning God? First of all, it teaches us that God is One, that He is the author of the world and all life, and that He dominates the universe, moving men and nations to suit His

will and purpose. Plessner depracates the attempts of historians to describe the story of mankind in terms of natural causation.

> "All that modern historians have been able to achieve, is the presentation of partly understood, partly misunderstood events, a mere reporting of facts whose cause and inner relationship they fail to grasp."

God's finger in history is evident; His dominance over peoples cannot be challenged.[7]

Moreover, God's interest is not restricted to the welfare of single nations or to humanity at large. He is very much concerned with individual souls; the life of every man is under His constant supervision. The fact that the world was created in six days, conclusively establishes particular Providence. Had God's interest in man been only momentary, He would have formed the world with one act. The progressive manner of creation indicates that God has a plan and purpose for the universe; and this Divine design assures each man the continued interest of the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good Being.[8]

Just what God intends, we cannot know. His thoughts are not ours, neither are His ways our ways. Man can only stand, as a silent awed observer. However - Plessner assures us - we can be certain that in its finalexecution, God's plan will be just and beneficent and, further, that God's purpose will, eventually prevail. In the end, all will be understood, all will be clear.[9]

Man

The knowledge of God through revelation helps us to discover man and to unravel the mysteries of his nature. Revelation places man at the pinnacle of creation, at the summit of God's endeavor. It proclaims him a free moral agent, possessing limitless potentialities for good and for evil.[10]

Plessner sees no conflict between the idea of Providence and the doctrine of free will. God's foreknowledge in no way hampers the freedom of man's action. As a matter of fact, God wants man to shake off the shackles of natural forces in order to become His co-worker in the continuous process of creation. Man is to be free from nature in order to be free for God.

> "Our actions are free, almost spontaneous, and the less they are bound by the predestinations of God, the more do they help to bring about the realization of His plan!"

By serving God we can achieve real freedom, and by struggling for inner freedom, we serve His purpose.[11]

With freedom of the will comes the inevitable conflict between good and evil. Plessner stresses the fact that we do not share the conviction of other religious faiths who hold man to be innately evil, who regard the purification of the soul as man's main task in life. True

enough, man is naturally inclined to evil, his passions lead him astray; but his soul came pure from God, and man's primary function is to keep his soul's edifice untarnished. Life may be compared to a battlefield and man to a warrior engaged in constant struggle against the enemies - drinking, gambling, and sensuality - created by his passions.[12]

There are two types of sin. One type - Plessner calls them "natural" - occurs when man, weak in flesh, succumbs to his desires. The other kind of sin, called "unnatural", consists in a willful, impudent transgression of God's injunctions. In either case, God's punishment is swift and just; He metes out a penalty to suit the offense.[13]

Occasionally, the righteous suffer evil. God wants to test them; He wants to teach them that He is to be served in sorrow as well as in happiness, that He is to be praised for evil as well as for good. By enduring pain, moreover, the righteous serve the world; God deals more leniently with others because of them; and their reward is assured in the hereafter.[14]

God Himself is the author of evil. Insofar as we can know His purposes, He sends sin to test and tempt man, and, through the resultant punishment, to bring about His moral regeneration.[15]

There is good in every evil. Indeed, we could not well get along without the יצר הרע. However, we can extract the good from the evil by bridling our inordinate desires, by thanking God who satisfies our wants, by sanctifying the enjoyment of our passions with appropriate blessing, and by persevering in our efforts to shake off the yoke of passion. Thus can the pitfalls of evil be avoided.[16]

The way of repentance is open to all and at all times. It consists, first and foremost, in a purification of the soul, in the restoration of its pristine state through the firm resolve to sin no more.

> "Blemished is the heart of man from the days of its youth; it is the seat of his appetites and passions...in order to renew ourselves before God, we must take heed to purify our heart, that is, no longer must we lust for the thousand earthly follies which are so totally unnecessary to the preservation of man or for his happiness."

Confession is an essential part of the process of repentance; and, where a sin was committed by hurting a fellow man, proper restitution must be made. Some form of sacrifice - fasting, or praying, or the giving up of certain pleasures - should accompany atonement to make it complete. Furthermore, men should help each other to repent - just as they ought to keep each other from sin - through gentle reprimand and good example. Full repentance alone can avert the evil decree. Delay in this is fatal. The time is short. The day of judgment is near.[17]

To Plessner, one of man's major tasks is the overcoming of evil in himself and in others. In striving toward individual and world perfection, God lends man a supporting hand and gives him the assurance that his endeavors are not in vain. However, God's blessing comes only to those who really what it; who prove the genuineness of their desire by loyal co-operation with the Divine. Just as in the physical world God's gifts of growth and life require human effort - the plant must be watered; the child must be fed - so too, spiritual growth and well-being come only if we work with God; if we do whatever is in our power to do, if we recognize God's help and give Him grateful recognition. In this sense we can place unfaltering trust in Him and in the eventual fulfillment of His promise.[18]

That which sets man above all other earthly creatures and places him on his pedestal as king of creation, is the soul. A fragment of the Divine life, the soul is the vitalizing force of human life. It embodies the spiritual part of man, including his conscience, his emotion, and his creative ability in the world of ideas and in the world of art. It is an aspect of the Divine reborn in man.[19]

Man's body is the vessel of the soul and as such gains sanctity. In fact, the body was fashioned in the form of the soul.

"The expression צלם used in the story of creation, designated form, outer structure.

> The expression צלם which is also employed there, refers to the inner quality of man. In his attributes, his inner being, man stands as an image (צלם) of God; in his outer form,...man is the פסל or the outer copy; [the body is] in a sense, a shadow (לב) of the inner being, corresponding to it, and similarly Divine; it is the form which the spirit of God assumes when He appears to man."

The body, then, is also of God and must be guarded zealously. Cleanness of the body is the parallel of purity of the soul.[20] Plessner never misses an opportunity to urge regular bathing, the washing of hands and feet, the prevention of exposure to disease. In effect, he lifts care of the body to the level of Divine service, making bodily cleanliness the **sine qua non** of worship.[21]

Plessner affirms his belief in the immortality of the soul, a conviction which he based - as was to be expected - not on philosophical speculation but on his faith in Providence. He asserts that only those who hold the world and life to be mere accident can doubt in a hereafter. Death sets no end to life; it is but a portal to immortal blessed existence; for the God who gave us the soul certainly does not want it to perish.

> "The pious, God-fearing man...feels most strongly...that the soul of man, the powers of the spirit pervading him, which more than anything else are a direct emanation of the great world spirit of God, cannot possibly cease or be destroyed. God Himself breathed into man the breath of life. He made the soul and created the spirit which dwells in man. I say, he who

> recognizes his soul as the emanation of God cannot tremble for the future..."[22]

The conviction of immortality is further buttressed by a study of nature. One season follows another in never ending cycle; each spring witnesses a resurgence of plant and animal life. Immortality, therefore, appears as an intrinsic part of the Divine order of things.[23]

The conception of a life hereafter satisfies an incessant, earnest craving in man and serves as a powerful incentive to noble conduct. Man well knows that how he lives on earth will determine the nature of his afterlife with God.

> "Man, you are immortal; there is a higher world...; one day your spirit will soar aloft triumphantly...and the more beautifully you live here on earth, the more beautiful, the more glorious, the more blissful will be your life on high."[24]

The Torah

Man, in his striving to carry into actuality the Divine plan, needs guidance. Free will, if left to itself, would soon produce hopeless confusion concerning right and wrong. Humanity, therefore, requires a law which will chart its course; and it stands in need of a teacher who will expound that law. The community of Israel is charged with the task of teaching mankind to seek the good. The Torah performs a double function: its moral message directs man along the

pathways of the Divine; and its distinctive ceremonial law marks Israel as a people especially consecrated to God.

The Torah - so feels Plessner - represents the primary source of all morality. The concept of God's fatherhood, revealed in law, places upon man the obligation to treat his fellow as a brother. Service to others is the essence, the quintessence of Divine Service. A moral life is the special task of Israel without which all his prayer and ritual are meaningless.[25]

Plessner asserts with certainty that there can be no morality without religion. Man's ethical aspirations are not self-generating, self-evident; there is no ultimately rational basis for them. By fact of history, the moral principles the world upholds were first formulated by the lawgivers and prophets of Israel and are the direct consequence of their God faith.

> "Lawgivers and founders of religions which came into being at a later time, taught the world nothing new with their moral teachings, they merely repeated literally, the teaching of Mosaic Law."

It is not unreasonable, therefore, to assume, that only through the faith which gave them birth can ethical values retain their vitality. Religion, moreover, offers the inspiration necessary to do the good; and it provides the force that compels and maintains man's faith in the right.[26]

The ritual laws of the Mosaic Code, as well as the institutions developed by later generations of Jewish teachers, serve to distinguish Israel from other nations. These ceremonies further the maintenance of Jewish unity - the Jew who chants the Kiddush feels at one with every other Jew who approaches his Sabbath table - and they help the Jew to remember his past. Remembrance is the basis of Judaism. If the Jew forgets the past, he is likely to let the thought of God slip from his mind entirely. The ceremonies of the Torah, particularly the injunctions concerning holiday observances, awaken the remembrance of past glories in the heart of every Jew and thus keep the thought of God uppermost in his mind.[27]

Plessner thinks ritual necessary, also, because it gives outer and concrete expression to an inner and abstract emotion. The outward act may actually stimulate the inner feeling; or it may help to restrain over ardent religious emotion which is always in danger of running the wild gamut of fanaticism.

> "Veneration of God in spirit is all important, but, when it precludes outer acts of reverence, it is dangerous. It leads, if I am to be permitted the expression, to pious idleness; it permits one to indulge in whims and imaginations which merit to be called, not a veneration, but a profanation of God...The exercise of Divine ordinances, statutes, and teachings, prevents pious idleness; it does not permit foolish joy or sullen seclusion, but keeps us, with all due ardor for religion, on the standpoint of reasonable and calm prudence."

Finally, the performance of ceremonies prescribed in the Torah, stimulates observance of the moral law enjoined therein, by reminding us constantly of our obligations to our fellow men, by keeping awake continually the desire for a pure and upright life.[28]

Plessner was aware of the dangers inherent in rituals, in their tendency to become devoid of spirit, to turn into mere conventional or traditional gestures, and hence useless. He warns the Israelite to imbue ceremonies with spiritual worth, to couple their observance with the true religious life, in order to maintain their vitality and value.[29]

Plessner makes study and teaching the first obligation of the Jew with relation to the Torah. If the Jew is to help humanity find the way to God, he must himself be versed in the Law; and if he is to hope for the fulfillment of his chosen task, he must himself impart his knowledge to others, especially to his children.

> "Without study, to what purpose the celebration in honor of the giving of the Law? To what purpose a rejoicing in the Law? Without study, to what purpose the Books of God? To what purpose the treasures of our literature? To what purpose the numerous works in all branches of Divine knowledge? Upon the study of the Law rests our strength! Not in the area of art and science, not in branches of industry which have become the main task of the Israelite; but in the Law; therein rests our real Power."[30]

Religious education is the highest way of honoring God. By teaching our children Torah and by imbuing them with a love for all things Jewish, we serve them best; and we serve ourselves as well, for it is only the child who knows the law that knows filial duty and has a heart noble enough to fulfill these obligations.

The earlier we start with religious training, the better. The impressions gained in childhood days cannot easily be erased. Whether the child understands or not is totally irrelevant; in later life his reason will support the faith instilled in youth.

Wherever possible, the parents themselves ought to teach their children - the soft spoken words of the mother are more potent than the severe reprimands of the teacher. In any event, the living example of the home can do more than the dead letter of the classroom. Environment is all important in education. It is senseless to give the child a dose of religious instruction and then place him in an atmosphere which makes it impossible for that instruction to flourish. The religious growth of the child can be made possible only by surrounding him with the right spiritual climate, and by setting the right example.

> "O fathers, mothers, educators, and teachers, I cannot impress you enough with the obligation to instruct your youth in the Law. It is the holiest of your duties - fulfill it...and you will raise a blessed generation that will bring joy to God and to men."

If we nurture our children in the spirit of the Torah, then God's promise will be fulfilled: "And their children shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all that see them shall acknowledge then that they are the children which the Lord hath blessed."[31]

Studying and teaching the Law are only means to an end. The aim, and at the same time the central duty of the Jew, is obedience to the Law and all its ethical and ritual demands. When Jews study they are the children of God; but when they observe the Mitzvos they become God's servants, "the bearers of sweet burden."

Plessner assures his congregants that even though the Temple has been destroyed and Jews are now citizens of many lands, each of the Torah's laws can still be observed. To be sure the Jews no longer have a Temple, but they have synagogues and buildings devoted to the study of the Law. They have no priests who demand tithes, but they have teachers and servants of religion who depend on their donations. Laws of purity are no longer in effect, but the inner being, the soul of the Jew, must be kept untarnished. Sacrifices have been suspended, but prayers have been ordained in their stead. The pilgrimages can no longer take place, but there are festivals which demand careful preparation. There is no harvest of fields and vineyards to be tithed, but there are profits and properties which can be shared

with the needy. There are no more princes and kings, but there are community leaders who are also in need of allegiance and support. Indeed, all of the Torah's injunctions can be observed. And they should be observed, with diligence and with zeal.[32]

The outer act of obedience to the Law should be accompanied by an inner feeling of devotion and loyalty to God. Man is to serve the Divine not only with his hands, but with his heart and soul. That means, that man must love God, must stand in awe of Him, must make willing sacrifices in His behalf. "Inner service of God is a dedicated, holy purpose, a pious fullness of the heart."[33]

Basically, this inner emotion should be one of joy. Klessner posits the psalmist's cry: עִבְדוּ אֶת יְהוָה בְּשִׂמְחָה בֹּאוּ לְפָנָיו בִּרְנָנָה (Serve the Lord with gladness; come into His presence with singing)," as a fundamental principle of Judaism. Sorrow is the reflection of a bad conscience. Joy is the mark of the good conscience; it is the consummation of a life dedicated wholeheartedly to the Eternal. The Torah reveals the God of Israel as a God of light and of love, of grace and of good will, as a God who, even in His anger, is basically kind, and who reprimands the Israelite as a father does a child. Hence, the Israelite should carry out the precepts of the Law with gladness and with song. "God dwells not with the dejected,

the sorrow laden, but only with him whose inner being is filled with pious joy."[34]

Prayer

The components of Divine service outlined in previous pages - the striving toward moral perfection, ritual observance, the inner feeling of devotion to God - are all contained in prayer. Plessner regards articulate worship as a "law of nature", man's response to his innate craving. He views it as an indespensable element of religion, and deals at length with examining prayer's essence, its underlying logic, and the ways in which it can be rendered more effective.[35]

Prayer in the stricter sense of the word, is an expression of man's need addressed to the Deity. It is proper that we make our wishes dependent on God, because God possesses everything and is all-powerful. We are His subjects, He is the source of all we have and own. Moreover, we can be certain that what He bestows upon us, we have acquired justly; and only what is honestly obtained can really be enjoyed.

> "A sense of right and wrong, yes, even an inclination toward the good lives in every man. Ever will man prefer to gain the satisfaction of his wishes in an honest, straightforward manner, rather than in a dishonest way...when God gives and grants your good fortune, you have it with right and you can delight in it all the more."[36]

Moreover, it is necessary that we articulate our desires. Inner thoughts must inevitably be given expression in language and gesture; the words of prayer are final proof of existing devotion. Language may serve to vitalize thought. The man who prays in his heart, especially if he is in the company of those who lack fervor, can easily be disturbed. Spoken prayer always shies away alien thoughts. "Man can serve God in loud prayer and song for hours without cooling in ardor." Furthermore, mere thought of need and want takes little effort. To merit God's attention and favor one must be willing to sacrifice. By praying aloud we exert ourselves, we lessen our comfort, and thus make our worship meritorious of God's consideration.[37]

To what does Plessner attribute the fact that so few of our prayers are answered? He suggests that we do not meet the conditions necessary for their acceptance. First, an inner feeling of devotion is required. Our hearts must be filled with joy, with courage, with trust in the Lord who is our father and master. Moreover, we must be pure of soul and upright. "He who expects his prayer to be heard, must not only be a regular worshipper, but also a good, moral and virtuous man."[38] And our intentions must be pure. We must not secretly intend to abuse the gifts of God, to utilize them for the satisfaction of our passions or in the transgression of the Law.

> "The Talmud tells us: 'Every thief, standing on the edge of the pit which he has dug, calls to God for help.' When praying, we generally think: first obtain this or that and then use it, not as you now promise God, but as will suit your pleasure. We pray for children and know in advance that we will never raise them in accordance with God's will, but rather in conformance to our own views. We pray for riches and know beforehand that our intention is not to be able to serve God without worry... but to be free, to make ourselves less dependent on God; yes, we pray to be moguls, to be enabled to lord over our fellows."[39]

Never ought we to ask for something supernatural. Our wishes must have their bounds. To be sure, God is capable of miracles, but even His wonders are exercised in a kind of natural order, lest the unlimited expression of God's power harm man's limited faculties. There is a supernatural element in the answering of prayer, so that when we desire, in addition, a supernatural goal, we are, in effect, daring a double miracle.[40]

When we petition for others our prayers will be more readily received; when we have the welfare of the community at heart our words are worthy to soar to the throne of the Almighty.

> "He who is not sensitive to the misfortune of others does not distinguish himself from the insensate animal which feels no compassion for the pain of others of its kind...In a word, he who in his prayer is conscious of despicable selfishness, who experiences during those noblest moments of life, during worship, no feelings of love for mankind - God's most acceptable sacrifice - he need not wonder

> about the efficacy of his prayer and should not ask: how is it that my wishes were not granted!"[41]

Knowledge of the Law is yet another prerequisite of acceptable prayer. He who is permeated with Torah or who pleads to God immediately after study is close to Him before he even opens his petition.

Perseverance is also necessary. We must never be impatient; we must never tire of prayer. The granting of our requests may be slow in coming, but, ultimately, we will receive what we desire. The course of God and nature is never fast but always certain.[42]

Plessner posits certain external conditions to be met before ideal prayer:

First of all, we ought to exercise care in choosing the time of prayer. Morning and evening hours, the days of rest and festivals, all give man the peace of mind which is conducive to wholehearted service.

A regular place ought to be designated for worship. Not that God is not omni-present, but in a building or a room or even a corner dedicated exclusively to prayer, we can gather our thoughts more readily. Praying toward a wall is always helpful. The place of worship must be clean, and so must we; our garments and our bodies must match the purity

of our hearts. Standing, in prayer, is preferred. We must be alert, when we worship; by sitting down we yield to comfort and are in danger of falling asleep.[43]

We ought not to hesitate to cry when we pray. Tears can ensue from a feeling of joy, no less than from sorrow. By giving free vent to our emotions, we smash that mighty wall which separates God and men and we turn the key to the treasurehouse of Divine grace and mercy. Fasting is a helpful aid to sincere worship. By refraining from eating we weaken our passions, and wrench the sturdiest weapon from the grasp of our inner seducer. The free movement of body (<u>shokel'n</u>) is still another, very much Jewish, way of releasing fervor.[44]

Daily prayer is recommended. Haphazard worship may flow from evil motives and can only result in flighty devotion. Regularity and self-discipline is as important in this as in every other human endeavor. If we wait for the "spirit to move us" we may surrender to the temptations of indolence and, ultimately, cease to pray entirely. Prayer is the food of the soul; our inner being, no less than our body, needs daily sustenance. Most important of all, prayer is "קבע" an intrinsic part of Divine service; we are God's subjects and have no right whatever to perform our duties at <u>our</u> leisure.[45]

As emphasized above, Plessner insisted that the traditional prayer formulas of Israel are to be maintained. They constitute a formidable bond of union, joining us to our brothers in all lands. Written in lucid, beautiful Hebrew, our prayerbook embodies all of man's wishes. It requests the satisfaction of man's highest needs, seeking wisdom and insight, grace and blessing. The Hebrew prayers should not be translated into the vernacular. No one can hope to recapture their meaning and significance in another language. They were written by God inspired poets and, not unlike the Scriptures, they are sacred and inviolate.[46]

Communal prayer is better than individual meditation. Just as the human being cannot live alone, so should he not worship alone. The devotion of the one gains strength in response to the ardor of the many. The greater the congregation the more profound is the religious inspiration. "Only in the multitude can the individual gain a hearing."[47]

Collective worship is given best expression in the synagogue. Replacing the Temple of yore, our houses of prayer are the most proper and worthy centers for Divine service. The synagogue is a place where man's soul can find rest from the turbulence of worldly life. Entering its portals, man leaves his cares behind and turns his eyes toward a higher, brighter world, to the vision of a better future.

Plessner extols the synagogue as a potent force for peace, bringing harmony to the Jewish community and to the world at large. Within its hallowed halls, all opposing cliques and factions are drawn together to do God's will with one and perfect heart.

> "What is it that brings to life at this late time the glories of Israel's ancient past? What gives us heaven on earth? What leads us from the foolish, confusing turmoil of earthly life and helps us find our real selves and God? What draws down the peace of heaven into our soul, the very Deity into our midst? What reminds us of our noble destiny and twines bonds of love and harmony about us? It is the temple, the house of worship...which calls us to collective prayer."[48]

Plessner feels certain that if we fulfill all the outer and inner conditions of prayer considered above, our pleading will find favorable hearing. Moreover, our God-given gain will be more than the mere granting of our immediate petitions. Our souls will be purified; we will be protected - at least for the few hours of worship - from the onslaught of sin; our noble resolutions will be strengthened; unbounded joy will fill our hearts; and we will be brought closer to God, enabled to achieve communion with Him, which, in the final analysis, is the ultimate goal of worship, the consummation of religion.[49]

Israel, its Mission, and its Ultimate Redemption

The concept of Israel's election is central to Klessner's theology. He viewed the Jewish people especially consecrated to the Divine and charged with the task of bringing the nations of the world to the God of Israel.

The Jew - so asserts Klessner - stands under a special Providence. His history of continuous, miraculous redemption proves God's special favor. Modern Jewish historians make a mistake when they apply to the story of the Jewish past the same standards and methods they employ in treating the histories of other peoples. In the attempt to demonstrate their thesis, these "pseudo-historians" resort to a perversion of fact and reveal their profound ignorance of true historical causation, which is the will of God, no more, no less.[50] Moreover, God chose to reveal Himself and His Law to Israel above all other nations. The Torah is the treasured possession of the Jew and conclusively establishes his state of pre-eminence in the world.[51]

Israel's election was a reciprocal process. The Israelites chose God as much as He chose them. They alone among the nations were ready to accept the discipline of the Law.

They merit God's special grace, precisely because they, of their own volition, committed themselves to the performance of His will."[2]

The Jew's function in life is embodied in the phrase "a kingdom of priests and a holy people". As a priest stands in the midst of his people, so is the Jew to stand among the nations. He is to build a humanity worthy to be called the work of God. He is to help man in his upward striving, by bringing light and insight to the world, by giving man a true knowledge of Divine word and will.

This mission of universal edification is to be achieved, not through formal preaching and teaching, but rather, through exemplary behavior. Israel is to show by the example of his own life, just what it means to be an image of God. He himself is to be versed in the Law. He himself is to obey the Law. He himself is to hold his fellow beings sacred. And, lest he learn worship of wealth and lust from the world, he is to distinguish himself from others by maintaining the ceremonies enjoined by Law and tradition. Thus he will merit the appelations, "a holy people."[53]

The mission of Israel explains the dispersion of Israel. We can teach a world by example only if a world can see us. And, though we undoubtedly suffer because of our sins and

the sins of our fathers, the concept of Israel's priesthood may help us to understand the martyrology of our people. Just as the priest has to bear the sin of his people, so the Jew has to bear the sins of the nations. Persecution and oppression, moreover, lead to our moral regeneration, thus speeding the fulfillment of our mission.[54]

Not all the Jews are true to their task. Thousands upon thousands are deserting the ranks of our people. And even those who remain in our midst are weakening in loyalty. Fearful lest they be mocked as odd separatists, lest they be put to an economic disadvantage because of their distinctive habits, and, perhaps, because, lacking in faith, they despair of the realization of Jewish hope, they give up the observance of their religious obligations and remain Jews in name only. What is worse, they urge others to do the same and demand that our youth engage in secular studies exclusively. Thus they sap our strength today, even while they undermine our tomorrow.[55]

Plessner warns these enemies from within to take the lessons of Jewish history to heart. God always sustained our people as long as we maintained His Law. Whenever we deserted Him, His Divine protection was withdrawn from us, and we were left to languish in the servitude of foreign masters. We need but return to Him, and He will return to us. We need but to obey His Law, and a glorious future will be ours.[56]

"This very day, yet we can and should prove that there is a people which gains strength through the Eternal, its ancient God, a people which is invincible through the power of its holy Law and its way of life; that there is a people which, though dispersed to the ends of the earth is united in faith and devotion to the One God; a people which at all times holds its religion dearer than life; a people which was always persecuted, but ever remained the same; a people which even during the holiest moment of its holiest day, yea, even in the last moments of life when the earth recedes from the eye and the portals of eternity are opened, knows no greater, no more precious word than, 'שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד' "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'"

Notes to Chapter IV

1. See Chapter on "Emancipation, Tradition and Reform, p.77

2. Festreden, pp. 168-169, 313; B&E I, p. 165a; B&E II, p. 267; Perle, p. 166; N.S. I, p. 435.

3. Festreden, p. 3-11; Perle, p. 317.

4. N.S. I, p. 375; B&E I, p. 280; B&E II, p. 287.

5. B&E II, pp. 287-289; 329; Festreden, p. 97.

6. Festreden, pp. 172-174; N.S. II, p. 149; B&E II, p. 329.

7. B&E II, pp. 20ff, 246, 260, 381-382; Festreden, pp. 253, 382, 405ff; Perle, p. 6.

8. B&E I, pp. 211b-225b; B&E II, pp. 27, 36, 367; Festreden, pp 356; N.S. I, pp. 596-622.

9. Perle, p. 90; N.S. I, pp. 57-60, 641.

10. B&E II, p. 57; Festreden, pp. 176-180; Perle, p. 133.

11. B&E I, pp. 222-223, 270; Festreden, pp. 95-96, 201; N.S. I, pp. 110-123, 368-369. Quotation, N.S. I, p. 111.

12. B&E I, pp. 77, 378; Festreden, pp. 23, 32, 225-227; N.S. I, p. 624.

13. B&E II, pp. 1-16; Festreden, p. 356.

14. B&E I, pp. 259-273; Festreden, pp. 125, 135; N.S. I, p. 589.

15. B&E I, pp. 216b, 219b; B&E II, p. 35; Festreden, pp. 29, 362ff; Perle, p. 8.

16. Festreden, pp. 50-70.

17. B&E I, pp. '94-146; B&E II, pp. 20, 41, 43; Festreden, pp. 119, 245, 282-299, 325; N. S. I, pp. 381-395, 655; N.S. II, pp. 55, 56; Quotation from Festreden, pp. 225-226.

18. Festreden, pp. 367-380; N.S. I, pp. 41-50, 61-72.

19. Festreden, pp. 19, 235; N.S. II, pp. 101-102.

20. B&E I, pp. 108-109; Eerle, p. 55.

21. B&E I, pp. 109, 164; Festreden, p. 145; Eerle, p. 61; N.S. I, pp. 307, 437.

22. B&E I, pp. 220-221, 155, 160-161; B&E II, p. 136.

23. B&E I, pp. 207b-208b; N.S. I, pp. 353, 378.

24. B&E I, pp. 160, 74-75, 80-82; Festreden, pp. 320-336.

25. B&E I, pp. 106, 117; B&E II, pp. 221, 305; Festreden, pp. 290-291; Eerle, pp. 29, 42; N.S. I, pp. 37, 70-71, 441; N.S. II, p. 37.

26. B&E II, pp. 278, 286, 290-293, 297-316.

27. B&E II, pp. 84-85, 320, 323-325; Festreden, p. 139; N.S. I, p. 319.

28. B&E I, pp. 207a-222a; B&E II, pp. 315-323, 325-329; quotation, ibid., p. 325.

29. Ibid., pp. 42, 238.

30. N.S. I, p. 425; B&E I, p. 65; B&E II, pp. 79, 103-105, 215, 240, 348; Eerle, pp. 45, 71.

31. B&E I, pp. 64-66, 187-206, 237-239, 325-240; B&E II, pp. 105-108; Festreden, pp. 150-154, 157-167; N.S. I, pp. 34-37, 431-432, 592, 593; quotation, B&E I, p. 239.

32. B&E I, pp. 63, 105; B&E II, pp. 290-293, 374, 384-385; Festreden, pp. 154-157; N.S. I, pp. 126-130.

33. B&E II, pp. 317-332.

34. B&E I, pp. 7, 275-292; B&E II, pp. 72-75, 307, 348; Festreden, pp. 1-17, 302-319; N.S. II, pp. 13-14; quotation, B&E I, pp. 275-276.

35. Eerle, pp. 1-7.

36. Ibid., pp. 7-12.

37. Ibid., pp. 12-17; B&E II, pp. 320-323, 325-327.

38. Perle, pp. 18-30; B&E I, pp. 29, 292.

39. Perle, p. 31.

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41. Ibid., pp. 42-45; quotation, ibid., p. 45.

42. Ibid., pp. 45-53.

43. Ibid., pp. 54-73.

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45. Perle, pp. 89-132; B&E II, pp. 327-328.

46. Perle, pp. 133-158; B&E II, pp. 323-325.

47. Festreden, p. 22; B&E II, p. 347; Perle, pp. 300-303.

48. B&E I, pp. 17-33; Perle, pp. 294-314; "Des Tempels wahrer Werth" (Berlin, 1841), pp. 1-37.

49. Perle, pp. 89-109.

50. B&E II, pp. 245-260, 376-381; N.S. I, p. 97.

51. B&E I, pp. 60, 386-387; Festreden, pp. 150-151.

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53. B&E II, pp. 45, 92, 144-145, 209-226, 279, 306; N.S. I, pp. 37, 370, 391.

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V. IN CONCLUSION

Such is the life and work of Solomon Plessner. His was a potent voice for the orthodoxy of the early Nineteenth Century. By word and by pen, he fought unceasingly tenaciously for the maintenance of Jewish tradition against the many internal and external forces which once again demanded that Judaism adapt itself to the new ideas and the new conditions of a newer day.

Viewed from the vantage point of the Twentieth Century and judged by its standards, Plessner does not loom large. Many weaknesses and inconsistencies in his thinking are apparent: He affirmed the supremacy of faith; yet he exerted much effort in order to establish the reasonableness of Judaism. He favored the ideas of the Romanticism, yet he lacked the courage to embrace their mysticism. He decried the changes of reform; yet he found it necessary, and without apology, to institute reforms himself - in his preaching and in his theory and practice of education.

One might well ask of Plessner: If the non-shaking of the body in prayer is a religious transgression, is not preaching in German an equally grave violation of tradition? If the moving of the bimah to the front of the prayer-hall

endangers Judaism, does not the reciting of Schiller's poetry (and in the synagogue at that) constitute an equally serious danger to the survival of the Jewish group? If the study of the Torah and obedience to its commandments is indeed the be-all and the end-all of a pious life, is not the study of science and art an utter waste of time?

By Plessner's own rules: entweder - oder; either - or. Either one is permitted a change, or one is not. Either one may modernize Jewish life, or one may not. If preaching in German and secular education is permissable, then why not allow some of the other things those wicked, wicked reformers advocate!

But no man should be judged by the standards of a later day alone. No one can be evaluated fairly, unless he is considered in the light of the times in which he lived. And measured by the standards of his own day, Plessner ranks high indeed.

He was a remarkable man. Self-educated, he managed to absorb and harmonize within himself the best of Jewish and European cultures.

He was a fine preacher. His sermons represent an original contribution to the development of the synagogual address. They mark a milestone in the transition from the exegetical

expositions of the medieval darshan to the homiletical presentations of the modern pulpiteer.

And he was a good Jew - no higher praise could be bestowed upon him. His sermons manifest a love for his people, a pride in her faith, an uncompromising devotion to his ideals, an ardent, joy-filled adoration of his God.

Indeed, Solomon Plessner merits an honored place in the history of our people.

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ABSTRACT

Solomon Plessner's fifty and more years of activity as preacher and teacher in Judaism were marked by sweeping changes in Jewish life. The political emancipation of the German Jews percipitated a complete upheaval of their religious and cultural existence. The old, all-embracing social order of the ghetto declined and disappeared. New institutions and new belief structures had to be built up designed to enable the Jew to adjust to this new role as the eager, but unwanted member of the European community.

In the religious conflict engendered by the emancipation, Plessner championed the casue of orthodoxy against reform. He wanted to see as much as possible of traditional Jewish life and practice retained for the modern day. He believed that while Judaism accorded with reason, it was also a revealed religion, presenting a body of revealed law demanding strict obedience.

To promote the acceptance of his views, Plessner had to perform a double task: He had to establish the reasonability of the Jewish religion and its accord with German Kultur and the demands of the German state. And he had to attack those who wanted to distill a spiritual religiosity from the complex of Jewish existence and, hence, encouraged major modifications in Jewish practice.

In voicing his opposition to reform, Plessner directed his main attack against innovations in synagogual service, both in form - bare heads, 'artificial' decorum", employment of musical instrument - and in content - the willful revision of traditional prayers.

In his theology, Plessner occupied a position next to that of Samson Rafael Hirsch. He shared early Nineteenth Century Romanticism's contempt for the scientific methods and ideals of the Age of Reason. Revelation was the bedrock of his faith. He proclaimed a frank supernaturalism, a belief in a transcendent all-powerful, all-present, all-good Deity, Who reveals Himself to man through nature, through

His prophets and through the Law. Mankind, created by God and under His constant supervision, strives to approach God, to carry into actuality the Divine plan. Israel, a community especially dedicated to God, is to act as mankind's guide. The Torah serves a double function: Its moral laws chart humanity's course toward the good; its ritual and ceremonial laws help to distinguish Israel as the people dedicated to Divine service.

Structurally, Plessner's sermons represent a transition between the exegetical presentations of the medieval <u>darshan</u> and the preachings of the modern pulpiteer. He used good vernacular; he employed illustrations from secular sources; and he followed the newer form of address. At the same time, he attempted to preserve the flavor of the older sermon, by sprinkling his homiletical excursions with an abundance of Scriptural and rabbinic material, exerting much effort in an endeavor to elucidate these sources.