

CHAPTER XIII

THE ONE AND ONLY GOD

1. From the very beginning no Jewish doctrine was so firmly proclaimed and so heroically defended as the belief in the One and Only God. This constitutes the essence and foundation of Judaism. However slowly the people learned that there could be no gods beside the One God, and that consequently all the pagan deities were but "naught and vanity," the Judaism of the Torah starts with the proclamation of the Only One, and later Judaism marches through the nations and ages of history with a never-silent protest against polytheism of every kind, against every division of the God-head into parts, powers, or persons.

2. It is perfectly clear that divine pedagogy could not well have demanded of a people immature and untrained in religion, like Israel in the wilderness period, the immediate belief in the only one God and in none else. Such a belief is the result of a long mental process; it is attained only after centuries of severe struggle and crisis. Instead of this, the Decalogue of Sinai demanded of the people that they worship only the God of the Covenant who had delivered them from Egypt to render them His people.¹ But, as they yielded more and more to the seductive worship of the gods of the Canaanites and their other neighbors, the law became more rigid in prohibiting such idolatrous practices, and the prophets poured forth their unscathing wrath against the "stiff-necked people"

¹ Lev. XIX, 4; XXVI, 1; Isaiah II, 8, 11; Psalm XCVI, 5.

and endeavored by unceasing warnings and threats to win them for the pure truth of monotheism.¹

3. The God of Sinai proclaims Himself in the Decalogue as a "jealous God," and not in vain. He cannot tolerate other gods beside Himself. Truth can make no concession to untruth, nor enter into any compromise with it without self-surrender. A pagan religion could well afford to admit foreign gods into its pantheon without offending the ruling deities of the land. On the contrary, their realm seemed rather to be enlarged by the addition. It was also easy to blend the cults of deities originally distinct and unite many divinities under a composite name, and by this process create a system of worship which would either comprise the gods of many lands or even merge them into one large family. This was actually the state of the various pagan religions at the time of the decline of antiquity. But such a procedure could never lead towards true monotheism. It lacks the conception of an inner unity, without which its followers could not grasp the true idea of God as the source and essence of all life, both physical and spiritual. Only the One God of revelation made the world really one. In Him alone heaven and earth, day and night, growth and decay, the weal and woe of individuals and nations, appear as the work of an all-ruling Power and Wisdom, so that all events in nature and history are seen as parts of one all-comprising plan.²

4. It is perfectly true that a wide difference of view exists between the prohibition of polytheism and idolatry in the Decalogue and the proclamation in Deuteronomy of the unity of God, and, still more, between the law of the Pentateuch and the prophetic announcement of the day when Israel's

¹ Comp. Ex. XX, 3; XXII, 19; XXIII, 13; with Deut. VI, 4; IV, 35, 39; XXXII, 39; Isaiah XL to XLVIII.

² See Dillmann, l. c., 235-241; D. F. Strauss, l. c., 402-408; A. B. Davidson: *Theology of O. T.*, p. 105; 149 f.

God "shall be King of the whole earth, and His name shall be One."¹ Yet Judaism is based precisely upon this higher view. The very first pages of Genesis, the opening of the Torah, as well as the exilic portions of Isaiah which form the culmination of the prophets, and the Psalms also, prove sufficiently that at their time monotheism was an axiom of Judaism. In fact, heathenism had become synonymous with both image-worship and belief in many gods beside the Only One of Israel, and accordingly had lost all hold upon the Jewish people. The heathen gods were given a place in the celestial economy, but only as subordinate rulers or as the guardian angels of the nations, and always under the dominion of God on high.²

5. Later, in the contest against Græco-Egyptian paganism, the doctrine of God's unity was emphasized in the Alexandrian propaganda literature, of which only a portion has been preserved for us. Here antagonism in the most forcible form is expressed against the delusive cults of paganism, and exclusive worship claimed for "the unseen, yet all-seeing God, the uncreated Creator of the world."³ The Rabbinical Haggadah contains but dim reminiscences of the extensive propaganda carried on previous to Hillel, the Talmudic type of the propagandist. Moreover, this period fostered free inquiry and philosophical discussion, and therefore the doctrine of unity emerged more and more from simple belief to become a matter of reason. The God of truth put to flight the gods of falsehood. Hence many gentiles espoused the cause of Judaism, becoming "God-fearing men."⁴

6. In this connection it seems necessary to point out the difference between the God of the Greek philosophers — Xenophanes and Anaxagoras, Plato and Aristotle — and the God of the Bible. In abandoning their own gods, the Greek

¹ Zach. XIV, 9.

² Bousset, *l. c.*, 221 f., 348.

³ Deut. IV, 19; Jer. X, 2.

⁴ See Chapter LVI, below.

philosophers reached a deistic view of the cosmos. As their study of science showed them plan and order everywhere, they concluded that the universe is governed by an all-encompassing Intelligence, a divine power entirely distinct from the capricious deities of the popular religion. Reflection led them to a complete rupture with their religious belief. The Biblical belief in God underwent a different process. After God had once been conceived of, He was held up as the ideal of morality, including both righteousness and holiness. Then this doctrine was continuously elucidated and deepened, until a stage was reached where a harmony could be established between the teachings of Moses and the wisdom of Plato and Aristotle. To the noble thinkers of Hellas truth was an object of supreme delight, the highest privilege of the sage. To the adherents of Judaism truth became the holiest aim of life for the entire people, for which all were taught to battle and to die, as did the Maccabean heroes and Daniel and his associates, their prototypes.

7. A deeper meaning was attached to the doctrine of God's unity under Persian rule, in contact with the religious system of Zoroaster. To the Persians life was a continual conflict between the principles of good and of evil, until the ultimate victory of good shall come. This dualistic view of the world greatly excels all other heathen religious systems, insofar as it assigns ethical purpose to the whole of life. Yet the great seer of the Exile opposes this system in the name of the God of Judaism, speaking to Cyrus, the king of Persia; "I am the Lord and there is none else; beside Me there is no God. I will gird thee, though thou dost not know Me, in order that the people shall know from the rising of the sun and from the west that there is none beside Me. I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and also create evil, I am the Lord that doeth these things."¹ This declaration of pure

¹ Isa. XLV, 5-7.

monotheism is incompatible with dualism in both the physical and the moral world; it regards evil as being mere semblance without reality, an opposing force which can be overcome and rendered a source of new strength for the victory of the good. "Out of the mouth of the Most High cometh there not the evil and the good?"¹

8. The division of the world into rival realms of good and evil powers, of angelic and demoniacal forces, which originated in ancient Chaldea and underlies the Zoroastrian dualism, finally took hold of Judaism also. Still this was not carried to such an extent that Satan, the supreme ruler of the demon world, was given a dominion equal to that of God, or interfering with it, so as to impair thereby the principle of monotheism, as was done by the Church later on. As a matter of fact, at the time of nascent Christianity the leaders of the Synagogue took rigid measures against those heretics (*Minim*) who believed in two divine powers,² because they recognized the grave danger of moral degeneracy in this Gnostic dualism. In the Church it led first to the deification of Christ (*i.e.* the Messiah) as the vanquisher of Satan; afterwards, owing to a compromise with heathenism, the Trinity was adopted to correspond with the three-fold godhead, — father, mother, and son, — the place of the mother deity being taken by the Holy Ghost, which was originally conceived as a female power (the Syrian *Ruha* being of the feminine gender).³

9. The churchmen have attempted often enough to harmonize the dualism or trinitarianism of Christianity with the monotheism of the Bible. Still Judaism persists in considering such an infringement upon the belief in Israel's one and only God as really a compromise with heathenism. "A

¹ Lam. III, 38.

² *Shei'he Reshuyoth*, see Hag. 15 a; Deut. R. I. 10; Eccl. R. II, 12; Weber, l. c., 152; Joel, *Blicke in d. Religionsgesch.*, II, 157.

³ D. F. Strauss, l. c., 409-501; J. E., art. Christianity.

Jew is he who opposes every sort of polytheism," says the Talmud.¹

10. The medieval Jewish thinkers therefore made redoubled efforts to express with utmost clearness the doctrine of God's unity. In this effort they received special encouragement from the example of the leaders of Islam, whose victorious march over the globe was a triumph for the one God of Abraham over the triune God of Christianity. A great tide of intellectual progress arose, lending to the faith of the Mohammedans and subsequently also to that of the Jews an impetus which lasted for centuries. The new thought and keen research of that period had a lasting influence upon the whole development of western culture. An alliance was effected between religion and philosophy, particularly by the leading Jewish minds, which proved a liberating and stimulating force in all fields of scientific investigation. Thus the pure idea of monotheism became the basis for modern science and the entire modern world-view.²

11. The Mohammedan thinkers devoted their attention chiefly to elucidating and spiritualizing the God idea, beginning as early as the third century of Islamism, so to interpret the Koran as to divest God of all anthropomorphic attributes and to stress His absolute unity, uniqueness, and the incomparability of His oneness. Soon they became familiar with neo-Platonic and afterward with Aristotelian modes of speculation through the work of Syrian and Jewish translators. With the help of these they built up a system of theology which influenced Jewish thought also, first in Karaite and then in Rabbanite circles.³ Thus sprang up successively the philosophical systems of Saadia, Jehuda ha Levi, Ibn Gabirol, Bahya, Ibn Daud, and Maimonides. The philosophical hymns and the articles of faith, both of which found a place in the lit-

¹ Meg. 13 a.

² Comp. Lange: *Gesch. d. Materialismus*, I, 149-158.

³ Alfred v. Kremer, l. c., 9-33; J. E., art. Arabic and Arabic-Jewish Philosophy.

urgy of the Synagogue, were the work of their followers. The highest mode of adoring God seemed to be the elaboration of the idea of His unity to its logical conclusion, which satisfied the philosophical mind, though often remote from the understanding of the multitude. For centuries the supreme effort of Jewish thought was to remove Him from the possibility of comparison with any other being, and to abolish every conception which might impair His absolute and simple unity. This mental activity filled the dwellings of Israel with light, even when the darkness of ignorance covered the lands of Christendom, dispelled only here and there by rays of knowledge emanating from Jewish quarters.¹

12. The proofs of the unity of God adduced by Mohammedan and Jewish thinkers were derived from the rational order, design, and unity of the cosmos, and from the laws of the mind itself. These aided in endowing Judaism with a power of conviction which rendered futile the conversionist efforts of the Church, with its arguments and its threats. Israel's only One proved to be the God of truth, high and holy to both the mind and the heart. The Jewish masters of thought rendered Him the highest object of their speculation, only to bow in awe before Him who is beyond all human ken; the Jewish martyrs likewise cheerfully offered up their lives in His honor; and thus all hearts echoed the battle-cry of the centuries, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One," and all minds were illumined by the radiant hope, "The Lord will be King of the earth; on that day the Lord shall be One, and His name shall be One."

13. Under all conditions, however, the doctrine of unity remained free from outward compulsion and full of intrinsic vigor and freshness. There was still room for differences of opinion, such as whether God's life, power, wisdom, and unity are attributes — distinct from His being, and qualifying it, —

¹ See Draper's *Conflict between Religion and Science*.

or whether they are inherent in His nature, comprising His very essence. This controversy aimed to determine the conception of God, either by Aristotelian rationalism, as represented by Maimonides, or by the positive religious assumptions of Crescas and others.

This is Maimonides' statement of the unity: "God is one; that is, He is unlike any other unit, whether made one in point of numbers or species, or by virtue of composition, separation, and simplification. He is one in Himself, there being no multiplicity in Him. His unity is beyond all definition."¹

Ibn Gabirol in his "Crown of Royalty" puts the same thought into poetic form: "One art Thou; the wise wonder at the mystery of Thy unity, not knowing what it is. One art Thou; not like the one of dimension or number, as neither addition nor change, neither attribute nor quality affects Thy being. Thou art God, who sustainest all beings by Thy divinity, who holdest all creatures in Thy unity. Thou art God, and there is no distinction between Thy unity, Thy eternity, and Thy being. All is mystery, and however the names may differ, they all tell that Thou art but one."²

14. Side by side with this rationalistic trend, Judaism always contained a current of mysticism. The mystics accepted literally the anthropomorphic pictures of the Deity in the Bible, and did not care how much they might affect the spirituality and unity of God. The philosophic schools had contended against the anthropomorphic views of the older mystics, and thus had brought higher views of the Godhead to dominance; but when the rationalistic movement had spent its force, the reaction came in the form of the *Cabbalah*, the secret lore which claimed to have been "transmitted" (according to the meaning of the word) from a hoary past. The older system of thought had stripped the Deity of all reality and had robbed religion of all positiveness; now, in

¹ Maim.: *Yesode ha Torah*, I, 7.

² Sachs, I. c., 3.

contrast, the soul demanded a God of revelation through faith in whom might come exaltation and solace.¹

Nevertheless the Maimonidean articles of faith were adopted into the liturgy because of their emphasis on the absolute unity and indivisibility of God, by which they constituted a vigorous protest against the Christian dogma. Judaism ever found its strength in God the only One, and will find Him ever anew a source of inspiration and rejuvenation.

¹ See Schmiedl, l. c., 239-258.

CHAPTER XIV

GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE AND OMNISCIENCE

1. Among all the emotions which underlie our God-consciousness the foremost is the realization of our own weakness and helplessness. This makes us long for One mightier than ourselves, for the Almighty whose acts are beyond comparison. The first attribute, therefore, with which we feeble mortals invest our Deity is omnipotence. Thus the pagan ascribes supreme power over their different realms to his various deities. Hence the name for God among all the Semites is *El* — "the Powerful One."¹ Judaism claims for God absolute and unlimited power over all that is. It declares Him to be the source and essence of all strength, the almighty Creator and Ruler of the universe. All that exists is His creation; all that occurs is His achievement. He is frequently called by the rabbis *ha Geburah*, the Omnipotence.²

2. The historical method of study seems to indicate that various cosmic potencies were worshiped in primitive life either singly or collectively under the name of *Elohim*, "divine powers," or *Zibeoth Elohim*, "hosts of divine powers." With the acceptance of the idea of divine omnipotence, these were united into a confederacy of divine forces under the dominion of the one God, the "Lord of Hosts." Still these powers of heaven, earth and the deep by no means at once surrendered their identity. Most of them became angels, "messengers" of the omnipotent God, or "spirits" roaming in the realms where once they ruled, while a few were relegated as monsters to the region of superstition. The heathen deities, which

¹ See Hebrew Dictionary, *El*; comp. Dillmann, l. c., 210, 244.

² See Levy, W. B.: *Geburah*.