

PREFACE

IN offering herewith to the English-reading public the present work on Jewish Theology, the result of many years of research and of years of activity as President and teacher at the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati, I bespeak for it that fairness of judgment to which every pioneer work is entitled. It may seem rather strange that no such work has hitherto been written by any of the leading Jewish scholars of either the conservative or the progressive school. This can only be accounted for by the fact that up to modern times the Rabbinical and philosophical literature of the Middle Ages sufficed for the needs of the student, and a systematic exposition of the Jewish faith seemed to be unnecessary. Besides, a real demand for the specific study of Jewish theology was scarcely felt, inasmuch as Judaism never assigned to a creed the prominent position which it holds in the Christian Church. This very fact induced Moses Mendelssohn at the beginning of the new era to declare that Judaism "contained only truths dictated by reason and no dogmatic beliefs at all." Moreover, as he was rather a deist than a theist, he stated boldly that Judaism "is not a revealed religion but a revealed law intended solely for the Jewish people as the vanguard of universal monotheism." By taking this legalistic view of Judaism in common with the former opponents of the Maimonidean articles of faith — which, by the way, he had himself translated for the religious instruction of the Jewish youth — he exerted a deteriorating influence upon the normal development of the Jewish faith under the new social conditions. The fact is that Mendelssohn emancipated the modern Jew

from the thralldom of the Ghetto, but not Judaism. In the Mendelssohnian circle the impression prevailed, as we are told, that Judaism consists of a system of forms, but is substantially no religion at all. The entire Jewish renaissance period which followed, characteristically enough, made the cultivation of the so-called science of Judaism its object, but it neglected altogether the whole field of Jewish theology. Hence we look in vain among the writings of Rappaport, Zunz, Jost and their followers, the entire Breslau school, for any attempt at presenting the contents of Judaism as a system of faith. Only the pioneers of Reform Judaism, Geiger, Holdheim, Samuel Hirsch, Formstecher, Ludwig Philippson, Leopold Stein, Leopold Loew, and the Reform theologian *par excellence* David Einhorn, and likewise, Isaac M. Wise in America, made great efforts in that direction. Still a system of Jewish theology was wanting. Accordingly when, at the suggestion of my dear departed friend, Dr. Gustav Karpeles, President of the Society for the Promotion of the Science of Judaism in Berlin, I undertook to write a compendium (Grundriss) of Systematic Jewish Theology, which appeared in 1910 as Vol. IV in a series of works on Systematic Jewish Lore (Grundriss der Gesamtwissenschaft des Judenthums), I had no work before me that might have served me as pattern or guide. Solomon Schechter's valuable studies were in the main confined to Rabbinical Theology. As a matter of fact I accepted the task only with the understanding that it should be written from the view-point of historical research, instead of a mere dogmatic or doctrinal system. For in my opinion the Jewish religion has never been static, fixed for all time by an ecclesiastical authority, but has ever been and still is the result of a dynamic process of growth and development. At the same time I felt that I could not omit the mystical element which pervades the Jewish religion in common with all others. As our prophets were seers and not philosophers or moralists,

so divine inspiration in varying degrees constituted a factor of Synagogal as well as Scriptural Judaism, Revelation, therefore, is to be considered as a continuous force in shaping and reshaping the Jewish faith. The religious genius of the Jew falls within the domain of ethnic psychology concerning which science still gropes in the dark, but which progressive Judaism is bound to recognize in its effects throughout the ages.

It is from this standpoint, taken also by the sainted founder of the Hebrew Union College, Isaac M. Wise, that I have written this book. At the same time I endeavored to be, as it behooves the historian, just and fair to Conservative Judaism, which will ever claim the reverence we owe to our cherished past, the mother that raised and nurtured us.

While a work of this nature cannot lay claim to completeness, I have attempted to cover the whole field of Jewish belief, including also such subjects as no longer form parts of the religious consciousness of the modern Jew. I felt especially called upon to elucidate the historical relations of Judaism to the Christian and Mohammedan religions and dwell on the essential points of divergence from them. If my language at times has been rather vigorous in defense of the Jewish faith, it was because I was forced to correct and refute the prevailing view of the Christian world, of both theologians and others, that Judaism is an inferior religion, clannish and exclusive, that it is, in fact, a cult of the Old Testament Law.

It was a matter of great personal satisfaction to me that the German work on its appearance met with warm appreciation in the various theological journals of America, England, and France, as well as of Germany, including both Jewish and Christian. I was encouraged and urged by many "soon to make the book accessible to wider circles in an English translation." My friend, Dr. Israel Abrahams of Cambridge, England, took such interest in the book that he induced a young friend of his to prepare an English version. While this did not answer the

purpose, it was helpful to me in making me feel that, instead of a literal translation, a thorough revision and remolding of the book was necessary in order to present it in an acceptable English garb. In pursuing this course, I also enlarged the book in many ways, especially adding a new chapter on Jewish Ethics, which, in connection with the idea of the Kingdom of God, appeared to me to form a fitting culmination of Jewish theology. I have thus rendered it practically a new work. And here I wish to acknowledge my great indebtedness to my young friend and able pupil, Rabbi Lee J. Levinger, for the valuable aid he has rendered me and the painstaking labor he has kindly and unselfishly performed in going over my manuscript from beginning to end, with a view to revising the diction and also suggesting references to more recent publications in the notes so as to bring it up to date.

I trust that the work will prove a source of information and inspiration for both student and layman, Jew and non-Jew, and induce such as have become indifferent to, or prejudiced against, the teachings of the Synagogue, or of Reform Judaism in particular, to take a deeper insight into, and look up with a higher regard to the sublime and eternal verities of Judaism.

“Give to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.”

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