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## AUTHORITY AND DOGMA IN JUDAISM.

“It is because I am with you in admiring the Rabbis that I would undo much of their work. The Rabbis constructed a casket, if you will, which kept the jewel safe at the cost of concealing its lustre. The Rabbis worked for their time ; we must work for ours. Judaism was before the Rabbis. Scientific criticism shows its thoughts widening with the process of the suns, even as its God Yahveh, broadened from a local patriotic Deity to the ineffable name. In every age our great men have modified and developed Judaism.” (*Children of the Ghetto*, by I. Zangwill, Vol. III., page 270.)

A RECENT case of the inhibition of a Jewish minister by the Chief Rabbi of the United Congregations of the British Empire on grounds of dogma, has raised two issues of vital import to the present and future position of Judaism. First, the function and scope of ecclesiastical authority, and, secondly, the formulation of dogmas. These two issues are connected, and hang together. A particular case, standing as a precedent, must have the effect of investing ecclesiastical authority with the power of giving new force to defunct dogmas, and of actually creating fresh ones.

Two reasons have been alleged for the inhibition referred to: 1. The objection of the clergyman to offer prayer for the restoration of the sacrificial rite. 2. That his published utterances contained matter which is “surmised” to be at variance with “traditional Judaism.” I quote textually from the document of inhibition.<sup>1</sup> This phrase “traditional Judaism” opens up a wide field of inquiry as to its exact significance. But for the moment I propose to deal with the first two points, namely, authority and dogma. In

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of the Chief Rabbi, dated May 27th, 1892, printed in the *Jewish Chronicle*, June 10th, 1892.

treating the subject I am painfully conscious that it demands the consideration of those who are renowned for scholarship in Jewish history and tradition, to which I can lay no shadow of claim. On the other hand, the subject directly concerns a generation of professing Jews who are not scholars, and who must be disposed to regard it from the point of their capacity to believe what is imposed upon them by that step. The legality of the step is not in question, at least for the purpose of this article. Technically, it is in accord with the provisions of a modern institution known as the "United Synagogue." It is, moreover, in legal pursuance of a certain Act of Parliament known as the "United Synagogues Act, 1870, Vic. 33-34, ch. cxvi." That Act, promoted by those who founded the "United Synagogue," contains a clause that the ritual of the constituent synagogues shall be the German and Polish ritual, and though it can easily be shown that the "United Synagogue" has by no means accepted the German and Polish ritual without reserve and modification, still that ritual does contain certain prayers for the restoration of the sacrificial rite. The present controversy, therefore, resolves itself into a criticism of the provisions of that institution, as also the functions of the Chief Rabbi with which it is bound. The latter points are possibly more appropriate for communal discussion than for treatment in this REVIEW. I therefore confine myself to the larger question of theology, which must logically be the ultimate one.

Belief in the restoration of sacrifices has never been held by the present generation to be an essential article of the Jewish creed. It has no place in the thirteen Articles which are found in the orthodox prayer-book. The fact that prayers are contained in the ritual, embodying certain aspirations which have been undoubtedly held by Jews of different ages, and more particularly by the individuals who composed them, does not constitute an article of faith in any statutory sense. If it did, it would be only that kind

of creed which grows up by usage, and has never at any time received the concurrence of the whole House of Israel.

The belief in the restoration of the sacrificial rite is a tremendous claim upon the faith of the Israelite. It means much more than appears at first sight. It is true that history often repeats itself, but it would be difficult to find any example of a repetition such as would be implied by the restoration of this rite. The rite is one which is characteristic of an age not only bygone, but necessarily incapable of living over again by reason of the ordinary law of cause and effect. It would seem positively grotesque to write an essay to prove the futility of attempting to appease the Deity by the blood of rams and of he-goats, if it were not that the doctrine is being revived by the dictum of modern ecclesiastical authority. People had ceased to entertain the idea as part of their religious faith; but when we are told that a clergyman is ineligible because he has avowed his disbelief in it, it becomes necessary to demonstrate the untenable nature of the idea as an article of faith. According to the teaching of the Hebrew prophets and of some of the great rabbins of the middle ages, the ancient rite of shedding the blood of cattle was nothing but a means to an end, and was essentially a ritual of temporary character. It may indeed be regarded, if not historically at least philosophically, as a step between human sacrifice and no sacrifice at all. The ancient Hebrew religion was structurally founded on the negation of human sacrifice. It is reasonable to regard the story of Abraham *not* having slain his son for an offering to God as a Divine command prohibiting homicide. At any rate, the fact that this act was prevented at the last moment is open to the philosophical interpretation that the Patriarch was placed ahead of his time by abstaining from the popular notion then prevalent that Divine justice could be gratified by such an outrageous and unnatural deed. Abraham possibly knew less of God when he thought he would be pleased by

his slaughtering his son than he did when he discovered that he would be better pleased by his *not* doing so. From the record of this episode in the Book of Genesis we hear no more of Israelites taking their children to the altar to offer their blood as sacrifices without the severe protest of the law. Then follows the elaborate code in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, for the use of cattle as objects of blood-offering. These codes, though very elaborate, are striking by reason of the minute restrictions which were placed upon them. One place, and in Deuteronomy one alone, one family, and one alone, were prescribed for the purpose. Never, in connection with the blood of animals, do we read the phrase which is found in connection with other rites, such as the Sabbath, and the Passover, and the Day of Atonement: "This is an ordinance for ever throughout your generations." The rigid limit of place and of priest testifies to the essentially temporary character of the rite. In the mind of the Lawgiver himself it was probably a case, in which he hoped and believed that the people would become raised to a level of spiritual life in which such a rite would no longer be attractive. The great insistence of laws against idolatry, an insistence which occupies so prominent a place in the Pentateuch, suggests the view that sacrifice of blood was treated by the Lawgiver as a process of weaning the people from one kind of worship to another.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maimonides pronounced against the tendency of some Jews to attach undue importance to the ancient sanguinary rite. His words are these:—"As the sacrificial service is not the primary object [of the commandments about sacrifices], whilst supplications, prayers, and similar kinds of worship are nearer to the primary object, and indispensable for obtaining it, a great difference was made in the law between the two kinds of service." The translation is that of Dr. Friedländer, whose scholarship and orthodoxy no one will question. The quotation is from the *Guide to the Perplexed*, Vol. III., chap. xxxii., p. 155. Then follows an account of the restrictions upon the rite, and on p. 156 it is written:—"Because of this principle, which I explained to you, the prophets in their books are frequently found to rebuke their fellow-men for being over zealous,

Judaism is not a stagnant religion. It preserves ideas ; it does not stereotype them.

Apart from the historical consideration of this question, there is the philosophical one. The human mind is incapable of reverting in the long order of progress. Whether Biblically true or not, there is no intellect of this age that can conceive the practicability of taking on again the conceptions even of the middle ages, still less those of the genesis of human history. If it were even true that a particular "ism" or system is stationary, human character is not, nor is it possible to stop the growth and the change of ideas in the long march of countless generations. It may, therefore, be taken for granted that no person of our age could voluntarily think that a social or ritual practice, which has already been obsolete for nearly two thousand years, could one day re-establish itself and become a desirable goal for human progress. No man in his senses could imagine that the course of history is to bring us back in ages to come to the point whence we started in ages that are past. If it were believable that the fulness of time could restore the desirability of superseding prayer and spiritual exercise by the rite of sprinkling the blood of rams and he-goats, it would also be credible that that rite would ultimately be exchanged for the one which preceded it, namely, the slaying of human

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and exerting themselves too much in bringing sacrifices ; the prophets thus distinctly declared that the object of the sacrifices is not very essential, and that God does not require them." Here come citations from the books of Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Leviticus to prove the subordinate and temporary nature of the sacrificial code. Maimonides represents sacrifices as something which the Almighty God tolerated and permitted for a time only, as a means of transferring the worship of idols, with which they were originally identified, to the worship of Himself. It is morally certain to those who have read the whole of that chapter, that Maimonides, whom all orthodoxy now reveres, never prayed to God to restore sacrifices, even though he might have prayed for the restoration of Israelite worship in the Holy Land. The inhibited minister happens to be one who belongs to the school of thought of which Maimonides was the great master.

beings. Equally probable would it be on such an hypothesis that the worship of the one only God, unseen and infinite, would revert to that of many—visible and finite. That going-back process, the receding of thought, and the reverting of habit, are conceptions more difficult and untenable than the doctrine of transubstantiation. It would be equally mysterious and incredible, yet considerably less attractive. So we may take it that the imposition of this dogma of the restoration of sacrifices cannot stand on human reason nor upon any philosophical basis, but upon some other ground. We then discover that it is based upon a particular view of the interpretation of Scripture. The view is this: Every clause in the Pentateuch is part of the word of God. The word of God declares the idea that restoration of sacrifices is part of his will. Being his will it must be our will and we must desire it, therefore pray for it. This view was evidently entertained by those rabbins who introduced into the Hebrew Liturgy these prayers, which were composed by men who entertained that view of the divine will and of the character of the Pentateuch. But nothing is said in the Pentateuch itself as to this restoration of the particular rite, nor is there much if any reference in the text of Scripture to the will of God in regard to what might be done in the event of a restoration of Israel after its final dispersion.

The *prima facie* objections to the doctrine of the restoration of this rite are only surpassed by the serious injury to the religious idea which is involved in the imposition to pray for it. Prayer is transformed the moment it is used to express thoughts which are not spontaneous. To pray for what we do not desire is to change the office of prayer and convert it into something else. The inhibition is not merely directed against the non-belief, but against the refusal to pray for a particular thing. Most articles of belief, both in Christianity as well as in Judaism, are not such as demand of the believer the additional burden of desiring and of

praying for its accomplishment. Puseyites would believe in eternal damnation, but they are not required to pray for it. We all believe in death: we are not enjoined to pray for a speedy demise.

Breadth of view is as much a necessity for the progress of the human mind as air and light for the body. Confined atmosphere is equally impossible in the one case as in the other. A religious system which allows no latitude is without doubt a religious stagnation. In the case of the Church of Rome latitude is denied in one form, but is permitted in another. The claim to Divine authority on the part of an organisation carries with it the power to amend and even to repeal. Such an institution is closed at one end, but it is open at the other. Thus it happens that the Roman Catholic Church has adapted itself, in some measure at least, to the altered circumstances of different ages. Politics and science and philosophy have each in their turn made distinct demands upon the elasticity of the Papal Institution. In our own day the Papacy has proved its power of surviving the loss of its temporal dominion. There is no finality in the Church of Rome. The Synagogue, too, has manifested its power of adaptability over and over again. The most striking illustration was its independence of a national polity, and its proved capacity to endure without temple and without territory. It has even changed its rites, because it has substituted prayer for shedding the blood of cattle. Rabbinism in the middle ages and down to the sixteenth century was a system of constant amendment, and therefore of renewal. The present danger to orthodox Judaism—which is, of course, the Judaism of the great mass of Israelites—is that that tradition has been permitted to be abruptly broken off with the compilation, three centuries ago, of the compendium of Rabbinical decisions known as the “Shulchan Aruch.” There is nothing more destructive and more dangerous in religion than the finality of a book. The weakness of “traditional Judaism” is therefore that it has become

fastened to a book, a danger which really ancient "traditional Judaism" feared and guarded against for a time, by long forbidding or discouraging the codification and committing to writing of the Oral Law. Bibliolatry is bad enough, but Shulchan-Aruch-olatry is worse. The Rabbinical decisions which are given in the year 1892 are nothing but the application of a text set forth somewhere about the year 1565. Herein lies the alarming condition of the present situation. Not in the Bible nor even in the Creed of the twelfth century was the belief in the restoration of sacrifice a dogma in Judaism. It was only an idea like that of Messianism, which some believed and some did not. It was hardly till the present century that it appears to have become stereotyped and made into a dogma. The claim to Divine authority, or, at least, to unchangeableness, in respect to the Prayer Book, with which this matter of prayer for the revival of sacrifices is connected, is also a product of an age later even than the sixteenth century. To amend or revise the Prayer Book is now a heresy. The Prayer Book has obtained by tradition and by the fixity of the Shulchan Aruch the same authority as the text of Scripture. Because something was written in a certain book centuries ago, Jews of the present generation are required by the claims of "traditional Judaism" to profess what they cannot believe. This is a tremendous claim, and must be resisted by the uncommon sense of the race.

There is another belief, which is popularly held by the majority of Jews, namely the restoration of their national polity. That belief is not untenable provided that it is so held that it makes no claim against the progress of science. It is conceivable that the ancient soil of Palestine and of the promised land may be re-peopled with the descendants of the Israelites who drove out the Canaanites; but it is not conceivable that this return should take place without the advantages of later science. There may be a gorgeous temple again, but it is reasonable to suppose

that it would be fitted with the electric light. It is not reasonable to imagine that ancient Judea will be restored without railways and without the printing press. Neither is it feasible to conjecture that the Jews will return, and not take with them the culture of the ages which have intervened since their dispersion. How incredible it would be to assume that a restored Israel would abide without a public library containing the literature of many languages, and at least a copy of the 16th century compendium of Rabbinical laws. Would it be possible that the restored nation would leave behind them the records of the history of their dispersion, their exile, and their contributions to the development of other empires? If restoration were to signify the destruction of all that has taken place in the long interval, no educated Jew could desire it; unless we intend to insult the prophets we cannot entertain the thought that they meant a restoration to primitiveness. Had they done so their claim to prophecy would be rudely shattered. There is no justification in human reason for the doctrine that a restored Israel shall imply a return to the conditions in which Israel lived thousands of years ago. Such a proposition would be at variance with the elementary principles of natural sense. Therefore the doctrine can only be advanced on a plea of mysticism and miracle-working, a plea which is growing less and less capable of the acceptance of reasonable men. Clearly a plea of that nature is no different in kind from such pleas as are put forth to establish the doctrine of transubstantiation. The human intellect must be told in both cases—this is a mystery that is not to be reconciled with reason. There is even less plausibility in the former case than in the latter. To bring a divine presence into the midst of a congregation in a visible and concrete form is an object that has about it the element of charm, howsoever untenable it may be. It cannot be urged that the prospect of viewing the spectacle of animal-slaughtering contains a vestige of æstheticism. The conception is altogether

repulsive both to the imagination and to the reason. It is essentially a thing not to be desired. We might go further, and conjecture that a whole nation would rise up in arms against any attempt on the part of a despotic or priestly power to re-enact so incomprehensible and ineffably obnoxious a code.

The hedging-in of thought and of spiritual aspirations that takes place by the exercise of an ecclesiasticism so uncompromising as this, is in itself a danger to which the adherents of Judaism may well be awakened. The highest interests of religion are defeated the moment they are identified with something which cannot continue. The elements of eternal truth, and the principles which are surely divine in the Jewish religion, are darkened by a shadow so gloomy and distasteful as the prospect of a return to the blood of rams and of he-goats. A priesthood which has passed from the functions of the butcher to those of the ministering angel would altogether fade away if it were sought to renew the ancient function. Any priesthood which attempted a reversal of this kind would most certainly die in the attempt.

If the Rabbins of Europe are agreed upon this latest declaration of Jewish dogma—a contingency that no one has yet ventured to indicate—the time has come for a religious dissent such as has never before been seen in the annals of Judaism. It would indeed necessitate a re-cleansing of the temple by a spiritual civil war, more intense and as lasting in its consequences as the revolt of the Maccabees against Antiochus Epiphanes. Then, indeed, might Judaism be divided into two distinct camps—the one claiming that reason and religion are at variance, the other that they are united.

After all, the insistence at this time of day of the extraordinary and unacceptable dogma is really not the work of concerted action. It is not, like the revival of ritualism in the Anglican Church, the result or the expression of a long-considered scheme of religious awakening. It is

nothing but a manifestation in detail of a newly-constituted ecclesiastical authority. The dogma is the effect of the authority. It is a mere accident that this authority has chosen the peculiar article of belief as a way of showing itself. It might as well have directed its prerogative against another clergyman, on the ground that he had his own views about Messianism, or about the meaning of a particular chapter in the Book of Ezekiel. It is the revival of the sacrificial rite to-day; to-morrow it may be dogma setting forth the divine origin of the Prayer Book or some ritual detail. Hence the question of dogma must, by the necessity of the case, involve the question of authority. Sacerdotalism is only one form of authority that may be objected to, and is scarcely distinguishable from the one here considered. That it should be given to one ecclesiastic, be he Prelate or Rabbi, to determine what shall constitute the crucial tests of adhesion to a great historic religion, is a danger that molests the survival of the very religion which he is supposed to be propping up. If a man could not be a Christian without believing in the dogma of eternal punishment or of predestination, Christian teaching would be at once deprived of many of its most valued exponents. In Judaism, if every man who does not believe in the restoration of the sacrificial rite is to be cut off from the band of Israel's teachers, that staff will be impoverished to the extent of losing many souls which are at once honest and intelligent.

The effects of such a limitation must be to place outside the organised system of religion the very forces which are most needed within. It cannot be anything short of an unmitigated injury to a religious institution that it should be deprived of all its teachers who are endowed with breadth of view. What kind of mental perspective can be discovered in those who acquiesce in the ruling that an essential qualification for the teaching of Judaism is a belief in the revival of the rite of blood-offerings?

To assert that the Jewish Religion is incapable of surviving certain beliefs and customs which belonged to its earliest history, is to relegate the ancestral faith to the region of archæological relics, and to remove it from the domain of eternal truth. It is, indeed, to subtract from it its truly divine elements, and to leave it in a state of decay and ruin.

This act of inhibition upon the ground stated is the most venturesome step of retrogression in the annals of recent Jewish history. It would be dishonest to minimise the significance of such a transaction. Without profound philosophical insight one consequence must be discernible. The old cry for union at all hazards is stopped. Allegiance to conscience and the propagation of Judaism in the only way in which modern Jews and Jewesses can receive it, becomes a paramount duty. Henceforth the very name of uniformity will be abhorrent. Even the multiplication of sects ceases to be a danger, and may possibly be the means of rescue for English Judaism. No devout Jew can receive without concern the tidings that "traditional Judaism" is stereotyped, and cannot advance beyond the ideas of the sixteenth century.

A soul in chains, yearning to learn more of the ways of God and of the means of righteousness, is bound to the ground when it accepts the pernicious impression that religion means stagnation and not development. But the soul of man is essentially free, and cannot be bridled except by the serfdom of sin. Thus the attempt to limit the progress of religious thought and to stifle it is artificial and futile. If it be done to conciliate Jews, who, fresh from the lands of oppression, have not yet realised the full significance of emancipation, then it is sacrificing the future to the past, and can only dwarf religion among them. If it be with the view of securing centralisation for ecclesiastical control in order to gain the adhesion of those who might perchance keep themselves apart, the boon is not worth the price paid for it. Such an act, if permitted to

pass uncriticised, unrepealed, cannot stand alone. More acts of a like nature will ensue, acts which will have the effect of driving from the community those elements which it most urgently needs, namely, men and women who are convinced that perfect honesty of mind is essential to religious teaching.

OSWALD JOHN SIMON.

