NINTH SERIES

OF

SUNDAY LECTURES

Before the Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel,

1895—1896

BY

Rabbi JOSEPH KRAUSKÖPF, D. D.

AND

Rabbi J. LEONARD LEVY.

OSCAR KLOPWER,
PHILADELPHIA.
When from the standpoint of Israel's Religion—in harmony with the dicta of reason there is no other—we speak of ethics as God's law, we speak of Freedom, Justice and Fidelity; and these are three dogmas, not, indeed, dogmas in the sense of Christian theology, which for the sake of salvation one must believe. With the imperative MUST the principle of freedom ceases and all moral and virtue become shadows without substance. They are dogmas which every intelligent being should know and understand for the sake of truth, righteousness and happiness.

When we speak of theological principles from the standpoint of Israel's religion, we speak in fact of three other dogmas, subsumed under these three words: Creation, Revelation and Life Eternal. For the sake of truth, certitude, the veneration due to God, regard due to man, and the adequate conception of the world, every intellectual being should know and understand them, as indeed the prophet Isaiah (xi, 9) formulated the idea thus:

"None shall hurt, none shall destroy on all my holy mountain, if the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

The ethical principle is the sequence of the theological. In Israel's religion the theological principle is the true God-cognition. These three dogmas, we maintain are the illuminated path to the God-cognition. It is incompatible with the principle of freedom to maintain I must believe these or any other dogma. It is senseless to maintain that Israel's religion has no dogmas, this being analogous to the allegation that this religion is no rational system built on fundamental principle. Therefore we need only to establish the two propositions:

1. That these three dogmas, creation, revelation and life eternal lead to the true God-cognition.
2. That these dogmas are grounded and founded in human reason, in human nature; hence the "Must" gives way to the "Should," inasmuch as we know the freedom of man to include even disobedience to the dictates of his own reason.

We look upon this cosmos, this world of bodies in number infinite, in magnitude immense, in forces and laws incomprehensible, in variety inscrutable, in constancy, harmony and beauty unutterable. Astonished, astounded, amazed we stand before that grand panorama. With the little knowledge we have of this grandest of all machineries—it is very little, indeed—we gaze upon this architecture of the heavens, we search
and scrutinize the suns, planets, moons, comets, this flood of light and life, to comprehend at last—what? That we cannot comprehend all this wisdom, power, grandeur, majesty and overwhelming sublimity. We shrink into insignificance, we feel ourselves weak and helpless like the newborn child.

It is all accidental, says the gross materialist. The atoms are soulless, senseless, loveless. They chased each other in immense space for innumerable periods of aeons, till they met accidentally and combined casually into bodies and beings as we observe them now. Does he not utter words for which he has no possible definition—words and nothing but words, which neither he nor any other human being understands? There is no analogy in human reason for a creation by accident; there is no law, no harmony, no constancy observable anywhere in the works of man or nature without devising intellect and executing power. You can not—within the whole scope of human reason and experience—point out a single instance, that accident produced anything of constant duration. The wind which drives the dust or snow and shapes it perchance geometrically, destroys its own formation in a short time. An accidental creation, a casual creation perchance is therefore unthinkable and incomprehensible, because it is unreasonable, it has nothing analogous in human reason and experience. It is rank rebellion against reason, therefore we can not think it, whatever words or phrases naturalists may coin to express it. Human reason can not go behind or above an all-wise and almighty Creator of heaven and earth, with which our Torah starts.

A new world of wisdom, power, glory and majesty opens to human gaze with this first and grandest revelation, God is the Creator of heaven and earth, and he only is God. A flood of never fading light was shed upon human understanding, an unfailing fountain of morality and goodness was opened to all mortals, when your Torah proclaimed God as the Creator of the world. This creation is the great text book for all to learn that God is and what he is, for them only who see the Creator is this immense creation. Therefore it is this dogma, “Creation,” which leads to the true God-cognition, which the materialist can never reach and the ancient Heathen never could. This is the illuminated path to כְּלָלָה רַאֲוִי וְרַעְשָׁן — fill the earth with the knowledge of God. Without “Creation” we can have no text book from which to learn that God is and what he is.

With all that, however, we must not believe this dogma. Abraham Ibn Ezra, Samuel Sarra and many of their contemporaries doubted it. Moses Maimonides stated, that from the philosophical standpoint he could not prove it. Leo De Banola denied it. All had their followers and none of them was excommunicated or even reprimanded. We should believe it, because it is in our Torah; because it is grounded and founded in human reason; because it is the illuminated path to the true knowledge of God, the true God-cognition. We should, but we must not believe it as conditio sine qua non as are the dogmas of the church; for freedom is the principle taught in the same Torah.
Creation is the first divine revelation of God and his will. Nature is the most comprehensible text book of theology. So the sacred bards of Israel reposing on nature's bosom sang the praise of nature's God. No words, no speech, no articulate sounds, did creation speak to Israel's sublime prophets, the Creator spoke to him through His creation. They understood that soundless language and translated it in human speech. This was the first revelation and remains forever audible and intelligible to all of them who behold the Creator in this creation. Revelation is the second dogma in Israel's religion. What we know of God, the good and the true, is communicated, is revealed to us directly from the Eternal God. God spoke to Abraham, to Moses and the Prophets, as God speaks, and they understood and expounded these communications, as the favored children of the all-wise Father only do understand and can expound his messages of love to his beloved ones. To this very day, and now even more than ever, the civilized world accepts these messages, endeavors to erect and shape the pyramidal structure of civilization on this broad and firm foundation, because these messages are yet believed and always were believed divine revelation, the loving Father's message to his beloved ones. Revelation is the dogma upon which the social structure is erected; it is the foundation of Israel's religion as all its holy books teach. If we know not what it is, we surely know that it is. It is the same as with all our knowledge not only of reason, consciousness, will and conscience, but all the physical forces of nature, we know not what they are, we know but that they are.

It is a mystery how one, or rather, every one is impressed with the thoughts, sentiments and feelings of other human beings, imparted to us by words, gestures, ejaculations, or other motions of bodily organs. We accept into ourselves those very thoughts or feeling, they became mentally our own, part of ourselves, and yet words are not the thoughts and motions are no emotions. Here is an inexplicable mystery, and all we can say about it is, such is human nature; it is capable of receiving revelations. Therefore it is capable to learn, to be taught, to educate and be educated, to progress from lower to higher states and conditions. Yea, we know that it is, but we know not what it is. Such is human nature, we say further-more, that it can receive revelations of thoughts and sentiments, instruction and wisdom from sources outside of himself, and by vehicles other than words, gestures, gesticulations, sounds or motions. Such is human nature, and none can deny it, although none can tell what it is.

We imagine ourselves to be well defined individual organisms, separate and distinct from the whole of nature; and it is not true. With a thousand threads are we tied to the whole of nature, constantly and pauselessly, cut these invisible threads, sever man or any organic being from nature's influence, and death and dissolution are the immediate consequences. We live as long as we stand in intimate copartnership with nature, in constant interchange of material. We must take in and give out, receive and return, without pause or intermission. In appearance
we are individuals, in fact we are parts of the whole with the capacity to take in varied material and change it into human blood, flesh, bones, muscles, nerves, and in this also we depend on the fitness and health of the organism, so that one entertains a livelier intercourse with nature than the other can, so that some are capable of receiving more, others most, and others less or even very little, according to the fitness and health of the organism.

The religion of Israel starts with the dogma, that God is the Creator of this physical world, he is God and none besides; he is the substance of all being, and all nature is the accident inherit in this substance. It follows that God is present in all parts of creation; his power, wisdom and goodnes are omnipresent in all nature. He is the universal spirit in universal matter, the intellectual and moral aspect of this indifferent physical existence. If man is in constant intercourse with this physical world, must he not be also in constant intercourse with the spirit of the world; if he receives continuous nourishment and substance from nature, must he not receive also continuous spiritual, intellectual and moral substance from the God of Nature? It follows necessarily that the dogma of creation also contains the dogma of revelation. If God created this world, he is in it, and man must stand in the same relation to God, as he stands to his creation. Deny it who can, doubt who may; reason cannot deny it and the civilized world did not doubt it, that there is divine revelation. The more or less of the divine gift coming to man, like the gifts of nature coming to him, depends on the capacity of the recipient. We who believe in God's revelations through Moses and the Prophets, believe that those ancient men were better capacitated than we are, to receive divine revelations; they stood nearer to nature and the God of nature than we do who may have become sickly in spirit, as indeed our sensual organs are degenerated. Therefore we take as our guide that which those ancient men bequeathed to us, without renouncing our freedom and capacity to regain our spiritual health, to proceed and progress from lower to higher conditions with the help of God. What has been revealed need not to be revealed again. Enough has been revealed "to fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

The dogma of creation contains logically the dogma of revelation. Only if God is in his creation, he could reveal himself to his creatures and by that revelation only we could know at all that he is constantly present in his creation. If the Creator is constantly present in his creation, he is also present in man, only more so than in all other parts of nature, for in man both nature and God are consciously reflected, man only is the focus, in which the universe, God and nature, are revealed and reflected. Heaven and earth, sun, moon, stars, elements, and forces reflect the glory, the power, wisdom, goodness and majesty of the Lord of Creation, reflect all that to man only. As far as reason's eye can penetrate the mystic depth of existence we can see man only to whom nature and nature's God are revealed. Beautiful and sublime are these heavens
with the millions of luminaries, and yet they are inferior to man, for they
know not, think not, feel not and man does know them, can think them,
and feel their beauty and benign influence upon this earth and its inhabi-
tants; to man only the grandeur and beauty of nature, the power, wis-
dom and goodness of God are known, he alone is conscious of them. As
far as reason's eye can penetrate man only receives these revelations. It
must therefore be considered a revolt against reason to surmise, that man
is not a being higher than all others; none of them is comparable to him.
If so, there must be some particular substance in man, which is not in
other beings known to him, as there can be no effect without cause, and
the cause must be substance. Therefore your Thorah on the same page
on which it records the revelation, that God is the Creator of heaven and
earth, places also before us this revelation that God created man in his
image, in likeness with himself he created man, and that image and like-
ness was created of God himself and by him directly after the body of
clay had been formed from the earth and by its forces, as all other organic
beings had been produced. The substance of man is not the compound
of elemental matter, hence it is not subject to dissolution as all material
beings are. It is substance of the Creator of all things, and must partake
of his nature, which is eternal, indestructible, imperishable. The soul is
not subject to the laws of matter.

The eternal substance of man, which we arbitrarily call soul or spirit,
is sentient, reasoning capable of dealing with the highest problems, there-
fore God revealed himself to man only. Revelation signifies to make
known that which is unknown in its causes or in its effects. Thus reve-
lation can only take place from one intelligence to a similar intelligence.
None can reveal his self-consciousness with its cause and effect to any
animate or inanimate being. None can impress the tree or the dog with
human ideality, with its cause and effect. None can impress on any
being besides man the memory of the entire past as a unit and the entire
future as a straight line of onward progress of the past with the cause and
effect thereof. Revelation can be made from an intelligence to a similar
intelligence only, therefore your Thorah informs you that God revealed
himself to a number of individual men or also to the whole people of
Israel, to inform us, that there is a substantial similarity of God in man—
revealed laws and predictions, cause and effects, the unity of past, present
and future—to impress you that God is in some respect like man and man
is in some respect like God, and thus revelation is possible. Like God
signifies to partake of his nature, to be of his substance, and this includes
life eternal, with and in God.

None can separate these three dogmas from one another. Revelation
is possible only if man is substance from the eternal substance, intelli-
gence from the highest intelligence, life from the eternal life. Revelation
is thinkable only with the dogma of creation. If God is not in nature
and in man, as is the author in his works, revelation and immortality
could never have been conceived by man. Again, if one once admits
creation, he admits at once both revelation, for creation is the most
wonderful and supernatural revelation, and man's eternal life, because he must postulate the existence of spirit outside and prior to all matter, which he must necessarily discover in man as well as in God. He must come to the conclusion, God is, therefore I am and know that both are, knowing this I contain some of God's nature in me, and I am contained in him. In the religion of Israel there are the three fundamental theological dogmas, which every one for the sake of truth, righteousness and happiness should know and well understand, in order to verify prophecy of Israel. "None shall hurt, none shall destroy on all my holy mountain, if the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."