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Judaism and Christianity, 1919.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON "JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY," AT THE TEMPLE, EAST 55th STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1919, CLEVELAND, OHIO.

RABBI SILVER: In a comparative study of

Judaism and Christianity, one may be tempted to exalt one
at the expense of the other. That has been a pursuit of
certain minds from time immemorial—to magnify one religion
at the expense of the other. So that in the past it was
quite a common thing for some Christian scholars to paint
Judaism in as dark colors as possible inorder to bring out
in stronger relief the brilliancy of Christianity. So
that Judaism of the first century of the common era was
portrayed as a religion that was law-ridden, priest-ridden,
stilted and stultified, and the Jews of the first century
were represented as men devoid of almost all spirituality
and idealism, with blind adherence to a religion which
exacted compliance and obedience, unquestioning to law and
nothing else.

And the Pharisee, that is, the observing Jew of that day, was represented as a villain of the darkest hue, a hypocrite, in spite of the fact that Paul himself said, "I am a Pharisee of the Pharisees." And in spite of the fact that Jesus of himself could have been nothing else but a Pharisee. Now, we have come to a point in the development of the human mind where we can concede that

many ideals may be coexistent, that many religions may be true, that religions may meet the needs of the temperament of certain peoples, differently, and that while one religion may appeal to one group or type of men, another religion equally true may appeal to another type or group of men. So that in my discussion this morning of Judaism and Christianity, I shall endeavor to emphasize the contrast simply to show the radical differences which exist between the two religions, the world view or the life view in the philosophy of life which each religion maintains or preaches.

I accept the Jewish interpretation, but I can readily see where others would accept the Christian interpretation. All religions serve the purpose of Providence, -- Christianity, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, all consistent religions which have in the past and which do today inspire the lives of men and women and help them to reach after the higher and nobler things of life; all religions are good and all religions serve the purposes of the Divine. We choose one; others choose another. In my last lecture on a Jewish view of Jesus, I endeavored to bring out the following facts: first, that the teachings of Jesus are essentially Jewish; that Jesus himself was a law observing, loyal, faithful Jew; that Jesus did not mean to found any new sect or religion; that Jesus himself did not think of bringing a new dispensation or establishing a new covenant, or indicting a new testimony; that Jesus,

if he claimed to be the Messiah, or if his disciples claimed for him the role of a Messiah, it was more a Messiah in a mundane or earthly sense: that is, God appointed man, a descendant of the house of David, who would be the us percuent aid of God and bring about the great day of redemption for which every loyal Jew of that day prayed. And the proof of that may be found in the fact that for a hundred years there existed in Judea a sect known as the Judeal Christians who believedin only one God, who obeyed the law, who met in synagogues and observed the ritual and the holidays just as any other Jew of that day, and yet regarded Jesus as the Messiah . And that same group of Jewish Christians looked upon the teachings of Paul, which we shall discuss in a moment, as heresy and regarded Paul as an apostate.

Now, who was responsible for the introduction into Christianity of those dogmas concerning the divinity of Jesus, the dogma concerning salvation through Jesus, the dogma concerning the bringing of a new dispensation, the dogma concerning the abrogation of the old law? Who was responsible for it if Jesus was not? Biblical science has established the fact that Paul was in very truth the founder of Christian theology, and Christianity today.

Orthodox, and, in a sense, liberal Christianity, must be traced back in its dogma and in its theology not to Jesus but to Paul. Paul was a Jew--Saul, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia. Paul was not a great Hebrew student.

He was in all probability not a disciple of Gamaliel, as the new testament would have it, but he was greatly steeped in the learning and in the lore of Greek philosophy--Hellenism--of his day. Tarsus, next to Alexandria, was the greatest center of Greek culture and Greek religious ideas in the first century of the common era.

Now, you must not get the impression that the people of those days were heathen, benighted, ignorant, to whom Christianity came as a new revelation. There was an intense cultural and intellectual activity along the Mediterranean littoral, in Asia Minor, in Palestine, in northern Africa, in Greece, from which Christianity drew inspiration while it gave inspiration to it. In those days a theology which was very common and accepted by many people regarded God as a transcendant being far removed from the world of men, a God of pure intellect, a God who comes very seldom in contact with the world. Now. to bring God nearer to the universe, the philosophers among Greeks and among the Jews evolved the concept of a logos, or the Word, -- the Hebrew memra -- an emanation from God, a sort of an intermediary between the universe of men, of things, and the far removed creative spirit of God. That was a metaphysical notion at first, pure and simple. In Philo , for example, the Jewish philosophy of the first century, the idea of the logos, of the Word as an emanation from God, as an intermediary between man and God receives its highest expression. They

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believed in those days that the world was intrinsically bad, evil; that men were sunk in a cesspool of corruption; that the flesh was evil, and that men cannot come to God except by and through the intermediary, this logos, this word, this wisdom of God, by taking it into themselves, and unto themselves, and being reborn, as it were, by absorbing this spirit, this emanation from God, who they called in metaphorical expression the Son of God, or the child of God--by taking that unto themselves, and, in a sense, into themselves, only in that way can men cleansed themselves of their corruption, of their sin, of matter, of the physical world, and reach the purity which can bring them nearer unto God.

Now, I emphasize this because unless you understand this dualism which existed in the minds of men at that day, you will fail to understand dogmatic Christianity entirely. The logos, this Word, this wisdom, was sent into the world to save men from their sins, to slay the so-called satan, and only so far as you accepted this Son of God, this logos, were you saved, and unless you accepted him, you could not be saved.

Now, I briefly outlined to you a certain theology that was prevalent in Asia, in Palestine, in Africa in the first century of the common era. It was common to the peoples of that day. It was known as agnosticism, from the Greek word "agnos" which means knowing and having a knowledge of the inner things of the spiritual world, a knowledge which was denied to the common, average man.

Then the notion also existed that this logos, this Word, this Son of God, itself a Divinity, in order to save men from death, which was an evil likewise, had itself to die, to be sacrificed, -- to die to overcome death, to be resurrected. and thereby all who accepted the logos were in a sense saved from death and born anew. ideas were in the air-Greek philosophy, Persian philosophy -- there was an admixture of philosophic notions in the air which Paul absorbed and took unto himself. Mind you. Paul never knew Jesus, never saw esus. Paul saw Jesus, only, as he says, in a vision on his way to Damascus to persecute certain men who believed that Jesus was the Christ. It was while on his way to Damascus that he saw the vision and the truth was revealed unto him. Paul then took this historic figure of Jesus, of which he knew very little and stripped it of all its humanity and injected into it all those Hellenic or pagan notions concerning the logos or the Son of God that prevailed in that day. So that the figure of Jesus as the Christ, and Jesus as the Savior, and Jesus as Divine had its origin not in Jewish thought but in Greek--Hellenic--gnostic spaculation.

Now, the idea is that trinity also originated at that time; and it, too, was a pagan notion. And when I say "pagan" I do not mean to say that I disparage that notion; I mean pagan in contradistinction to Christianity.

Primitive religion believed in triadsof divinity, -- a heaven God, an earth God, and an offspring, a Son of God.

There was Baal, the father diety, and Astarte, the mother diety, and Tammuz, the son diety. Among the Babylonians they had Marduk , the father diety, and Ishtar.the mother diety, and Tammuz, the son diety. Among the Greeks they had Zeus, the god diety, tenus, the mother diety, and Adonis, the son diety. So that the notion of triads. of trinity, was a very common and papular one among the religions of antiquity. And Christianity in endeavoring to reach the peoples of antiquity was compelled to compromise with them, and in the course of time the idea of trinity was also injected into Christianity, God, the Father, Jesus, the Son, the Holy Spirit, -- the Mother Spirit -- the Holy Ghost. So that you see the trinity idea was merely a return to the ancient ideas of triads, of trinities, which Judaism through its prophets attached eight centuries before the birth of Jesus.

Please remember this: Paul was essentially a missionary. He is called the apostle of the heathers.

Paul was an enthusiast, he was completely absorbed in the great ideal of Jesus, the Christ, and he was ready to preach unto all the peoples, absolutely sincere, absolutely devoted; but every missionary, if he desires to be effective, must compromise. That is why Judaism has, for two thousand years, refused to become a missionary religion; because we found from experience that in endeavoring to proselytize we must make concessions, we must compromise with existing notions and ideals and theologic things/which cannot be uprooted in a day. Paul

endeavored to do it and failed, with the result that the Christianity which he preached was perhaps only one-third Jewish and two-thirds pagan. When the ethics of Christianity remained to a very large degree Jewish, the theology, the dogma, was almost entirely un-Jewish. That accounts for the introduction of these ideas, of which I spoke into Christianity and for their acceptance. They were common notions in the heathen world; they were very common. Paul merely accepted them and gave them a new name, and perhaps a slight modification and interpretation.

Now, then, Judaism, does not repudiate or reject the teachings of Jesus in so far as the teachings are Jewish. I enumerated two or three of the teachings of the Sermon of the Mount last week which Judaism cannot accept, but in the main Judaism does not reject the teachings of Jesus any more than it rejects the teachings of any great teacher of prophet. What we do reject, what we cannot accept is the Christian theology as developed not by Jesus but by Paul and the school of Paul, by the apostles after the death of Jesus. And the reasons why we cannot accept them are as follows -- I shall speak of only three or four and I shall be through: first of all. Paul. in theology, contends that Jesus is the Christ. And it were best for us, when we speak of Jesus definitely to have in mind that while we as Jews can speak of him as Jesus, we cannot speak of him as Jesus

Christ, because we do not regard him as the Messiah or as a Messiah any more than you would regard anyone as the Messiah or as a Messiah. Paul, or the theology of Paul, maintains that Jesus abrogated the law, the ritual, as found in the old testamentas developed by the rabbis of his day. The law bringeth sin into the world. The law is the cause of great sin. Jesus brought new grace. new dispensations and new salvation into the world only by faith as a man saved and not by law. First of all the Jewish ideal of faith and the Christian ideal of faith differ. Judaism believes in faith in the sense that man believes in God, an implicit, straightforward, honest belief of the existence of a creative spirit in the universe that guides and controls our destiny. While science is not ready to establish that fact, it is not ready to contradict it. It is a belief in the existence of God. But Christianity asks us to believe in something else. It asks us to believe in an historic fact -- that at a certain time, at a certain place, an emanation from the divine spirit was incarnated and became flesh, and that this divine being incarnated was crucified and buried and then resurrected, and through the resurrection the children of man who believe in him are saved from hell and damnation. In other words, we are asked to believe in a fact, in an historic fact. Now, if science and biblical criticism say that this so-called fact is after all only a mythological notion common to the peoples of those days, what remains of our faith then? Nothing. In other words,

even in the idea of faith, that is different between Jewish and Christian faith, you are not asked as a Jew to believe in any historic event; you are asked merely to believe as an expression of your own soul that there is in the world an intelligent spirit creating and guiding the universe. But Judaism goes a step farther. Through faith alone, a man is not saved. It is not so much what you believe that counts; it is what you do. It is your conduct; it is your righteousness; it is your conduct through righteous laws that determines your character. Christianity says you cannot be saved unless you believe in Jesus as the Christ. Judaism has never maintained it; Judaism has never set any such thing; Judaism said that even he who is not a Jew and who lives according to the principles of morality and ethics is a child of God and will inherit immortality.

A little while ago I came across in one of our papers this interesting item. I read it merely as an illustration mean the point I make--the difference between Jewish faith and Christian faith. Doctor Joseph Gile, who is president of a certain theological seminary, speaking at a conference of world evangelists at the Moody Bible Institute, declared that "a hero's death in battle was not necessarily a passport to heaven.

Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone. It would be pleasant to believe that the spirit of the soldiers who die in battle goes straight to heaven." It would be pleasant, but it is not so. Now, let me put alongside of -19-

of two thousand years ago: "The righteous among the gentiles will inherit the world to come". The rabbi lived two thousand years ago. This reverend lives today. Judaism has never appropriated heaven for itself and put a bar of on it for everyone else. It is remarkable, is it not, how every religion, as soon as it is founded, immediately gets a lease or mortgage on heaven? I don't know of any finer passport to heaven, if heaven exists, than offering one's self upon the altar of one's country. I wish I were as sure of my immortality as this soldier boy who was immolated for the sake of an ideal.

Do you know what that statement means? It simply means that the hundreds and thousands of Jewish boys who died upon the fields of France cannot go to heaven. Why? Because they refused to believe in a certain historic event which neither their minds nor science nor history establishes. That is the first difference.

of which I spoke. Unless you believe that the world is really bad, corrupt, it has no place in it for Jesus. Christ was sent into the world to save men from their sinfulness, of their corruption. If you doubt this dualism, if you say that evil and good are both the products of God, there is no need of a saviour to redeem you from evil. Now, Christianity believes just as the pagan philosophers of those days maintained--that men labor under an original sin, dating away back to

Adam. Adam committed theterrible crime of disobedience, and because of that crime sin and death came to the world. and you and I today, thousands of years after that alleged event, are still laboring under that terrible original sin, and unless for this figure that came into the world to sacrifice himself in order to redeem you, you would still be under this terrible burden of an original sin. Judaism does not believe in an original sin. Judaism says that man is imperfect, that life is a proof of imperfection. If men were perfect, progress, evolution, life would be meaningless. Every idea, every effort that you make, every aspiration that you entertain is proof positive that your life as it is has yet been perfect. But it does not mean that you are sinful, that you have been plunged in the morass of sin, and that you yourself cannot save your self from that sin except throughthe intercession and the sacrifice of another being. Judaism says. "God created the light and created the darkness. created the good and created the evil." Judaism says that life is a result of the meeting and the conflict between these two principles in your life -- that you grow and develop through the evils that beset you: that you rise to the higher level and touch the throne of God on the rung of sin, crime, failure, evil and disappointments.

Evil is the reverse of the coin of which good is the obverse. I shall speak more of that in detail when I come to discuss the question of Judaism and

Christian Science. But for the present suffice it to state that Judaism does not regard the body or the world as sinful. Judaism says, "Thou, O Lord, createst the body: Thou . O Lord, createst the soul; and both are of God, and both are beautiful, and both are good, and both help us to the higher life." We do not believe in an original sin, and therefore we do not believe in the need of a saviour to save us from an original sin. The idea of a saviour, of a man sacrificing himself, has in the background the institution of sacrifice. In the olden days if a man sinned he brought an ox or cow as a sacrifice and thereby sins were atoned. Now, if humanity sinned, if humanity were steeped in sin, it needed some tremendously big sacrifice to save it from sin. and so God gave His only begotten son as a sacrifice to save it. We do not believe in the very idea of saving. Men do not need saving because they are not lost. Men need to grow and to develop, and that growth and that development can come from their own efforts, from their own initiative, from their own will, from their own souls. It is part of humanity; and he does not need an outside intercession or an outside atonement to save it.

Another difference between Judaism and Christianity is the idea of mediation. This logos idea was that
God was far removed from the world and man, who was so
small and insignificant. We do not accept this metaphysical speculation as truth. We believe the whole
world is full of God. He is here, there, everywhere.

He is within you, and you do not need to come through a mediator to God. You can come to Him directly through your soul, through your soul and through your higher ambition, and through your prayers. God is with you; God is near into you: God is near unto all those that call upon him. He is not far and distant. So the idea of a mediator cannot be accepted in Judaism. dols Judaism defferfrem Cheir baut as to

Finally is the idea of the Messiah. Orthodox Judaism believes in a Messiah, in a personal Messiah. Orthodox Judaism still believes in the coming of a personal Messiah, that is, a man inspired by God to bring back the children of Israel to their former greatness in the land of their forefathers. Liberal Judaism has given up completely the idea of a Messiah. We say that the idea of a personal Messiah was one of those fixed ideas of the early days which humanity today is gradually shaking off. do not believe that humanity will be perfected in one day by the coming of one man. We believe that humanity will have to travel the road of life for thousands and tens of thousands of years before it will approach anywhere near perfection; and as long as humanity lives so long will it be imperfect; for only death is perfect. Life is always imperfect. So that the idea of a Messiah coming and establishing the kingdom of God, making all men good, and even establishing paradise on earth is a traditional idea that appealed to the vivid, imaginative man, to the oriental man, but could not appeal to the plain, cold, out to

rational mind of the man of the twentieth century. We must give up completely and forever the idea of the Messiah just the same as science was compelled to give up, after centuries of terrible struggle, the idea that you can find some stone that would suddenly transform the baser metals into gold. You can't do it. And you can't find in spiritual alchemy a person or a principle that would suddenly transform the baser metals of life into absolute goodness and perfection. That must come with centuries and cons of trinities of development. if it ever does come. Humanity has a history of perhaps a hundred thousand years back of it. It will have a history of perhaps hundreds of thousands of years in front of it. The process of evolution will never be interrupted, and the idea of a man or an emissary of God or divinity itself coming to break the process of evolution and establishing suddenly a new world is an idea which we must give up and which we do give up. We might speak of a golden age of the world when the knowledge of God covers the earth as the waters of the sea cover it. We might dream of that age. It is a beautiful goal; it is a beautiful idea; but if it ever does come about, it will not come about through the intervention of man, but through the struggles and the sacrifices and crucifixion of millions of men and of tens of thousands of ages and generations, the accumulative effect of the agonized struggles of millions of God's -15children.

No: Judaism and Christianity differ radically upon certain facts of human life. Judaism expresses service, life, conduct. Christianity expresses salvation, redemption from sin through the acceptance of a belief in this God-man, crucified for the sake of the world. a verse Judaism expresses this world, this worldness. Christianity expresses other worldness. The motive of the preachings of Jesus, the motive of the preachings of Paul, the apostle, what was it? Prepare, for this world is coming to an end. The kingdom of God is among you: it is coming; it is near. They expected every moment this cataclysm , this revolutionary change, and so they cared nothing for this world. This world was sinful; this world was beset with evil. Tet us leave it with its cares and responsibilities. Let us forsake everything because the new world is coming. We shall belong to the kingdom of heaven. It dreamed of other worldliness. while Judaism has always hoped, labored and served for this world. This is the place where men live and toil: this is the place where men must attain perfection if that is possible. The other world, if it come, may be a promise; it may be a dream; it may be a hope; it may be Mueron a fallacy, it may not exist. But that does not excuse man from hating his duties and his responsibilities in this world. God is here and man is here, and man's destiny is to improve this world by means of thekingdom of God. -16Judaism has insisted upon human dignity.

Christianity has insisted upon human sinfulness. We say that every man is a son of God. Every man is a child of God; every man contains the spirit of God into himself. Christianity has endeavored to give the impression that man is so small, so insignificant, so lost, that there was need of a son of God to save and to redeem him.

These are differences, radical and vital, and yet in spite of those differences, in spite of the fact, that I, as a Jewish Rabbi, champion the cause of Judaism as against Christianity, and that my people have for thousands of years done it and shall continue to do so for thousands of years more, we yet recognise in Christianity an instrument of Cod. Christianity after all has made Jewish ideals more universally accepted. What Judaism could not do, Christianity succeeded in doing. It took the ethics of the Jew, the idea of God, as a God of righteousness, and have loved and spread it throughout the western hemisphere. It is not Judaism pure and unadulterated; it is not our idea of religion, and yet it is an approach, a very great approach to the ultimate glory when God shall be one and His name shall be one.

The rains fall from heaven upon the mountain top and there they separate; some run an easterly course and run into the ocean, and some run a westerly course and run into the ocean. But the waters ultimately return to heaven whence they came. An inspiration which came from God to our people descended, and the water sheat

divided it; some of it ran east and some west; some accepted one interpretation of life and others another. But after all the waters run back to the ocean of human life and human experience, and after all their source is God. Judaism and Christianity may continue their great work in the world, each one following its life, each one doing the will of the Father who is in heaven.



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