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Reel
177

Box
65

Folder
407

Jewish Education Committee, 1936.

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I wish to congratulate the Jewish Education Committee for the great services which it is rendering the cause of Judaism in America. It is a most necessary and valuable agency in strengthening the cause, in improving the technique and in raising the standards of Jewish education. Its achievements during its relatively short period of existence are most hopeful and encouraging indications of what it is likely to achieve in the oncoming years. The establishment of the Jewish Education Committee was evidence of great foresight on the part of its founders, and is a product of logical and constructive thought.

I take it that by Jewish education we all mean education in the Jewish religion, in Torah. It means that, or it means nothing at all. The sole purpose of education among our people throughout the ages was to teach men to live according to the Law. Our people, of course, knew of Hochmah - secular knowledge - alongside of Torah - religious instruction - and except in certain periods and places were not opposed to Hochmah. Many welcomed it and many made significant contributions to it. But the Jewish communal schools were devoted primarily and, in most instances, exclusively to Torah. Whatever Hochmah was taught was woven into the pattern of Torah. Torah was primary. Without it all secular knowledge was regarded as vain and even dangerous. "If there is no Torah there can be no Hochmah." And the very foundation of Hochmah itself was reverence for God and the spiritual order. It was not learning as such which our people extolled, or study or scholarship, but learning the will of God and studying the word of God.

Torah did not mean abstract religious philosophy or theology. It meant instruction in moral conduct based on divine authority. Our forefathers were not great philosophers. It was nearly 1500 years after Socrates and

Plato before we produced our first important systematic philosopher. But centuries before the time of Athenian philosophers our people produced Moses, Micah, Jeremiah and Isaiah. "The Hebrew," to quote Zangwill, "was never a speculator (about God) nor a reflector, but always an actor. God was not to be figured in thought or art, but to be obeyed."

Jewish education was an experience in, and preparation for, modern living in the sight of God. Its texts were the Bible and its rabbinic derivatives. Its locale was the Synagogue. Its mood was piety. Its devotions were the prayer book. Its spiritual exercises were Holy Day observances. Its songs were the psalms.

The Jewish world outlook in the past was in many ways like that of all other peoples, but in some ways it was different. And it is these differences which gave and still give distinction to our culture. The wise Greeks produced no bible. In Athens, Rome or Alexandria there were no prophets although there were many soothsayers and oracles. No people resisted Hellenism in the Levantine world of the second century except the Jews, who preferred Torah to a Torahless Hochmah.

Neither the idealist Plato, nor the rationalist Aristotle, nor the mystic Plotinus, was in any way emotionally involved in the ethical system which they elaborated. Their moral speculations resulted in no compelling sense of mission, no call to champion the cause of the poor, the slave, the dispossessed. No Greek or Roman ever died for his religion. Socrates, as Carlyle pointed out, was terribly at ease in Zion.

It was said of the Persians (and the Jews lived within the Persian Empire for centuries and learned much from them) that the sum of their education consisted in teaching their youth to ^{ride} write, to shoot with the bow, and to speak truth. Truth-speaking is a high moral virtue. But it is not enough. One must also learn to do right. The schools of our forefathers did not teach their youth to ^{ride} write or to shoot, although they did come, after a time, to teach them a trade.

But they did teach their youth to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God. This kind of Jewish education, the classic and traditional kind, the only kind known to our people under the name of Jewish education, is sorely needed in our day. As a people we need not be admonished or encouraged about the importance of secular education. We are avid for it. Our people are crowding all the secular schools and colleges of the land. The Jewish mind is making brilliant contributions today in nearly every field of human thought. But our youth needs religion and our adults need religion. This entire generation of Jews and non-Jews alike has gone from one disaster to another for lack of it.

Is it not becoming increasingly clear that what has been tragically missing in our civilization now in the Second World War within a quarter of a century is the compelling and unifying faith in the great spiritual goals which religion long ago set for mankind, and towards which all science and education and democracy should have made their contribution? But mankind lost sight of these goals, and therefore human progress has today lost all clear direction.

Men forgot in our day what the spiritual guides of mankind have always stressed, but faith in God is the strongest bulwark of a free society. The democratic dogma in the modern world has an exclusively religious origin. Political freedom came to the Western world as a result of a long struggle for religious freedom, and not vice versa. Modern democracy was born in the struggle for religious freedom in the 16th and 17th centuries. The demand for religious freedom of those days soon expressed itself in demands for other forms of freedom. Political and economic rights were demanded by humble people. By what authority? They had no authority. In whose name did the rebellious peasants speak? In the same name and in the same authority that the ancient prophets of Israel challenged the kings, noblemen and the powerful of their day. They spoke in the name of God. They appealed to His ^{revealed} ~~revealed~~ word in the Bible. All men were equal because God made all men equal. The things which

they asked for were the things which the Bible conceded to them. The social revolutions of the 16th century, which were drenched in the blood of 100,000 peasants, were religiously inspired.

Religious inspiration carried over into the American Revolution. The spiritual motives of our revolution are directly traceable to the doctrines of the religious rebels and enthusiasts who carried them from the continent to England, and thence to the American colonies.

When the Founding Fathers wrote into the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident - that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," they were giving political expression to seminal religious Anabaptist doctrines. When they countered the claim of the Divine Right of Kings with the claim of the Divine Right of People to resist the tyranny of kings, when they proclaimed that resistance to tyrants is obedience to God, when they engraved upon the Liberty Bell the Biblical proclamation: "And Thou shalt proclaim freedom throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof," or when they placed on the first seal of the newborn republic of the United States the figure of Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, they were marshalling religious truth, religious authority and religious tradition to underwrite and sanction their political revolution.

Struggles for human freedom, uninspired by a living faith in God, often lead mankind to disaster. ~~In recent years, Russia attempted to build a free and happy society without God. It succeeded only in forging a dictatorship and an enslaved society.~~ Fascist and Nazi states in Europe also sought to build happier, socialized communities on the basis of a Godless materialism. They succeeded only in effecting, with the aid of rubber truncheons and concentration camps, a brutally regimented and terrorized society. A society achieves real renewal only through inner spiritual renewal. If freedom is ever to speak again everywhere, its speech, to quote Heine, will have to be Biblical.

Democracy shrivels when its religious source dries up.

Thoughtful men are coming to understand that mankind's way back to freedom is the way which leads forward to God.

In the same way, and even more earnestly, are thoughtful Jews reaching out today for the religious vision of Jewish life. For ours is a double measure of disillusionment and a double measure of misfortune. More than any other people do we require today the everlasting arms of a great religious conviction to sustain us.

To thoughtful Jews it is becoming increasingly clear that there are no substitutes in Jewish life for religion. Neither philanthropy nor culture nor nationalism is adequate for the stress and challenge of our lives. All these interests can and must find their rightful place within the generous pattern of Judaism. But the pattern must be Judaism, the Judaism of the Torah, the synagogue and the prayer book, the Judaism of the priest, the prophet, the saint, the mystic and the rabbi, the Judaism which speaks of God, and the worship of God, and the commandments of God and the quest of God.

There have been many false prophets of "Ersatz" Judaism in our midst who have frequently misled our people. There were those professional social-workers for example, who announced that a full complement of scientifically administered hospitals and orphanages and other social agencies was a sufficient "vade mecum" for the Jewish people, and that the synagogue and the religious school were quite unnecessary. At best they were to be tolerated only as a concession to those who still take such things seriously, and in order not to create unpleasant friction in the community. Such social workers had many ready adherents among our would-be assimilated and rich Jews.

There were certain Jewish educators who resented the intrusion of religion in their ultra-scientific curricula. Judaism, they said, was not a religion, but a way of life - that is to say, their way of life, which of course, was non-religious or anti-religious. Jewish education should, according to them, not be

religious at all, only nationalistic and linguistic. At best the religious note might be smuggled in, but only as a concession to old-timers and cranks who do not know any better.

There were those Jewish spokesmen who offered Jewish nationalism as a substitute for Judaism, forgetting that nationalism as such, unredeemed by a moral vision and responsibility, has sadly fragmentized our world, provincialized its peoples and is driving nations madly from one disaster to another; forgetting, further, that there is a widely-felt and widely-answered need for religion and religious institutions even among peoples whose national life is already fully established, who are in their own lands and who are possessed of a rich national culture. Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah felt the need to preach religion - God and obedience to God's moral law - to their people even though Israel in their day was established as a nation in its own land and spoke its own language. ~~It is not possible to brush aside the spiritual needs of the Jews in the Diaspora.~~ The upbuilding of a Jewish national home in Palestine is one great, urgent and historically inescapable task of Jewry, and Jewish education should stress this fact. The upbuilding of Jewish religious life in America and elsewhere throughout the world, inclusive of Palestine, is another. One is no substitute for the other. One is not opposed to the other.

It is folly and worse at this desperate and critical moment in our history to draw misleading distinctions between Judaism and Zionism, to suggest that prophetic Judaism is anti-nationalist, or that the universal ethical teachings of Judaism demand that the Jewish people shall never again reconstruct its national life in the historic national home where these universal ethical teachings were first promulgated. The total Zionist program is the fulfillment of prophetic Judaism. And our great spiritual leaders throughout the ages always spoke of a twofold task for Israel: the task of spiritual return and that of national restoration. The anti-nationalism of a handful of Modern Reform rabbis is a very recent and an altogether alien importation into Jewish life. It was first pro-

claimed in 19th century Germany, and having been completely bankrupt there, it is now being offered again as something sensationally new to the Jews of America - with an eye to the non-Jew.

All these false prophets of "Ersatz" Judaism have had their clamorous hour among us, or are having it for the moment, but their hour is definitely over. Thoughtful Jews are turning to the sure and classic highways of Jewish life. What our people need today is not the innovation or renovation or reformation or reconstruction of Judaism, but the conversion of the Jew to his faith. Tshuvah - "Return" - that is the note which the world's great Judgment Day and our own vast tribulation is sounding in the camp of Israel. It is no longer a question of less ritual or of more, of Reform, Conservatism or Orthodoxy, but of Godlessness, secularism and materialism which have blighted our people, along with all other peoples, but which we, because of our unique position in the world, can least of all afford. Neither Orthodoxy, Conservatism nor Reform has scored any significant victory in our day, and life is now attacking them all. Organizationally, Reform Judaism has not only failed to make progress in recent years, but it has actually retrogressed in relation to the increased Jewish population in the United States. The ranks of Conservatism and Orthodoxy have been replenished largely through immigration. Nor can Reform Judaism hope to save or vitalize itself by furbishing up anew its traditional opposition to Jewish nationalism. The bitterest foes of Zionism are laymen who never enter our Temples. Their opposition is motivated not by religion or by any consistent and worthy philosophy of Jewish life and destiny, but by sheer escapism. Nor will Conservative and Orthodox Judaism save or vitalize themselves through the mere championing of Jewish nationalism. Nor is Jewish philanthropy or civic protective activities adequate for the spiritual emergencies of our people. The former is only a phase of our religion, the latter only a phase of the world's irreligion. Our lay-leaders would do well to turn from their all-out absorption in relief and defense and devote more of their thought and energy to the spiritual and educational needs of their people, who, knowing

less and less of their people's life, history and literature, are losing more and more their perspective and their morale.

The answer today must be Judaism - that which is carved out of the everlasting rock - that which is neither old nor new - that which burned on the lips of Isaiah and sang in the heart of the Psalmist, that which Moses heard in the burning bush, and Hillel shared with the proselyte - that which satisfied the souls of generations of our ancestors who walked in varied garb under many skies, who knew all the bitterness and suffering which we, their descendants, are coming to know, but who knew much else besides.

We have an eternal and sufficient truth which alone can stay the hearts and uplift the spirits of our ravaged generation of Jews, and into the hearts of this desolate generation, we must try to bring that healing and strengthening. Many will not listen to us. We must not pursue the many and distort our message and cast about for new techniques to please their tastes. God singled out our people for the burden of His truth. "Not because you were many...for you are the smallest among the nations." Isaiah, too, was baffled by his generation which was stricken in every part of its body like ours, whose whole head was sick and whose whole heart was faint, yet persisted in straying away more and more. But, as in the days of Isaiah, there will always be the remnant who may be made to understand the meaning and the healing of a Religion of Return. We should offer our people the refuge of their historic faith, a faith meet for mature men, which holds out no promise of quick victory, no escape into illusions or self-delusions, and no immunity from sorrow and smiting, but which does offer men the dignity of working with God in a world which He created for man to dwell in on terms defined by Him, and the comfort of belonging to a brave and gallant band of men who from the days of Abraham to this marched through the long centuries beaconing the world's darkness with the torch of their faith in God and in justice, freedom, brotherhood and peace.

The faith of Return and Good Deeds which we must offer them they must make

their own by means of the proved technique of Jewish religious life; learning, study, contemplation, the disciplines of the devotional life - prayer and religious practices and observances - few or many - it does not matter much - old or new - that too does not matter much - just so there goes with them the Intent, active and transforming and the disciplines of the ethical life - the doing of good deeds pleasing to God. There is no other technique! There never has been. The Jewish layman must himself actively seek God. Seeking God is the most common term applied to religion and the religious man in our Bible. The synagogue and the rabbi can only help the layman in his quest. They can do no more.

And our religious schools are indispensable agencies in this program of religious revival and spiritual renewal. Jerusalem was destroyed, say our rabbis, when there were no longer such schools within the city and children were no longer instructed in them.

