



Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated.

Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

Reel
44

Box
14

Folder
668

New Certainties and Old Truths, 1956.

NEW CERTAINITIES AND OLD TRUTHS

Reflections on the Theme of "Inherit The Wind"

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver - Oct. 21, 1956

This is a service of firsts. It is my first opportunity to speak to you during a regular Sunday Morning Service, and the theme which we have chosen to mull over this morning is also with a first - the first chapter of the First Book of our Bible, the richly poetic and compactly philosophic work, those few verses which we read this morning. Our Rabbis held that these thirty-four lines of the Bible were as it were the chief pillars on which the Bible rests. Imbedded in the rock, in the substance of this text they found the five philosophical religious principles, the five affirmations of faith which they held to be the esse - the quintessence of our Jewish outlook on life.

"In the beginning God created" - in Hebrew but three short words

* * but these are the central pillar of our Jewish belief. God is, God is all power, God is the power which can create, God is the power which has created this life. We are not/^{here}because of a chance juxtaposition of inorganic matter. Our lives are not purposeless. We are not at the mercy of chance. You will not find in the whole scheme of Jewish thought any pessimism, any fatalism, any throwing up of the hands, any feeling that our lives, our civilization is a worthless thing. Something that has come into being by chance and can disappear from this earth equally quickly and equally by chance. Man was created for a purpose and our purpose in life is to uncover the divine purpose and to make our lives fulfill His will. God is. God is the creator. And God saw all that he had created and behold it was good.

Here is the second of Judaism's fundamental assertions - the worthwhileness

* Omission of Hebrew

of life - the assumption and the affirmation that life is given us to be enjoyed. Our eyes, the eyes of our teachers, of our Rabbis and our sages have always been fixed on this world - not on the next - on the problems which face us in our daily living and not on gaining for ourselves the secret combination to the lock that opens the Kingdom of Heaven. Life is good. Life is meant to be enjoyed. You will not find among our Jewish sages any feeling that we must repress and suppress our desires to enjoy the beauties and the love which abounds in this life. You will not find monasticism or asceticism among the principles of our faith. Life is good. There is no fatalism among our people. We are optimistic about the future. We feel that this is a good earth and with our hands and our minds working to make it better, it can become a better place in which to live. And because we are optimistic about the future, our faith has always concerned itself with the questions of the market place, has always concerned itself with the prophetic imperative - with winning for our people, all people, social justice, equality, and opportunity to share equally in the bounties which this world has to offer.

"And God created man". Here is the third fundamental assumption and affirmation of Judaism. God created man - singly, alone, sole. "He created man", the Rabbi said, "singly to teach us all a lesson, to teach us that there are no inferior races and no superior races, no inferior peoples and no superior peoples, to teach us that each man, each country, each person whatever his skin, whatever his color, whatever his nationality is equally the son of God, equally the son and descendant of the first man, equally deserving of his share of this earth's bounty." And because all men are brothers, we have imposed upon us as Jews an

overwhelming obligation to work in all causes - whether they be civic or communal or national or international- which have to do with the betterment of the lot of all of our brothers.

"And God created man and he created man in his own image - after his own likeness - created He him." Here is Judaism's fourth major assumption. The affirmation that we are not simply frail flesh, that we are not an empty vessel, that we have more than enough potential and talent and capacity within us to become more than the beast, more than the animal, close to the God who created us. Judaism assumes that in each of us there is a spark of the divine and that life consists, our duty in life consists in fanning this spark into a flame, in maturing, in realizing our talents, in realizing our capacities, in making use of the wonderful mental and emotional gifts which God has placed in us. Judaism does not teach that we have acquired some taint of original sin, that we are so weak and so fragile that we can achieve nothing. On the contrary it teaches us that we are powerful, that we are co-workers with God and ~~the~~ⁱⁿ work of His creation.

And finally - "And God rested on the seventh day. And God rested on the seventh day and hallowed it." This, too, is a fundamental assumption of our people. In the days in which the Bible was written, ninety percent of mankind was enslaved. There was no thought given to their inner needs, to their leisure, to their own human needs and human desires. They were worked without thought of their basic human rights. And when the Bible emancipated the right of each and every man ~~for~~^{to} a day for himself, this was a challenging moral and social assumption. This was part of the prophetic crusade of our people. Now, today, this doctrine of one day in seven of rest hardly seems shocking, hardly seems forward looking. We have

another problem. Our problem is that we have too much leisure. Our problem is to use constructively the leisure at our hands. And yet, this assumption remains that Judaism is concerned with every legitimate program for the betterment of the common lot, that Judaism is concerned with the welfare and the well-being of each and every man who toils here on this earth, that the Pulpit and the Temple is not above, beyond, superior to the problems of everyday life, that though it concerns itself with matters spiritual its ultimate end is to concern itself and to improve the material lot of man.

~~And our fifth principle comes from the text that "God saw all that he had created - behold it was good." Behold it was good, the good earth.~~

The Rabbis say that the corner stone of Judaism is to be found in this first chapter of our Bible. Here in the very first thirty-four lines of text are to be found the basic principles within which all later Jewish thought operates. But somehow in the last century, men seem to have found that this corner stone of Judaism is chipped and is cracked. They seem to feel that the text of the first chapter of Genesis is no longer the magnificent moral and spiritual challenge which it was felt to be. Why is this so? The first chapter of Genesis tells us that God created this earth in six days. The new knowledge in biology and geology has piled up overwhelming and uncontrovertible evidence that man, for instance, did not come into being until after some billions of years of life had passed. The time table of the first chapter of Genesis is misinformed, is fallacious, is erroneous. And secondly as you read the first chapter of Genesis, you cannot help but feel that whoever was its author held to the view that each species was created singly and separately. God created the trees, then

He created the reptiles, then He created the fish, then He created the mammals, then He created man. There is no necessary interconnection between each of these species. But again the science of biology has told us that there is an interconnection between the simpler and less complex organisms and the higher and more intricate organisms, even between the simplest amoeba and man. Man has in his family tree not only some primitive form of the ape but also mammals, and reptiles, and amphibians, and the fish that inhabit the sea, and even simpler organisms. There is a chain in this in life between all that lives. They are all part of one family. And because men found that some of the scientific detail of the first chapter of Genesis was fallacious, they came to question its whole basic purpose and meaning. Now had they found such errors in say, Shakespeare, had they found that Shakespeare's geography or his anatomy was in error, they would simply have said "Well, you can't expect Shakespeare to have known more about science than was known in his day. After all, ^{it is} his consummate artistry, his mastery of the English language, his poetic genius, his art which endears him to us and which makes him eternally worthwhile." But you cannot say that ~~some~~ felt about the Bible. You cannot simply shrug your shoulders and say "Well, the Bible was wrong in this detail," because to many the Bible was more than simply a work of art, a masterpiece. It was a holy book. It was the revealed word of God. Men asked themselves how can God be wrong? How could God have revealed to us facts which are in error - which are fallacious. Surely God must know all there is to know. Surely He would not have committed error in revealing His word to His chosen people. So, men were troubled. And for the centuries since Darwin first published "His Origin of Species", there has been a quiet battle in the minds of men

to re-orient their position on the worthwhileness of the Bible. Some men threw out the baby with the bath. Some men said that because the Bible is in error as to detail, it is completely worthless. Let us toss ^{it} aside. It is not necessary to the modern day. And some men try to live their lives with blinkers. Some men said that if science is in opposition to the Bible, science is in error. Science must be wrong. And they simply refused to admit the overwhelming mass of evidence as to natural selection and mutation as to the laws of heredity.

Now there is, of course, a middle way. It is the Jewish way. It is the way that holds that all truth is one, and it is simply that we are slowly gaining an awareness of the truth along many ways. It is the way of the old Midrosh. It is the way which sought not the superficial meaning of a biblical text but the gold ore which is buried deep within and which can be understood only when we apply ourselves and our minds to understanding its fullest import. But many men were not prepared for the way of the Midrosh, and the battle has raged for a hundred years in public debate and in private meditation as to the meaning and purpose of our Bible. Now this debate took many forms and it was an honest and an open debate until the men of one side were finally driven so much into a corner, finally had so many of their arguments opposed by facts which they could not controvert, that they resorted as do all too often, men believing that they have a noble cause but believing that their cause is challenged by some ^{new} fact, they resorted to coercion. In March of 1925 the legislature of the State of Kentucky declared it to be a crime to teach the doctrine of evolution in any state supported institution. In March of 1925 the legislators of the State of Kentucky prompted by sincere Bible-believing people, by church-

going men and women, by good men and women, declared it to be a crime to teach what was believed by the scientists of their day to be scientific fact. I suppose that men have a right to any opinion however misguided, however lacking in substance and in basis. But I am sure of this, that no man and no group of men has a right to attempt to coerce others into their belief, and no man and no group of men has a right to deny to the world facts which cast doubt upon their chosen and cherished tenants. The citizens of Kentucky who created this law were among a long skein of honest, well-meaning, well-intentioned but erroneous people who since the days of old have attempted to silence the questioner, silence the doubter in the name of some higher good. After all it was well-intentioned people who ordered that Socrates drink the cup of hemlock because he cast doubt on the Gods of Athens. It was honest, temple-going people who ordered that Jeremiah be cast into chains and ^{put} made Jeremiah in daily peril of his life because he dared to assume that the Temple was not inviolate and that if the people did not change their ways - God, the God even of the Jews - would wreck havoc upon his chosen people. It was honest, well-meaning church-goers who burned the Brunos and silenced the Galileos, who created the index, who have in all ages attempt to create religious censorship, have attempted to deny to the young, to deny to the mind which is grasping and seeking and thinking a right to have presented to and for acceptance or rejection all facts which might bear on an issue.

Now, in 1925 when the state legislature of Kentucky passed this law, this debate for the minds of men took on a much more sinister tone. It was no longer a question of individual belief. It was a question whether the United States, built and based on freedom, was to gain for all of its citizens the freedom of dissemination of information - the freedom to teach and the freedom to learn. In 1925 this law became a cause celebre. In a little town of Dayton a young biology teacher by the

name of Scopes challenged this law, made a test case of this law, and to his side rushed Clarence Darrow ~~of~~ the giant legal mind of this generation, ~~and~~ all the organizations dedicated to civil liberties. They were determined to overthrow this law, to re-assert America's fundamental beliefs in the freedom of information - the freedom of the human being to think and to make up his own mind. The trial was a dramatic one for the opposition, for the well-meaning and well-intentioned Bible believer there was William Jennings Bryan - the great commoner, the greatest orator of his day, ~~four~~^{three} times candidate for the presidency of the United States. A man who perhaps more than any other was able to verbalize and vocalize the sentiments and the feelings of the average American. These two giants met in a dramatic clash and the story of this clash has been re-told for us in the play of Lawrence and Lee which came to Cleveland last week - "Inherit the Wind".

These two authors have well captured the essential point ^{at} and issue - freedom of the fact that this was a struggle for the/human mind and they have shown dramatically how Darrow - Drummond in the play - won for his client, won before the bar of American opinion, re-asserted the/^{basic}American love of freedom and saw to it that the censorship because of religious loyalties was not be imposed upon our religious school system.

The question as to the place that the Bible is to play in our own minds remained moot. America was awakened, perhaps more than she had before, to the necessity of deciding once again what the Bible was, how the Bible should be treated. Was it a holy book to be swallowed whole? Was it plenary inspired by God - each sentence, each word directly

revealed by Him to men? Or was it no more than any other book - any of the hundreds of thousands of books which pour out of our presses each year? Was it perhaps a dangerous book - such a book which could inspire men to all types of excesses in its name?

I would suggest to you that there is an answer - a wonderful answer to the place the Bible should play in our minds. It is the Jewish answer. It is the answer which Judaism has maintained for , 10, three thousands of years. It is an answer based on the Midrosh and based on the Jewish assumption that all truth is one, that religion and science are but the obverse and the reverse of a single coin. The Midrosh, the Rabbis sought to read the Bible, not for what it said on the surface, but what it said deep within. They saw that the inspiration, the grandeur of the Bible, its revealed nature if you will, was^{the fact} that in thirty-four such lines as the first chapter of Genesis a writer, an author could compact a whole way of life, a whole philosophy. This was the miracle of the Bible. And nowhere in Jewish life will you find any opposition to new science, to new learning. In fact whenever an at all observant Jew sees a great mind, whether he be Jew or Gentile, he is asked by our people to say "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has created discernment and wisdom." It is a positive commandment, a mitzvah, to search out the heavens to learn astronomy, to search out the human body to learn anatomy. Judaism has always sponsored and fostered the study of the sciences, and you can search Jewish history and you will not find a single attempt to create an index, a single attempt to impose a rigid or any type of scientific censorship. How can this be? We, too, have an orthodoxy. We, too, have men who believe that the world was

created five thousand seven hundred and sixteen years ago. But these men long since have been used to this Midrashic method. And when the scientists said that the details of the first chapter of Genesis show the limited state of scientific knowledge twenty-five or thirty hundred years ago, our Rabbis were quite prepared to say well, after all, the days mentioned in Genesis are perhaps epochs. We cannot measure them, They represent whole decades, centuries, generations of years. Look how close they pointed, is the story of the progressive evolution of men and of animals as told in Genesis to the story which Darwin and his successors paint for us.

As modern Jews we would reject this symbolism. We would point/^{out} to the fact that the Bible author did not know the theory of evolution, made mistakes, if we are to assume that he did, in the nature of evolution. And we, too, would point to the ethical insights, the moral imperatives deep in the bedrock of this chapter. We, too, would say that this is a great chapter - limited surely, limited by the knowledge of his day - but great with the eternal knowledge which is the knowledge of the human being, of the nature and the relationship of the human being to God, and of the nature of God. Science tells us how the world was formed. Religion tells us how life is to be reformed. Science tells us about the use that man can make of nature. Religion tells us of the use man should make of his character and of his talents. They deal with separate fields. They are not contradictory but complimentary, and I do not know whether Lawrence and Lee, the authors of "Inherit the Wind", were Jewish or not but they came to a Jewish answer when at the very end of the play after all the antagonists and the protagonists had left the stage and Drummond stands there alone, they made Drummond pick up his copy of Darwin's Origin of the Species and look at it and then walk over to the desk of the Clerk of the Courts and pick up the Bible and

look at it, and then bring both books together and bind them in a single parcel for reading on the train. Both books are worth reading. Both are necessary to the development of man. Without religion, science can only speed the destruction of men. Without science, religion is incapable of improving the material lot of men. Each is necessary to the other and as it is said in the Book of Ecclesiastes *

* *. It is good that you should take hold of this point of view and also from this point of view not take away your hand.

Let us take both these books. Both science and religion, both faith and the facts of nature. Let us learn them, let us absorb them, and let us use them wisely. The Bible will reveal to us how man shall live, science will reveal to us the use man can make of ~~the~~ the nature and of the power which surrounds him. There is a great future which both evolution and the Bible put before men. Evolution tells us that we are growing in our strength, growing in our capacity to respond to our environment, that each generation is in a sense a little bit more adept at being human than the previous. Religion paints for us the glorious future of peace and of well-being among men, the glorious future in which men have learned to share with ^{one} another the glories and the bounties of nature when the right of every man shall be to dwell under His vine and his big tree for none need be afraid. Both ~~these~~ disciplines paint for us a glorious future, and if we use both of these disciplines and use them wisely, truly we can make a glorious future for all men.

Amen.

* Omission of Hebrew

This is a source of joy

It made my first opportunity to speak to you during a regular Sunday morning service.

On that day also I had with me a first! The first of our first books of our Bible - those well drawn and pictorially compact verses which are read together the morning - which describe the creation of the world and of life.

2) Genesis I has always been a favorite text among the people of our people. The rabbis held that the first of Genesis was of supreme importance, because they found in it the fundamental affirmation of our faith.

"In the Beginning God Created" in Hebrew 3 words only פָּאָרָא בְּרֵאשִׁית אֱלֹהִים - yet these three words the rabbis found the essential declaration of our faith. There is a God - a single God - an all powerful God - The God who created life and is close to all who live. The God who created man and gave us life for a purpose.

Our world is not the chaos coming together of energy. Our life is not the chaos coming together of organic matter. We live - we are - because our God as purposeful it. Behind the apparent confusion of our world lies God's fixed purpose. That God created us is to reject all philosophies of negation or despair and to affirm the meaningfulness of religious concerns and moral enterprise.

"And God saw that he had created and beheld it was good" after each day of creation, God paused to survey his handiwork and to reflect on what he had done - and after each pause he concludes "Behold it is good". In this refrain the rabbis understood another of God's essential truths - Life is meant to be enjoyed.

unlike many other faiths and philosophies Judaism

does not despair of the life - nor does it concentrate on attention
on the world to come. In the main stream of Jewish thought you will
find neither asceticism nor morality. You will not find any
despairing evaluation of the human situation. You will come across
neither the despairing pessimism of a man in a bunker nor the
hopeless despair of the Kijani.

Judaism affirms the life and quite practically concerns itself with
its improvement and betterment. Judaism's prophetic sense of
social sense and of the equality of opportunity due all men flows
from the conviction with the heart and new. It is a great truth
which God has bequeathed us and we can make it an even
better world by cooperation ^{soul} and vision.

Judaism affirms life. It is not a religion of denials. It is not
a faith which holds simple pleasures and desires to be sinful
to avoid. It opposes vice and indulgence but it does not
equally oppose a unhealthy repression and the denial of all
bodily needs.

Judaism affirms life, therefore it affirms the future. It is
an optimistic faith - a faith which stands opposed to
concealing fears which choke off of despair and fear upon
on man.

"And God created man ^{his own image} in the image of God created he him" -
 there you see that judgment, ~~From the good things~~ and just
 challenge to each man to realize his full potential. In each of us lies
 a spark of divine fire - We can see a capsule of being good & doing
 good or creating beauty - whether it be the beauty of art or the
 beauty of law. Man, as to our faith, is neither depraved nor
 insufficient nor penalized by the taint of some ancestral sin - but a
 free combination of mind and talent and character which can be of great
 service both to himself and to his fellow man.

"And God created man" - ~~He created a single man~~ - To build us
 again a cardinal truth - The truth of human brotherhood - The
 truth that there are no inferior and no superior races - but that
 we have a common heritage and a common obligation to serve & help
 our fellow man regardless of color or creed.

"And God rested on the 7th day" - In such a world there must be
 time for ~~quiet~~ reflection, for refreshment of soul, for relaxation. In
 the days when Genesis I was written - our best was a rivalry of glories
 vying for the place of the sun & the moon - These poor souls were
 made to labor without thought of their rest or well being. The battle
 of the religious man for his share of the good things of life has in this
 century been in large measure one. We have to-day an almost
 diametrically opposite problem: How to make use of large
 amounts of spare time - But the solution remains to remind us
 of ~~divine~~ ^{his models - practical} ~~employees~~ ^{values} ~~to be~~ ^{of} ~~all~~ ^{of} ~~men~~ ^{of} ~~of~~
 it enthusiastic, willingness to participate in organized all spiritual
 programs of social justice.

There were two truths our rabbis found in Genesis I - One truth which
 quite oppositely embodied in the very first II of our Bible - truth
 which was more whole and cut the whole heart of judging
 concern. Because of the riches and just of our ideas it is not
 strange at all that one of our teachers called this text "the corner
 stone of social justice".

many a man of God really with the problem. Many a dramatic public
debate was held.

In 1860 in England Mr. T.H. Murray and the Bishop of Oxford
had a long conversation in a room which had produced more satisfaction
than illumination and proved only that theologians must go on with
and over the problem.

The plan for Bibles was to hold in mind what we wish to
play among the Bible during the preceding decade, the things we
to support we may need. The Protestant Church in 1860
divided between fundamentalist and modernist in the
Church has never allowed the playing comparison of the
to be raised.

In March of 1925 in the U.S. - in the state of Pa. to be precise the
assembly for the main trial was on the day of the
of 1925 was that of K. Promoted by the religious of many
against a man who made it a crime to teach the
in my old notebook is good. What had been a
of our book on a more ancient doctrine,

It is one thing to demand from the pulpit that the
be mistaken - it is quite another to say
you can not depend in your debate - it is quite another to say
and our man's legislation by changing the
laws.

Remember man have a right to believe anything, say that - however
misinformed or distorted their opinion may be - But I know
that no man has a right - however our his of his position
however able to feel his own - It is no man's business
any right to change others to his point of view.

In March of 1925 was a very good one and a reflection of man's
to people of ~~the~~ the day will produce to ignite the
to us means, we can say we are trying to show
and in the name of God to ourselves and to ourselves

