

Sermon

WHAT JUDAISM HAS GAINED BY EXPOSURE TO THE AMERICAN ENVIRONMENT

1. Story re Father Birmingham

his admission that the Catholic Church in Spain had been guilty of intolerance ;

"when the church alligns itself with the political power, its bad for the church".

unusual for a defender of the church to admit that it is capable of major error.

Why did he do so? *what encouraged him to be critical of very high authority*

My response- THE CHURCH, LIKE JUDAISM, AND PROTESTANTISM HAS BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES OF AMERICA AND NO RELIGION BROUGHT TO AMERICA FROM EUROPE HAS FAILED TO BE INFLUENCED BY THE IDEALISM AND THE VALUES OF AMERICA. *Similarly Catholic Ch in Spain influenced by democratic values of France*

2. AMERICA HAS DIMINISHED THE BITTERNESS BETWEEN RELIGIONS.

A. "Brothers Karamazov"- Doestoevsky reveals prejudice against Jews in his novel (The characterization of the Jew in the movie reflects a different viewpoint-American). Doestoevsky's prejudice typical of Europe, esp. of eastern Europe.

1). Jews 2nd class citizens in Eastern Europe; denied equal opp. for education, professions, ~~social~~ social standing. Jewish image in eye of average Xtian- miserly, greedy, slimy person.

2) Reverse prejudice existed. My bubbe- all right to cheat the goyim. The goyishe image in the eye of the average Jew- drunken bum, blood-thirsty, wife-beater, lacking in intelligence. "Shicker is a goy".... *na goyishe up*
IN SPITE OF SOME PREJUDICE EXISTING IN AMERICA, there is certainly much less bitterness. THERE IS A DEFINITE DECLINE IN THE STRENGTH OF THE PREJUDICED IMAGE- more of a tendency to judge a person as an individual, for what he is. So true, that inter-marriage is proceeding apace. *quite fashionable*
(M. Monroe- A. Miller; E. Taylor- M. Todd).

3) New standard- not rel. origin- but financial standing.

3. AMERICA HAS INSPIRED EACH RELIGION TO EMPHASIZE ITS UNIVERSAL TEACHINGS

A. Each rel. has its particularistic and its universalistic aspects.

1) Judaism- claims on ~~one~~ ^{*is particularistic in that it*} one hand that the Jews are the chosen ~~and~~ God, the nearest and dearest to him ; yet on the other hand, it holds that salvation is for all men who obey the basic moral law. *no law has no mission of reaching the nations about the true God*

2) Xty- claims that it , unlike Jud., is a rel. for all men, yet many branches of Xty condemn/those who do not believe in the Messiahship of Jesus.

B. America has encouraged each rel. in its universalistic aspects.

1) Catholic teacher in Boston-recently forced to give up his job by his superiors because he taught that salvation was only obtainable thru the Catholic church- THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN CHURCH DOGMA.- yet in America this kind of chauvinism must be whispered and not preached.

2) Methodism- the largest of Prot. churches in America usually expresses the greatest sympathy towards the Jews and cooperates on the highest level in almost every problem involving inter-rel. relations.

3). America has mothered- the non-denominational religions like Unitarianism and Universalism which speak of brotherhood but not of creed.

4) On the Jewish side- America has mothered Reform Judaism which *in many ways* has sought to de-emphasize the chauvinism implicit in Jud. by declaring that America and not Zion was the Messianic land. While the traditional Jew. prayer-book constantly speaks of the return to Zion, the Reform prayer-book omits all such references. THE IMPRINT OF EARLY AMERICAN IDEALISM UPON JUDAISM THRU ITS REFORM MOVEMENT IS CLEARLY EVIDENT IN THE PRAYER-book.

Let us turn , for example to p. 16,17-
prayer re redemption of Israel- translate Hebrew-
then read English.

compare p. 140, 141- prayer for peace-
read translation of trad. prayer on p. 141,142 of Singer-
compare " of Reform prayer-

NOTE THAT REFORM BOOK CHANGES HEBREW AND COMPARE HEBREW.

Significance: not that Orthodoxy does not have its universalistic elements. It has them in abundance. But in Europe, when the Jews were kept in enforced isolation, it was difficult of them to think and provide even for themselves, much less for allmankind. Consequently, their thoughts wereturned inward , and the people rightly thought of primarily of their own survival.

America, however, has given the Jew, as well as the Xtian, a diff. type of environment. Here, the Jew does not have to worry about where the next meal is coming from, and how to protect himself from the next program. Here he can plumb the depths of his religion and come to its heart. The JEWS from Orthodox homes who became the leaders of Reform Judaism, did nothing but resurrect the teachings of the prophets who lived thousands of years ago. REFORM JUDAISM IS THUS PRIMARILY THE SELECTED TEACHINGS OF THE MORE OPTIMISTIC AND MORE UNIVERSALISTIC OF THE ANCIENT JEWISH TEACHERS. Reform Judaism began in Germany, but it could not survive there. It has thrived in America, however, and today 550 congregations, including our own, belong to this movement which now houses 1/3 of all American Jews.

To be sure Orthodoxy and to a greater extent Conservatism have been influenced by the American environment, but it is Reform Judaism which alone has the right to call itself American Judaism. Tonight we are celebrating the anniversary of the passing of Isaac Mayer Wise who was the dominant figure in the founding of the first college for the training of Rabbis in America. A native of Europe Wise sensed that a new expression of Judaism was needed for this unique land, and he understood that Rabbis trained in Europe could not create this expression. Accordingly, he sponsored the founding of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. American Jews properly should reverence his memory . But Rabbi Wise is not the only hero worthy of our reverence. Were it not for Washington and Jefferson and Paine, and the whole host of thinkers who fashioned our democratic government religion in America might have become merely a replica of what it was in Europe with embittered factions taking shots at each other .

It is the spirit of America which has made possible the resurrection of the greater spirit of Judaism.