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Articles of Faith

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No Fixed Dogmas

In the same sense as Christianity or Islam, Judaism can not be credited with the possession of Articles of Faith. Many attempts have indeed been made at systematizing and reducing to a fixed phraseology and sequence the contents of the Jewish religion. But these have always lacked the one essential element: authoritative sanction on the part of a supreme ecclesiastical body. And for this reason they have not been recognized as final or regarded as of universally binding force. Though to a certain extent incorporated in the liturgy and utilized for purposes of instruction, these formulations of the cardinal tenets of Judaism carried no greater weight than that imparted to them by the fame and scholarship of their respective authors. None of them had a character analogous to that given in the Church to its three great formulas (the so-called Apostles' Creed, the Nicene or Constantopolitan, and the Athanasian), or even to the *Kalimat AsShahadat* of the Mohammedans. The recital of this "Kalimah" is the first of the five pillars of practical religion in Islam, and one converted to Islam must repeat it verbatim; so that among the conditions required of every believer with reference to confession is the duty to repeat it aloud at least once in a lifetime. None of the many summaries from the pens of Jewish philosophers and rabbis has been invested with similar importance and prominence. The reasons for this relative absence of official and obligatory creeds are easily ascertained.

No Need for Creeds in Judaism

The remark of Leibnitz, in his preface to the "Essais de Theodicee," that the nations which filled the earth before the establishment of Christianity had ceremonies of devotion, sacrifices, libations, and a priesthood, but that they had no Articles of Faith and no dogmatic theology, applies with slight modification to the Jews. Originally race-or perhaps it is more correct to say nationality-and religion were coextensive. Birth, not profession, admitted to the religio-national fellowship. As long as internal dissension or external attack did not necessitate for purposes of defense the formulation of the peculiar and differentiating doctrines, the thought of paragraphing and fixing the contents of the religious consciousness could not insinuate itself into the mind of even the most faithful. Missionary or proselytizing religions are driven to the definite declaration of their teachings. The admission of the neophyte hinges upon the profession and the acceptance of his part of the belief, and that t here may be no uncertainty

about what is essential and what nonessential, it is incumbent on the proper authorities to determine and promulgate the cardinal tenets in a form that will facilitate repetition and memorizing. And the same necessity arises wh en the Church or religious fellowship is torn by internal heresies. Under the necessity of combating heresies of various degrees of perilousness and of stubborn insistence, the Church and Islam, were forced to define and officially limit their respective theological concepts. Both of these provocations to creed-building were less intense in Judaism. The proselytizing zeal, though during certain periods more active than at others, was, on the whole, neutralized, partly by inherent disinclination and part ly by force of circumstances. Righteousness, according to Jewish belief, was not conditioned of the acceptance of the Jewish religion. And the righteous among the nations that carried into practise the seven fundamental laws of the covenant with Noah and his descendants were declared to be participants in the felicity of the hereafter. This interpretation of the status of nonJews precluded the development of a missionary attitude. Moreover, the regulations for the reception of proselytes, as developed in course of time, prove the eminently practical, that is, the noncreedal character of Judaism. Compliance with certain rites baptism, circumcision, and sacrifice is the test of the wouldbe convert's faith. He is instructed in the details of the legal practise that manifests the Jew's religiosity, while the profession of faith demanded is limited to the acknowledgement of the unity of God and the rejection of idolatry (Yorei De'ah, Germ, 268, 2). Judah haLevi ("Cuzari," i. 115) puts the whole mat ter very strikingly when he says:

"We are not putting on an equality with us a person entering our religion through confession alone [Arabic original, *bikalamati*=by word]. We require deeds, including in that term self-restraint, purity, study of the Law, circumcision, and the performance of other duties demanded by the Torah."

For the preparation of the convert, therefore, no other method of instruction was employed than for the training of one born a Jew. The aim of teaching was to convey a knowledge of the Law, obedience to which manifested the acceptance of the underlying religious principles; namely, the existence of God and the holiness of Israel as the people of his covenant.

The controversy whether Judaism demands belief in dogma or inculcates obedience to practical laws alone, as enlisted many competent scholars. Moses Mendelssohn, in his "Jerusalem," defended the nondogmatic nature of Judaism, while Low, among others, (see his "Gesammelte Schriften," i. 3152, 433 et seq. 1871) took the opposite side. Low made it clear that the Mendelssohnian theory had been carried beyond its legitimate bounds. The meaning of the word for faithful and belief in Hebrew [*emunah*] had undoubtedly been strained too far to substantiate the Mendelssohnian thesis. Underlying the practise of the Law was assuredly the recognition of certain fundamental and decisive religious principles culminating in the belief in God and revelation, and likewise in the doctrine of retributive divine justice.

Evolution of Judaism

The modern critical view of the development of the Pentateuch within the evolution of Israel's monotheism confirms this theory. The controversy of the Prophets hinges on the adoption by the people of Israel of the religion of YHWH, that excluded from the outset idolatry, or certainly the recognition of any other deity than YHWH as the legitimate Lord of Israel; that, in its progressive evolution, associated YHWH the concepts of holiness, justice, and righteousness; and that which culminated in the teaching of God's spirituality and

universality. The historical books of the Bible, as recast in accordance with these latter religious ideas evince the force of a strong and clearly apprehended conviction concerning the providential purpose in the destinies of earth's inhabitants, and more especially in the guidance of Israel.

Discussions and Dogmatism Disfavored

The Psalms and Wisdom books manifest the predominance, of definite religious beliefs. To say that Judaism is a barren legalistic convention, as Mendelssohn avers, is an unmistakable exaggeration. The modicum of truth in his theory is that throughout Biblical Judaism, as in fact throughout all later phases of Jewish religious thinking and practise, this doctrinal element remains always in solution. It is not crystallized into fixed phraseology or rigid dogma. And, moreover, the ethical and practical implications of the religion are never obscured. This is evidenced by the Biblical passages that, in the opinion of many, partake of the nature of Articles of Faith, or are of great value as showing what, in the opinion of their respective authors, constitutes the essence of religion. Among these the most noteworthy are Deut. vi. 4; Isa., xlv. 57; Micah vi. 8; Ps. xv.; Isa. i. 16, 17; xxxiii. 15.

Whatever controversies may have agitated Israel during the centuries of the Prophets and the earlier postexilic period, they were not of a kind to induce the defining of Articles of Faith counteract the influences of heretical teaching. Dogmatic influences manifest themselves only after the Maccabean struggle for independence. But even these differences were not far-reaching enough to overcome the inherent aversion to dogmatic fixation of principles; for, with the Jews, acceptance of principles was not so much a matter of theoretical assent as of practical conduct. Though Josephus would have the divisions between the Pharisees and the Sadducees hinge on the formal acceptance or rejection of certain points of doctrine such as Providence, resurrection of the body, which for the Pharisees, was identical with future retribution it is the consensus of opinion among modern scholars that the differences between these two parties were rooted in their respective political programs, and implied in their respectively national and antinational attitudes, rather than in their philosophical or religious dogmas.

If the words of Sirach (iii. 2023) are to be taken as a criterion, the intensely pious of his days did not incline to speculations of what was beyond their powers to comprehend. They were content to perform their, religious duties in simplicity of faith. The Mishnah (Hag. 11. 1) indorsed this view of Sirach, and in some degree, discountenanced theosophy and dogmatism. Among the recorded discussions in the schools of the Rabbis, dogmatic problems commanded only a very inferior degree of attention ('Er. 13b: controversy concerning the, value of human life; Hag. 12a: concerning the order of Creation). Nevertheless, in the earliest Mishnah is found the citation of Abtalion against heresy and unbelief (Ab. i. 11 [12]); and many a Baraita betrays the prevalence of religious differences (Ber. 12b; 'Ab. Zarah 17a). These controversies have left their impress upon the prayerbook and the liturgy. This is shown by the prominence given to the Shema'; to the Messianic predictions in the Shemoneh-Esreh (the "Eighteen Benedictions"), which emphasized the belief in the Resurrection; and, finally, to the prominence given to the Decalogue though the latter was again omitted in order to counteract the belief that it alone had been revealed (Tamid v. 1; Yer. Ber. 6b; Bab. Ber. 12a). These expressions of belief are held to have originated in the desire to give definite utterance and impressiveness to the corresponding doctrines that were either rejected or attenuated by some of the heretical schools. But while the se portions of the daily liturgy are expressive of the doctrinal contents of the regnant party in the synagogue, they were not cast

into the form of catalogued Articles of Faith.

The first to make the attempt to formulate them was Philo of Alexandria. The influence of Greek thought induced among the Jews of Egypt the reflective mood. Discussion was undoubtedly active on the unsettled points of speculative be lief; and such discussion led, as it nearly always does, to a stricter definition of the doctrines. In his work "De Mundi Opificio," lxi., Philo enumerates five articles as embracing the chief tenets of Mosaism:

1. God is and rules;

2. God is one

3. The world was created;

4. Creation is one;

5. God's providence rules Creation.

But among the Tannaim and Amoraim this example of Philo found no followers, though many of their number were drawn into controversies with both Jews and nonJews, and had to fortify their faith against the attacks of contemporaneous philosophy as well as against rising Christianity. Only in a general way the Mishnah Sanh. xi. 1 excludes from the world to come the Epicureans and those who deny belief in resurrection or in the divine origin of the Torah. R. Akiba would also regard as heretical the readers o f Sefarim Hetsonim-certain extraneous writings (Apocrypha or Gospels)-and such persons that would heal through whispered formulas of magic. Abba Saul designated as under suspicion of infidelity those that pronounce the ineffable name of the Deity. By implication, the contrary doctrine and attitude may thus be regarded as having been proclaimed as orthodox. On the other hand, Akiba himself declares that the command to love one's neighbor the fundamental the principle of the Law; while Ben Asa i assigns this distinction to the Biblical verse, "This is the book of the generations of man " (Gen. v. i.; Gen. R. xxiv). The definition of Hillel the Elder in his interview with a wouldbe convert (Shab. 31a), embodies in the golden rule the one fundamental article of faith. A teacher of the third Christian century, R. Simlai, traces the development of Jewish religious principles from Moses with his 613 commands of prohibition and injunction, through David, who, according to this rabbi, enumerates eleven; through Isaiah, with six; Micah, with three; to Habakkuk who simply but impressively sums up all religious faith in the single phrase, "The pious lives in his faith" (Mak., toward end). As the Halakhah enjoins that one should prefer death to an act of idolatry, incest, unchastity, or murder, the inference is plain that the corresponding positive principles were held to be fundamental articles of Judaism.

The Decalogue as a Summary

From Philo down to late medieval and even modern writers, the Decalogue has been held to be in some way a summary of both the articles of the true faith and the duties derived from that faith. According to the Alexandrian philosopher the order of the Ten Words is not accidental. They divide readily into two groups: the first five summarizing man's relations to the Deity; the other five specifying man's duties to his fellows. Ibn Ezra virtually adopts this view. He interprets the contents of the Decalogue, not merely in their legalritual bearing but as expressive of ethicoreligious principles. But this view can be traced to other traditions. In

Yer. Ber. 6b the Shema' is declared to be only an epitome of the Decalogue. That in the poetry of the synagogal ritual this thought often dominates is well known. No less a thinker than Saadia Gaon composed a liturgical production of this character (see AZHAROT) and R. Eliezer ben Nathan of Mayence enriched the pray erbook with a piyyut in which the six hundred and thirteen commands are rubricated in the order of and in connection with the Decalogue. The theory that the Decalogue was the foundation of Judaism, its article of faith, was advocated Isaac Abravanel (see his Commentary on Ex. xx. 1); and in recent years by Isaac M. Wise of Cincinnati in his "Catechism" and other writings.

The only confession of faith, however, which, though not so denominated, has found universal acceptance, forms a part of the daily liturgy, contained in all Jewish prayerbooks. In its original form it read somewhat as follows:

"True and established is this word for us forever. True it is that Thou art our God as Thou wast the God of our fathers; our King as [Thou wast] the King of our fathers; our Redeemer and the Redeemer of our fathers; our Creator and the Rock of our salvation; our Deliverer and Savior from eternity is Thy name, and there is no God besides Thee."

This statement dates probably from the days of the Hasmoneans (see Landshuth, in "Hegyon Leb").

Saadia's, Judah haLevi's and Bahya's Creed

In the stricter sense of the term, specifications in connected sequence, and rational analysis of Articles of Faith, did not find favor with the teachers and the faithful before the Arabic period. The polemics with the Karaites on the one hand, and, on the other, the necessity of defending their religion against the attacks of the philosophies current among both Mohammedans and Jews, induced the leading thinkers to define and formulate their beliefs. Saadia's "Emunot weDeot" is in reality one long ex position of the main tenets of the faithful. The plan of the book discloses a systematization of the different religious doctrines that, in the estimation of the author, constitute the sum total of his faith. They are, in the order of their treatment by him, the following:

1. The world is created;

2. God is one and incorporeal;

3. belief in revelation (including the divine origin of tradition;

4. man is called to righteousness and endowed with all necessary qualities of mind and soul to avoid sin;

5. belief in reward and punishment;

6. the soul is created pure; after death it leaves the body;

7. belief in resurrection;

8. Messianic expectation, retribution, and final judgment.

Judah haLevi endeavored, in his "Cuzari," to determine the fundamentals of Judaism on another basis. He rejects all appeal to speculative reason, repudiating the method of the Motekallamin. The miracles and traditions are, in their natural character, both the source and the evidence of the true faith. With them Judaism stands and falls. The book of Bahya ibn Pakuda ("Hobot haLebabot"), while remarkable, as it is, for endeavoring to give religion its true setting as a spiritual force, contributed nothing of note to the exposition of the fundamental articles. It goes without saying that the unity of God, His government of the world, the possibilities of leading a divine life-which were never forfeited by man-are expounded as essentials of Judaism.

Ibn Daud and Hananel ben Hushiel

More interesting on this point is the work of R. Abraham ibn Daud (1120) entitled "Emnah Ramah" (The High Faithful). In the second division of his treatise he discourses on the principles of faith and the Law. These principles are:

- The existence of God;
- His Unity;
- His spirituality;
- His other attributes;
- His power as manifested in His works;
- His providence.

Less well known is the scheme of an African rabbi, Hananel b. Hushiel, about a century earlier, according to whom Judaism's fundamental articles number four:

- Belief in God;
- belief in prophecy;
- belief in a future state;
- belief in the advent of the Messiah.

The Thirteen Articles of Maimonides

The most widely spread and popular of all creeds is that of Maimonides, embracing the thirteen articles. Why he chose this particular number has been a subject of much discussion. Some have seen in the number a reference to the thirteen attributes of God. Probably no meaning attaches to the choice of the number. His articles are:

1. The existence of God;

2. His unity;

3. His spirituality;

4. His eternity;

5. God alone the object of worship;

6. Revelation through his prophets;

7. the preeminence of Moses among the Prophets;

8. God's law given on Mount Sinai;

9. the immutability of the Torah as God's Law;

10. God's foreknowledge of men's actions;

11. retribution;

12. the coming of the Messiah;

13. Resurrection.

This creed Maimonides wrote while still a very young man; it forms a part of his Mishnah Commentary, but he never referred to it in his later works (See S/ Adler, "Tenets of Faith and Their Authority in the Talmud," in his "Kobez 'al Yad," p. 92, where Yad haHazakah, Issure Biah, xiv, 2, is referred to as proof that Maimonides in his advanced age regarded as fundamental of the faith only the unity of God and the prohibition of idolatry). It did not meet universal acceptance; but, as its phraseology is succinct, it has passed into the prayerbook, and is therefore familiar to almost all Jews of the Orthodox school. The successors of Maimonides, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century-Nahmanides , Abba Mari ben Moses, Simon ben Zemah, Duran, Albo, Isaac Arama, and Joseph Jaabez-reduced his thirteen articles to three:

Belief in

- God;
- in Creation (or revelation); and in
- providence (or retribution).

Others, like Crescas and David ben Samuel Estella, spoke of seven fundamental articles, laying stress on freewill. On the other hand, David ben YomTob ibn Bilia, in his "Yesodot ha Maskil" (Fundamentals of the Thinking Man), adds to the thirteen of Maimonides thirteen of his own-a number which a contemporary of Albo (see "'Ikkarim," iii.) also chose for his fundamentals; while Jedaiah Penini, in the last chapter of his "Behinat haDat," enumerated no less than thirtyfive cardinal principles (see Low, "Judische Dogmen," in his "Gesammelte Werke," i. 156 et seq.; and Schechter, "Dogmas of Judaism," in "Studies of Judaism," pp. 147181).

In the fourteenth century Asher ben Jehiel of Toledo raised his voice against the Maimonidean Articles of Faith, declaring them to be only temporary, and suggested that another be added to recognize that the Exile is a punishment for the sins of Israel . Isaac Abravanel, his "Rosh Amanah," took the same attitude towards Maimonides' creed. While defending Maimonides against Hasdai and Albo, he refused to accept dogmatic articles for Judaism, holding, with all the cabalists, that the 613 commandments of t he Law are all

tantamount to Articles of Faith.

In liturgical poetry the Articles of Faith as evolved by philosophical speculation met with metrical presentation. The most noted of such metrical and rimed elaborations are the "Adon 'Olam," by an anonymous writer now used as an introduction to the morning services (by the Sephardim as the conclusion of the musaf or "additional" service), and of comparatively recent date; and the other known as the "Yigdal," according to Luzzatto, by R. Daniel b. Judah Dayyan.

Modern Catechisms

The modern catechisms abound in formulated Articles of Faith. These are generally intended to be recited by the candidates for confirmation, or to be used for the reception of proselytes (See Dr. Einhorn's "'Olat Tamid"). The Central Conference of America n Rabbis, in devising a formula for the admission of proselytes, elaborated a set of Articles of Faith. These modern schemes have not met with general favor their authors being in almost all cases the only ones that have had recourse to them in practise. The points of agreement in these recent productions consist in

- the affirmation of the unity of God;
- the election of Israel as the priest people;
- the Messianic destiny of all humanity.

The declaration of principles by the Pittsburgh Conference (1885) is to be classed, perhaps, with the many attempts to fix in a succinct enumeration the main principles of the modern Jewish religious consciousness.

The Karaites are not behind the Rabbinites in the elaboration of Articles of Faith. The oldest instances of the existence of such articles among them are found in the famous word by Judah ben Elijah Hadassi, "Eshkol haKofer." In the order there given these are the articles of the Karaite:

1. God is the Creator of all created beings;

2. He is premundane and has no peer or associate;

3. the whole universe is created;

4. God called Moses and the other Prophets of the Biblical canon;

5. the Law of Moses alone is true;

6. to know the language of the Bible is a religious duty;

7. the Temple at Jerusalem is the palace of the world's ruler;

8. belief in Resurrection contemporaneous with the advent of the Messiah;

9. final judgment;

10. retribution.

The number ten here is not accidental. It is keeping with the scheme of the Decalogue. Judah Hadassi acknowledges that he had predecessors in this line, and mentions some of the works on which he bases his enumeration. The most succinct cataloguing of the Karaite faith in articles is that by Elijah Bashyatzi (died about 1490). His articles vary but little from those by Hadassi, but they are put with greater philosophical precision (see Jost, "Geschichte des Judenthums," ii. 331).

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