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Sunday Lectures of Joseph Krauskopf.

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Theologies many—Religion one.

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A Sunday Lecture

Before the Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel,

October 25th, 1891,

BY

Rabbi JOSEPH KRAUSKOPF, D. D.



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Theologies many—Religion one.

RABBI JOSEPH KRAUSKOPF, D. D.,

Philadelphia, Oct. 25th, 1891.

Again we are assembled, in large numbers, and with joyful spirits, for the commencement of another season of *Sunday Services*, in addition to our regular Saturday Sabbath Services. For the fifth time we resume to-day our gatherings, during the Fall and Winter and Spring Sundays, for gratifying the soul's craving after communion with God, for drawing inspiration for right-thinking and right-living in our daily walks, for drinking in refreshing draughts from the fountains of knowledge and truth, and for an occasional theological discussion, or investigation of some of the professed creeds and dogmas.

The work for which the Sunday-Services are resumed.

The announcement of the last branch of this season's work is, I fear, not received with welcome by some of you gathered here. Theological questions, I might even include the Theologians themselves, have ceased to be popular. To many they have become abhorrent. Not a few flee from the theologian, as the theologian himself once fled from His Satanic Majesty. At the merest mention of Theology or Theologians they smell the odor of musty volumes, the effluvium of the grave, the exhalations of streams of blood innocently shed, they see manacles and shackles and torturing instruments, they hear the cries of anguish of the persecuted, exiled, tortured, executed, they see visions of the martyred Hypatia, Savanarola, Servetus, Latimer, of the slaughter of the Saxons, of the annihilation of the Albigenses, of the massacre of the Jews and Huguenots, of the murder of the Hussites, see the affrighting ghosts of Cyril, Torquemada, Catharine de Medici, Alva, Cotton Mather, and they shrink from it, as they would from poison draught or deadly weapon.

Theology unpopular.

There exists in the minds of many, and much it is to be regretted, a sorrowful confusion between Theology and the Theologian. Theology is good, the Theologian may be bad. Theology is necessary and rational, the Theologian may be unnecessary and irrational. Theology is a pure source of religion, Theologians may be its polluters. Theology is the benign mother of religion, theologians may be its assassins.

Theology confounded with Theologians.

Without theology there can be no religion. Before the heart can feel religiously, the mind must think theologically. Before hand and tongue can act and speak *godly*, theology must tell that there is a *God*, and what that God is, and what that God wants. Before we can know how to use this life of ours, we must form some idea as to what it is, and why it is, and whence it comes, and wither it goes.

Without theology no religion.

Theology constituted one of man's first thoughts, and to this day it has remained his highest thought. Long before theological institutes were dreamed of, theology existed, and it will continue to exist, even though every seminary dedicated to its study be destroyed. As long as man will continue human, as long as the human mind will remain finite, as long as the ever-perplexing and the ever-vexing problems of life will elude the grasp of exact science, as long as birth and death will alternate, and planets revolve, and seasons change, and the grandeur and harmony and wisdom in the universe overawe, so long will the mind search after the *First Cause*, and trace cause to the *Last Effect*. And the few faint glints of light, that it will gather up on its way, it will reflect in an infinite variety of speculations and hypotheses, of dreams and fancies, of creeds and dogmas, all of which will constitute its *Theology*.

Moreover, theology will not only continue, but it will also differ in the future as it has in the past. As long as men will differ physically, Theology will continue to differ. mentally, and morally, in age and in environments, in circumstances and in antecedents, so long will there be an unavoidable difference in their theological conclusions. The *First Cause* of the savage, just emerged from the brute, will differ from the conception of it in the mind of a Herbert Spencer, and the *Last Effect* in the mind of the Esquimaux will differ essentially from that which the inhabitant of sunny Italy will form of it. The Pantheon of the Oriental, accustomed to pompous pageantry, to luxuriant display, to voluptuous ease, to slavish subjection, will differ materially from that of the plain, freedom-loving American or Swiss. To sailor and to mountaineer, to men constantly exposed to trials and dangers, to those whose whole existence is solely dependent on the uncertain products of the soil, to the poor and heavy-laden, Life—here and hereafter—will have an altogether different meaning from that which the rich and the strong, the happy and the young, give to it, who live sheltered and protected, amidst ease and affluence, on the broad avenues of the metropolis.

And much I fear that the continuance of differing theologies will prolong the existence of discord-spreading theologians. As in the past, there will be men, who, from choice or profession, will surrender themselves to theological speculations, will brood and ponder, will dream and guess, until they will mistake the few faint glints of light for luminous revelations, their guesses for proofs, their dreams for facts; and, hoisting their own theological notions high, will proclaim them as *the only theology*, themselves as its only proper enunciators, and declare war against all holders of other creeds and dogmas.

There has never been a theological system that has not had theologians to claim superiority for it, nor has there been a people on the face of the earth that has not been distracted and torn because of such a claim. Men, calling themselves theologians—Excesses of theologians. for whom *idlers* or *peace-disturbers* had been a fitter name—keeping themselves aloof from the common walks of life, leading for the most

Continuance of differing Theology involves continuance of fighting theologians.

part a recluse life, coming little in contact with their fellowmen, knowing little of the trials and tribulations, of the joys and pleasures, of the real needs and interests and desires, of human society, often shunning home- and family-life, deadening the heart to all finer sensibilities, absorbing themselves wholly in abstract speculations, falling prey to mysticism and hallucination, have made, during many dark and painful centuries, of helpful and needful theology a most horrible monster, so much so, that to this day the merest mention of it fills us with disgust and alarm.

That the abuse of theology by theologians, the attempt to force one man's creeds and dogmas upon another of totally different taste, culture, environment, ancestry, modes of thought, and the practice of visiting cruel punishment upon him for refusing, has not aroused civilized society to open rebellion against theology, has not driven it to tearing it up, root and all, and crushing it forever, is indeed surprising. It is theology's best vindication that it is not responsible for its abuse. It is the best proof that rational man instinctively felt that not theology, but the theologian, is reprehensible.

Rational man appreciated the benefit of civilization. He knew that its continuance depended on the continuance of religion, and that the continuance of religion depended on the continuance of theology. He knew that to have society pervaded with a love of justice and truth, of peace and good will, of virtue and charity, to have the mind ennobled, the heart softened, to make progress and enlightenment possible and easy, to have, in brief, man think divinely and act godly, he must have the ministration of religion. But, he also knew that religion, to achieve such lofty ends, must be invested with the highest authority, must speak, command, direct, in the name of a Being supreme in power, wisdom, goodness. The proof for the existence of such a Supreme Being, endowed with such attributes, religion could derive from theology only. It alone could furnish arguments in favor of the divine origin and purpose of life, and of the immortality of the soul. With these *First Principles of Theology* for a foundation, religion could go on erecting its magnificent ethical structure, without any other help from theology.

These First Principles of Theology, however, seldom contented the theologians. They went on hatching new creeds and new dogmas, formulating new rites and new ceremonies, imposing new restrictions and new obstacles, which made life a burden, religion a hardship, disturbed the peace of society, impeded progress, and forced men into hypocrisy and infidelity.

It is amusing to hear theologians speak of the great benefits their caste conferred upon human kind, to see them claiming credit for blessings, wrought, not by them, but by religious people, and often despite their opposition.

I make a distinction between theologians and religious people. By theologians I understand those, who profess to know all about God and

Theologians and
religious people
contrasted.

the Hereafter; who profess to know precisely what sect is God's favorite and who are God's appointed and anointed, and where and when, and in what form and language, and with what rites and ceremonies, God wants to be worshipped by man; who regard themselves as God's detective force on earth, entrusted with the duty to see that even the minutest detail of God's want is scrupulously obeyed; charged even to visit severe punishment upon the disobedient; and who prove their divine appointment by their really marvelous powers for scenting heresies, and for unearthing apostasies.—By religious people I understand those, who, without much talk of God, who, without claiming much knowledge of the nature and essence of God, lead a godly life, in obedience to the will of God, as revealed by their reason, and by the dictates of their conscience.

It is amusing to see these theologians posing as the great lights. Who are the real lights and perpetuators of the world's religions? Who were the founders and preservers of Judaism? Who were they, who made its name coextensive with the whole civilized world, and beneficial, wherever once heard? Surely not those theologians, who wrote ponderous treatises on the nature and attributes of God, on the mysteries of the upper- and nether-world, who elaborated enormous digests on the ritualistic and ceremonial laws, who foisted the *Kabbalah* and the *Shulchan Aruch* upon the religion of Israel, who made Israel a *peculiar people*, who set up impassable barriers between them and other people, the effects of which have been, and still are, painfully felt? Nay, not these, not these.

The founders and preservers of Judaism were not theologians; they were religious people. They were men of action, not dreamers. They dealt with realities, not with fancies. They dealt with people, not with phrases. They were men who, like Moses and the Prophets, heard within them God's voice calling them aloud for great work. In their writings and speeches you will look in vain for a theological system, or for a treatise on the soul's immortality, or for pictures of the Hereafter. But you will find there the first moral code known to History, the Ten Commandments, and a Golden Rule, and other wise laws, regulating the relationship of man to God, to the state, to his fellowmen, and to himself. You'll find there declaration after declaration, that: it is not sacrifice, not ceremony, not prayer nor penance, that God wants of man, nothing but—to use the prophet Mical's summary — 'to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.'

Who were the great lights of the Christian Church? Who were they who made its name and work blessed? Surely not those spinners of fine-drawn theological subtleties, who launched schism upon schism upon the Church, who introduced breach upon breach among her members, and shed rivers of blood in consequence? Surely not they, who clogged the wheels of progress, shackled independent thought, hurled the ban upon original research, brought the curse of the Dark Ages, the inquisition, the torture-chamber, the stake, the

Same true in
Christianity.

drawn theological subtleties, who launched schism upon schism upon the Church, who introduced breach upon breach among her members, and shed rivers of blood in consequence? Surely not they, who clogged the wheels of progress, shackled independent thought, hurled the ban upon original research, brought the curse of the Dark Ages, the inquisition, the torture-chamber, the stake, the

autos da fe upon Europe, because of their unending doctrinal quarrels,—one theologian claiming that God is *one*, the other insisting upon a *triune* God; one claiming that the Son is co-eternal with the Father, the other that the Father is older than the Son; one claiming that the Son's essence is *identical* with that of the Father, the other that it is only *similar* to it; one claiming a *divine* origin for Jesus, the other a *human*; one insisting that Mary must be addressed as the *Mother of God*, the other as the *mother of Jesus*; one claiming that the communion wine and wafer consist of the blood and body of Christ, the other that they are only permeated with his spirit; one claiming that man is born corrupted with the sin of Adam, the other that he enters life sinless; one declaring that the Holy Ghost "proceedeth from the Father and the Son," the other omitting the Son; one insisting that baptism shall consist of immersion *in* water, the other of sprinkling *with* water,* and so on through a whole catalogue of them. Nay, not these were the lights and benefactors of the Christian Church.

Christianity's true founders and preservers were not theologians but religious people. Paul, the Neo-Platonic mystic, was, it is true, one of the founders of the Church. But had he not had the example of the noble life and deeds and utterances of Jesus, the religious Jew, and of his religious Jewish apostles and disciples and followers, to hold up for admiration and imitation, he would never have succeeded in planting Christianity in three continents. The true disseminators of Christianity, they that made it illustrious among the religions of the earth, were those religious men and women, who went forth in the true religious spirit of Jesus, to toil self-sacrificingly for the good of all men of all conditions, to bring liberty to the oppressed, help to the needy, comfort to the sorrowing, hope to the despairing, light to the erring, and to extend the hand of brotherhood to the fallen and straying, to the pariah and slave, to the publican and sinner.

The same is true of Buddhism. Not its theologians, who separated themselves from the world for ascetic practices or for idle profitless speculations, not those theologians, who spun out their voluminous commentaries and casuistries and systems, until they divided their Church into numerous factions, have made Buddhism the largest of all denominations, and in point of ethical excellence equal even to the best. Not the theologians of the Hindoos, but their religious people accomplished this, they, who like their leader, the good Buddha, were ready to surrender station, wealth, comfort, pleasure, ease, for the good of suffering humanity, they who went forth among men to break down castes, to make all men brethren, to diffuse the sentiment of universal peace and good will, and to extend them even to the lower animal, to heal and to aid and to comfort, to educate and to elevate, to instil a love of truth, of justice, of tolerance, of self-control, and who are amply rewarded, for the Buddhists rank to-day

Same true in
Buddhism.

*See controversies of the Arians, Pelagians, Homoousians, Homoiousians, Eutychians, Nestorians, Transsubstantiationists, Consubstantiationists, Filioques.

among the most peaceful and industrious, among the most benevolent and hospitable, among the most temperate and humane, of all the people on the face of the earth.

The same is true of other denominations. While the Mohamedan theologians wasted their time and energies upon splitting the worst teachings of the Koran into a labyrinthial maze of doctrines, and divided the people into many hostile factions, the religious people took the best teachings of their Scriptures, the beautiful ethical precepts, and with them civilized and humanized and blessed themselves, and millions of others.

It was the same in Greece. While the theologians clamored for the blood of Socrates, declared that the gods would visit terrible vengeance upon the nation for tolerating the heretic and infidel, the innocently accused philosopher was busily engaged in helping, teaching, elevating, ennobling, his fellowmen.

It is the same to-day. While theologians institute courts for the trial of heretics, split up people into factions, create confusion and discord, hurl their anathemas against the heads of those, who share not their views, nor perform their rites, nor pray in their language, deny even the right of fellowship to those who worship the same God, in the name of the same denomination, only in a different form, the people themselves, more religious than their theological leaders, toil side by side, hand in hand, heart with heart, in work of love, of charity, of education, and live peacefully and helpfully together in brotherly love and good will.

Thus we see that not the theologians of a denomination but its religious people are its real lights and propagators and benefactors. And we also see that the attitude and characteristics of theologians and religious people are about the same the whole world over. Study whatever history of whatever denomination we may, this we find as a universal characteristic:

Theologians preach—religious people practice. Theologians deaden the heart,—religious people make it a living fountain of love and sympathy. Theologians wound, freeze, darken, divide,—religious people heal, warm, illumine, unite. Theologians deal with abstractions,—religious people deal with facts. Theologians are exclusive and narrow,—religious people are broad and cosmopolitan. Theologians are arrogant, intolerant, boastful, they delight in holding other creeds up to scorn, in flaunting the errors of others before their hearers, in contrasting their worst forms with the best of their own,—religious people are humble and tolerant, they pity the errors of others and seek to hide and to remove them by words and deeds of love and sympathy, they contrast their own weak sides with the best of other creeds, and thus set a stimulus for betterment before them. Theologians make forms and rites and creeds the end of worship,—religious people make them the means. Theologians say to the applicant for membership you must first be purged of your old errors, you must be new-born, converted, immersed, baptized, confirmed,—reli-

Same true in
Mohamedanism.

In Greece.

Same true to-day.

Summary of contrast
between
theologians and
religious people.

gious people stretch forth their hands and say: come brother, come sister, and be welcome, no matter what your former belief, or present belief, welcome even if you have no belief at all.

Such an examination of the actions of the different religious people reveals yet more. It shows that not only are their actions similar but also their conceptions of what constitutes religious duty.

Whatever definition we give to religion, whether that of the philosopher or scientist, of the historian or philanthropist, none is so narrow or so deficient as not to include every form of religion that was or is extant still. All start with similar First Principles of Theology—a Belief in Supreme Power, in a Hereafter—and though their conceptions of that Supreme Power and Hereafter and their mode of worship, differ, they are alike, and have been, in their conception of the highest religious duty. Their theologies differ—their religion is one. The Golden Rule was taught and followed by the Chinese, by the Greeks and Latins, by the Hebrews, and others, long before the advent of Christianity. Those of our Ten Commandments that relate to the duties of man to man are also those of the Buddhists. Long before Christianity was introduced among the Norsemen, Ingemund the Old, bleeding and dying, prayed God to forgive Rolleif, his murderer. The virtue of returning good for evil, of rewarding hatred with love, of thinking and judging and acting justly and charitably, the duty of being hospitable to the stranger, of sharing with the needy, of caring for the aged and infirm, of comforting the sorrowing and stricken, of self-control and self-culture, are as rigorously enjoined as the highest religious duty upon the Chinese, the Parsi, the Hindoo, the Arabian, as they are upon Christian or Jew.

It is the same melody which the human soul has brought from some other sphere, which all, from the highest to the lowest, are playing and singing still, only on different instruments, with different voices, in different times and keys. Some have elaborated it into a magnificent symphony, with others it is as monotonous as the droning of the bagpipe. But the musical ear detects the same melody even in the most unmusical of them all. Time may have damaged the instrument, or environment may have prevented the development of the voice, yet the melody has clung to the human soul, whether damaged or undeveloped, I believe with the poet

“that in all ages

Every human heart is human,
That in even savage bosoms
There are longings, yearnings, strivings,
For the good they comprehend not;
That the feeble hands and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness,
And are lifted up and strengthened.”

“*Hiawatha*,” Longfellow.

Yes, mankind is one religiously, and, but for the theologians, it might have constituted one religious brotherhood. And what has not yet been, soon may be, sooner perhaps than any of us believe. The theologian's power is broken. His recent heresy-hunt has revealed his senile weakness and his dotage. Science, that has already helped religion much, will help it yet more. With every day it increases the means of bringing the whole human family into closer contact. Peoples, long separated, learn to understand each other, and to copy from one another. The likeness of their First Principles, and of their religious aspirations and practices, will become more and more manifest, and hearts will soften towards each other, and the sanctuary of the one will be holy to the other, and where the one worships, the other will feel he too might worship.

This is not a dream. I have stood in Catholic Cathedral, in Quaker Meeting-House, in Protestant Church, in Mormon Tabernacle, in Chinese Joss-House, and I have felt within them all the same reverence, have felt the same prayerful feeling come over me, that I feel within the synagogue. Within each I felt the presence of the Supreme Power, and wherever it is present, I can worship.

I remember being told of a poor Catholic woman straying into a synagogue, one Saturday morning, before services had begun, and walking up to the chancel railing, dropped on her knees and offered her prayers. The Sexton informed her of her mistake. For a moment she seemed puzzled, but, regaining her self-possession, she remarked: "And to be sure, God is here too." That pious woman uttered in these few words a profounder truth than even she herself probably grasped, and many generations will yet pass before people will grasp the truth that God is present in every place dedicated to Him, by whatever name it be designated, and in whatever form He be worshipped, and that one may worship Him in one place or form, or in another, and not give offense to his God, nor do violence to his own conscience.

The time will come when some Reformer, greater than all that have preceded him, starting from the premise that theologies do, and must, and will differ, but that religion is one, will set himself to work to unite the whole human family into one religious brotherhood, with theological liberty for each, even as now thousands, millions, of people constitute one citizenry or nationality, without sacrificing their right of managing their individual households as suits them best. Recognizing that the First Principles of all denominations, the basic elements of their modes of worship, their spiritual yearnings and expressions, are about the same, that the people long to commune with their Supreme Being, to bow, or to kneel, or to prostrate themselves before the Mysterious Power infinitely greater and better than themselves, to stammer before it their thanks, to bring to it their offerings, to confess before it their wrongs, to supplicate it for aid, to consecrate to it their new-born, their betrothals, marriages, deaths, and other important epochs of life, to place before themselves, in statue or painting,

Mankind will yet constitute one religious brotherhood.

A new Reformer wanted.

or in symbol, their great heroes and benefactors, for inspiration and imitation, that great Reformer of the future will set himself to work to contrive a mode of service, which, without doing violence to individual theological conceptions, will satisfy all the people's inner cravings, and conform, for the most part, in outward expression. He will enable the people to worship at home or abroad, within or without their congregation, with brother or with stranger, in almost the same manner, and not feel themselves strange, whether in synagogue or cathedral, in mosque or joss-house, in pantheon or pagoda.

It will be a gigantic work. It will require a Reformer, who will combine within himself the sagacity of a Moses, the fire of an Isaiah, the self-sacrifice of a Buddha, the sweetness of a Jesus, the zeal of a Paul, the magnetism of a Mohamed, the fearlessness of a Savanarola, the daring of a Luther. But he will come, with all these traits, and will achieve this glorious end. He will unite the human family into one religious brotherhood, with theological freedom for all. He will come, for it is right, and the right, in the long run, and in due time, succeeds.

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