

## “Onward Christian” Yigdal.

Cantor \_\_\_\_\_ of Temple \_\_\_\_\_  
“at the Church of St. Luke and Epiphany, dressed in the traditional regalia of a Protestant Episcopal Churchman, led the procession at the head of the Church Choir. Following the General Confession, Cantor \_\_\_\_\_ rendered the Shma Yishroel. In place of the Magnificat, Cantor \_\_\_\_\_ sang Neilah and Kaddish, followed by Shalom Aleichem and concluded with Kedushah. Neilah and Kaddish made the greatest impression upon the audience which was entirely composed of Christians.”—From the “Jewish Daily Bulletin,” March 4, 1930.

With reference to the above, Mr. Solomon B. Freehof states as follows in “The American Israelite” of March 14, 1930:—

Of course it made an “impression upon the audience entirely composed of ‘Christians.’ Why should it not? It was novel and startling enough! If a high Church Episcopalian clad in a Talis would bless a Jewish congregation at a Synagogue service in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, it would create a still greater impression. Only, of course, the audience would not remain “entirely composed.”

This weird performance was described as a “novel approach to church unity through the medium of sacred music.” But Kaddish, Kedusha, and Neilah are not just music. They are traditional Jewish prayers which express the spirit of Judaism. To insert these prayers into a Christian service assumes that they properly fit into such a service! Which is, of course, absurd. Jewish prayers embody Judaism and the Anglican prayers express historic Christianity! The two religions are not identical. A pot-pourri of magnificats and Kedushas, collects and En Kelohanus, Eucharist and Shma Yisroel is an affront to two historic faiths.

This much, at least, can be said for the Roman Catholic Church. It is not liberal, but it has self-respect. No priest would ever permit his service to be converted into sacred vaudeville. Precisely because Judaism and Christianity are not alike, and therefore do not duplicate each other’s message, each has something unique to contribute to the world of thought. Decent people respect each other’s personality; let them learn to respect the unique significance of each other’s faith.

If Christians want to learn something of Judaism, they are welcome to attend a Jewish service. Nor would it hurt Jews to attend an occasional Episcopalian service. But let us not have any more of these Kaddish-Mass and “Onward Christian”—Yigdal combinations. They are mutually degrading.

## Conscious Liberty.

By PINHAS SHUR.

Why should not the individual have conscious liberty?—This is a question that has recently been asked by Professor du Plessis. —Does his mind belong to the Dutch Reformed Church Synod, or does it belong to God?

It is interesting at this juncture to consider the attitude the Jewish Faith would adopt regarding “Liberty of Thought.”

Let us start from Biblical History. When Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp and Moses was asked to restrain them, he replied: “Would all the people of the Lord were prophets.” Is not this the very essence of freedom of thought? One might go further and say that the very existence of prophecy showed how deeply rooted was the principle of free speech and free thought among Jews. Had there not been freedom of speech and freedom of thought, we would not have been able to conceive the existence of the prophets as depicted in the pages of the Bible. One must not forget that besides true prophets we also had false ones, and surely the toleration of the latter furnishes enough proof of the wide outlook on knowledge the Jewish people possessed in Biblical times.

One of the many reasons why our race still exists is because it has always encouraged thought. The Rabbis of old teach us that “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” should not be translated as “Hear” but “Understand.” How does the prophet predict the Messianic Age? “The Earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

Judaism never encourages blind faith. Our faith is based upon reason and understanding. Do we ever find in the Bible “Thou shalt believe?” Never.

The layman in Judaism would be surprised at the many controversies of opinion in the Talmud. Why? The book is full of arguments, one Rabbi against another, and both considered, however, equally as great. Unanimity in thought was never demanded. We often read in the pages of the Talmud that a member of the *Beth Din* who was in the minority was not prevented from propagating his views as long as he did not stir up the people against the decision of the majority. The action of which stands to reason, that there must be some authority in every social millenium and the views of the majority stand as a standard of everyday life. Nevertheless the Rabbis always encouraged the minority to expound their views as much in detail as possible; as a matter of fact, the rule at the *Sanhedrin* was that the youngest spoke first so that the audience should listen carefully to their arguments and thus not be influenced by the more experienced Rabbis, who spoke after.

Possibly, it is the freedom of speech and the wide interest people took on individual thought that caused and causes so many parties among Jews. To name a few:—*Pharisees, Saducees, Essenes, Karaites, Chassidim, Mithnaggedim, Reform, Liberal.*

There is a very interesting dictum referring to “Liberty of Thought.” Rabbi Jose (third century) was of opinion that God never came down to earth, and Moses and Elijah never went up to heaven. This sounds astounding! and yet who dare say that Rabbi Jose was not true to his religion?

The case of Spinoza is exceptional. And still there is room in Judaism for a Spinoza. When we consider the political as well as social difficulties in which the Jews of his age and country found themselves, we can understand the mind of those who put Spinoza in ban—*Heirem*. Nevertheless the action of the Amsterdam Rabbis was thoroughly against the Jewish spirit.

If it would not have been for the liberty of thought and that of speech, Jewish literature might never have had the precious writings of Maimonides, *Rambam*; as we learn in history, the opposition to his work was the outcome of bitter struggles. Again, thanks to liberty of thought we possess in our literature the writings of Abraham ibn Ezra, who boldly declares that the passages in the Pentateuch referring to the *Tefilin* should be taken not literally but symbolically.

Such liberty of thought has not shattered our Faith; on the contrary, it placed it at the head of all religions because of its reason and understanding. Judaism is strong enough and broad enough to tolerate all results of free inquiry, if only the spirit in which they are carried out is honest, just and good.

A renowned Jewish propagandist, speaking about Jewish folklore lately, reminded us of a suitable dictum:—*Hallalu oserim vehallalu mattirim elu veelu diverci Elokim haim.* “These forbid and these allow, yet both are the words of the Living God.”

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