

various ideas of God----- and Mine!

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Tonight my purpose is not so much sermonic as descriptive. For I would like to respond to a request that I react to a number of other speakers who, in the course of this season, have addressed themselves to matters of theology from various points of view. And while I have made my own feelings and preferences clear in a number of contexts I would like to summarize once more from the pulpit.

Let me begin by saying that we are in the midst of an era in which theology has once more ^{become} ~~become~~ ^{recognized as} of compelling relevance. ^{It is} ~~It is~~ ^{no longer} ^{only} a specialized ^{study} ~~study~~ of ~~isolated~~ isolated scholars. Today's world is so fastly changed in scientific orientation that a containing philosophy of life ~~is not a luxury~~ ^{It's} ~~is not a luxury~~ ^{a necessity} ~~but~~ ^{for a personal "evangelism"} ~~a unified worldview of life.~~

And so during tis past year some of our congregation (I would wish more) have listened to a number of clergymen of different faiths and only recently a colleague of mine speaking from this pulpit ^{very} ~~speaking~~ on the subject of their own faith in general and their conception of God in particular. ^{The variety has been fascinating to most of us} ~~confronting the same.~~

The field of theology is a vast one, ~~and~~ ^{In} the few minutes which I have to speak to you I can only touch on the broadest outlines of contemporary views ~~in~~ Judaism ~~on~~ the idea of God. ^{INDEED} ~~INDEED~~ ^{in the 2 night week classes I taught this season I could only touch the highlights of basic Jewish theology.}

To the extent that what I say piques your interest, excites either your agreement or your objection, a good purpose will have been served. ~~First~~ For the first and cardinal principle of Judaism is, of course, a belief in the existence of the living God. This is what we mean when we recite the Shema. (But, still, there is no single view in Judaism as to the Nature of God. Judaism as a religion has always been more concerned with what God wills, or wants of us, than it has been with the nature of God Himself.

Thus there are a host of ideas of God, ideas which have changed radically thru the ages, even within the pages of the Bible and certainly from Bible times to the present. (And only he who rejects God entirely who is in the words of the Talmud, Kofer b' ekar, a denier of the root principle is considered outside the pale of Jewish ^{religious} thought. All other interpretations are acceptable within our faith. And they differ widely.

With ^{warning} ~~apologies~~ in advance ^{that there is} for wide generalizations let me present the ideas of God in ~~three~~ two wide classifications before sharing with you my own particular view ^{of reaction to them}.

The first may be called the Traditional.

The ~~first~~ traditional would include all of the Biblical views (of which there is a wide variety) all of the Talmudic, ~~and~~ most of the medieval philosophic and, in modern times, all views ~~classified as traditional or non-reform~~.
 ~~Reform.~~ OF Orthodoxy, and the majority of Conservative + Reform.

^{that is to say a living}
This is the view ^{of a} Personal God,
a Creator God who brought the world into
being and with the exception of man's
freedom of will, controls the destiny of
the world and its peoples. In this
view prayer is directed to God Who hears
and answers in His ~~own~~ way. God is the
Judge, God is the Author of Life, God is
both transcendent and immanent, which is to
say that he is concerned with both the
universals as well as the intimate par-
ticulars of the ^{personal} human heart.

The theology of the Bible, for example,
is founded for the most part on the
assumption that good is rewarded and evil
is punished. ^{by a Personal God} The notable exceptions ^{are} is to
be found in such ~~a~~ books as Job, and Ecc.

Be that as it may, the traditional view of
God was expanded to represent God as the
author of the Torah and all the resultant
expansions and adaptations. ^{in Talmudic literature} A mitzvah is
commanded by God and there is no distinction
between ethical and ritual requirements,
for practical purposes.

Reform Judaism in its ^{latest} official ^{platform} ~~guide~~ still
adheres to a belief ⁱⁿ a personal living
God. Albeit we have made distinctions
between ritual and ethical demands of this
God and there is a vast amount of ~~xxx~~
eclecticism, ^{perhaps} in our view of what is and what

is not the will of God.

The bare recital of these facts, I am sure already raises questions in your mind as it has in the minds of others. (Medieval philosophers who dealt with the problem of the nature of God from the speculative point of view defined God in terms familiar to the philosophy (not the theology) of their day. They talked of God as the "First Cause".) They posited the existence of God on ^{the basis} ~~a basis~~ of the standard philosophical proofs as, for instance, the ordiliness of the universe and the obvious exist4nce of the un;iverse.

The second general classification of theology can be called Naturalism as opposed to the supernaturalism of the traditional view.

This is the view of the ~~EXXREXX~~ movement ~~which~~ ~~is~~ called Reconstructionism. (It's main architect ~~is~~ Mordecai Kaplan, ~~now~~ still ~~now~~ a creative and vibrant Rabbi in his 80's. (Nzturalism or reconstructionsim denies a personal God in the sense of the traditional view. (In this view God and nature are very close. As God moves ~~frk~~ thru human history (a view I accept) so God is to be seen in the development of both the natural and the moral world, a nother view which I accept. (In this vidw God is not a "person" in the traditional sense but a C_ause, a process, a directing force in the universe from which all life springs and towchich all life is subject. *And in the on-going development of both the physical & moral world*

This view is not without its reverence for life, not without its particular view of worship. ^{It} in no way dispenses with ritual ^{and} or the sancta of Jewish life. ^{But this is not the thing I am trying to say.} But the God idea is vastly different. Kaplan defines God this way. "God, he says, is the ~~power~~ power that makes for human salvation."

Another spokesman for a non-traditional definition ^(the he was) ~~but~~ not a Reconstructionist says in the same spirit: "God is the redemptive aspect of human experience."

^{It} In this view, as you can see, there is absolutely no ^{room for} supernaturalism. ^{Some} would say there is a non-rational element but not an irrational element. ^{The} view combines the ~~ex~~lectisim of all modernist religion with a touch of the mysticism and wonder of traditionalism. ^{But}, in essence it remains ^{almost} totally within the natural world.

It is highly humanistic, easy comprehensible in terms of rationality and closely wedded in my view to the secular world.

So much for general description except to say that within Reform either view, ^{traditional or liberal,} is acceptable and within the ranks of the Reform rabbinate our Central Conference of American Rabbis is divided between the two general theological positions (with variations) of Traditional Personal Concepts and the ^{more} recent Naturalism.

Now my own view: First a genral observation:

This is that in keeping with^{THOUGHT} Judaism ~~thought~~

I would demand of myself and of others ~~would~~

~~I expect~~ an element of change. I do not believe as I did in my youth. My view is not that of my parents or grandparents to say nothing of my forefathers. This is good Jewish thought. The religion of Elijah was not the religion of AMos. The God-view of Isaiah was not that of Abraham. Our perception of the Almighty changes and hopefully ~~deepen~~ deepens. The religion and the God-idea of a child cannot serve the mature adult. And as the God idea has reflectd the social and world situation in the past, so now ought one's concept of God be campatible with the world in which we live.

My own view, then, is one which clearly rejects the ^{highly Personalized} ~~so-called~~ traditional view.

I do not believe that God ordains in every ~~in~~ detail the manner of my life. Nor do I believe that I can bring to God ~~every~~ in pra yer a supplication to change the order of the natural ~~world~~ world to suit my desires.

On the other hand, I am ~~vastly~~ in great measure in agfeement with the Reconstructionist position when it speaks of God ~~k~~ as the power which makes for human ~~his~~ salvation. I do see God in every good act, in the creation of beauty, in the appreciation of high ideals and in the desire of men to improve their ^{moral} way of life. I am in agreement with the

religion of naturalism in its suggestion that ~~the~~ God lives in the natural universe, and in the rejection of supernaturalism as a fundamental tenet of religion. (I find the rational and natural interpretations of religious life useful, ~~attractive~~ ^{attractive} and ^{inspiring} acceptable as far as they go.

Frankly, I wish I could subscribe wholeheartedly to Reconstructionism. But I cannot. I cannot for several reasons:

First, I do not believe that all of life can be described, evaluated or even planned in rational terms. (I deplore irrationalism. But I know perfectly well that non-rational elements are necessary supports to my life. (Among these are love and kindness, peace and harmony and in specific religious terms a sense of the mystery of God and the sacredness of life.

Secondly, while I can understand God in terms of both moral and physical evolution, while I can see God in both nature and human nature, God, for me must be more than that, outside ^{independent} of these. (God is not nature. (Nature reflects God. Human nature is not God. (God is reflected in human nature. For many this distinction is not important. For me it is.

Thirdly, I understand God as the power in the universe that makes for order, goodness, purpose and salvation. But I cannot pray to power. I cannot address myself meaningfully to a philosophic principle or a scientific

I understand the impossible problems of a completely personal God. (But I feel equal problems with the idea of an ^{completely} impersonal God, not because I wish to ~~think~~ think of God in personal terms like my own, but because I must think of MYSELF in personal terms.

(So God for me is personal in the sense that I can relate myself personally to the goodness that is God, the redemptive qualities of life, which is God, to the ideas I believe God wills and to the sources of strength, wisdom, patience and creativity which are God for me in a personal sense.

(Given ^{the} choice I would be nearer to the Reconstructionist than to the traditionalist.

(But Reconstructionism ^{in its holiness} does not go far enough for me. There are elements of life and experience which defy the rational, are beyond the cosmic and are still very much part of the personal soul of man. (There is still mystery and wonder~~x~~ surrounding both the good and the evil in life. I think that I want to relate myself, personally, to that mystery insofar as ~~my~~ both my rationality and my sense of the sacred allow me to do so.

(In prayer I must express myself for my ^{for my support, for my need} good, not to alter~~at~~ God's plan. Still, I must feel that in prayer a bond is established between myself and the Source of all life and thought.

I think God "hears" in the sense that my thoughts and aspirations have effects on me, on others and thru others into time itself. I think we can hear God "speak" whenever we listen ~~correctly~~ *sensitively*.

The question is often asked if God created man or if Man created God. In some sense both are true. We have all ^{been} ~~be~~ given such enormous postentials in life that the contemplation of them is staggering. How we use them is up to us. The God we have created in mind and spirit and belief reflects pretty much our own values and goals.

Whatever our personal belief, and Judaism gives us wide latitude, let us be worthy of The ~~God~~ who gave us life. And let the God we worship comprise in part a complex of ideas and dreams that one day will bring a godly way of life to all men.