Box 1, Folder 7, "Hanukah", November 1956.
"Peoples and governments," wrote Hegel, "have never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it."

Consider

When one reviews the epic of Hanukah, the Jewish Festival of Dedication, in light of the present international turmoil in the Russian satellite countries and in the explosive Middle East, one cannot but help acknowledge the tragic but ineluctable truth in the gloomy judgment of the 18th century German philosopher.

Hanukah, which is observed by the Jewish people throughout the world for an eight-day period beginning this year on November 29th, is a case history which unhappily illumines the Hegelian conclusion.

As recorded in the First and Second Books of the Maccabees, and in the writings of the historians Polybius and Josephus, Hanukah — in the simplest scenario terms in which it is popularly understood — commemorates the victory of the Israelites in the year 165 B. C. E., under the leadership of Judah Maccabee, over the massed military might of the Syrian tyrant, Antiochus IV. In this aspect, Hanukah is generally regarded as a commemoration of victory wrought by the Israelites in their struggle for national liberation.

An accurate understanding of the full historic context in which Hanukah's events took place, however, will indicate the
larger implications of this observance, its remarkable parallels
to the international occurrences which so concern all of us, and,
above all, our unbelievable failure to learn anything from its
history or the principles with which it is freighted.

What are some of these implications and parallels? In the year
334 B.C.E., Alexander the Great unleashed his invincible armies
upon Asia Minor. Before them fell Syria, Palestine, and Egypt,
among other Near Eastern peoples. Influenced by his court philosophic
mentors, notably the Stoics, Alexander did not seek to "brainwash"
his conquered subjects with Hellenistic speculative philosophies and
pagan religions. He conceived his empire as oikoumene (from which
Greek "ecumenical" is derived), loosely translated, a "brotherhood
of men". He demanded acceptance of his political sovereignty;
but cultural and religious autonomy were assured to the conquered.

The Greek city-state, or polis, with its local magistrates, councils,
temples, and other internal institutions, were in effect transplanted
to the Near East. The Jews of Palestine, for example, under Alexander
conceived their community as "a polis of the Mosaic faith."

(it should be noted that in this comparatively permissive
atmosphere, Hellenism made considerable headway in influencing the
customs, beliefs, social, cultural and religious practices of the
vassal peoples)

On the death of Alexander in 323 B.C.E., his empire became
carved up among his generals. The Seleucid empire, including Syria,
swiftly entered into military rivalry with the Ptolemys of Egypt.
Antiochus IV of Syria set out to defeat the Ptolemys, had entered
onto Egyptian soil when the rising Roman empire threatened him to
desist. Antiochus returned to Palestine, crossroads between Syria...
and Egypt. Fearing his loosened control over the Palestinians ("Titost tendencies" were manifested by the Jews), Antiochus determinedly sought to enforce total conformity. He demanded not alone political "Everything in the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state," loyalty, but cultural and religious conformity as well. To achieve this end, he forbade the practice of Judaism, which was and is not simply a religious creed but a religious regimen rooted in a communal way of life. In dramatic reversal of Alexander's policy of autonomous polis, he imposed his own priests upon the Jews, and defiled their central sanctuary, the Temple in Jerusalem.

The rebellion of the Maccabees against Antiochus IV was more than an instance of guerrilla warfare. This revolt of the Israelites under the Hasmonaens was a supreme act - the first serious attempt in recorded history - to assure the identity of a people. Thereafter, self-sacrifice became an accepted tradition central to Christian saints and martyrs. It was a proclamation of the principle of religious and cultural diversity of a people within the human family. It was a defense of the civil rights of all groups against their arbitrary abrogation by an external power.

It is worthy of note that on the morrow of their military triumph against Antiochus, the Maccabees did not engage in a military parade, but rather their first act was to repair to their Holy Temple which they rededicated. In effect, the Maccabees intended in this fashion to affirm the principles and values which their oppressors were bent on eradicating.

Throughout the 2100 years which separate us from the Maccabees, on the Sabbath preceding Hanukkah, Jews assemble in their Synagogues and recite a portion from the book of Zachariah.
When the pale yellow glow of Chanukah candle-light spreads unevenly across the window-panes, a warm moving spirit will surge through the breasts of Jews throughout the world.

Huddled about the candelabrum, Jewish families in Boston, New York, Buenos Aires, Hamburg, Shanghai, and Tel Aviv will with prayer book in hand and melody in heart usher in Chanuka 5708, the year 1948.

Since the justly-heralded triumph of the Maccabees circa 167 B.C.E., the twenty-fifth day of Kislev (this year December 7th) has come to mean many things to many Jews. To most, Hanukah, the eight-day period has been symbolized as: The Feast of Lights, The Feast of the Maccabees, The Feast of Dedication. To all, the festive strikingly Chanukah has meant this: inspiration, invincibility, and the triumph of the human soul.

Scurrying back through the avenues of history, one finds few epochs in the annals of man so stirring, so valorous as that of the Maccabees. The breath of freedom which sustains twentieth century man was first exhaled by the unassuming priest Mattathias of Modin, who, with his/five sons struck the first blow of resistance against the imperial fascist Antiochus Epiphanes, king of all Syria. Incensed by the invasion of Samaritan hordes, who sought to exterminate trunk-and-root the Jewish religion and spirit and to impose their decadent Hellenic culture and cult upon tiny Judae, the Maccabees organized guerilla bands, harrassingly assaulted the fat Syrian flanks until they reeled back in flight.

But before going down in crushing defeat, the Syriac pagans gleefully chalked up one achievement: they violated the stiff-necked
Jews' sacred shrine in Jerusalem where they set up a pagan altar in the Temple. But the achievement was short-lived. Three years later on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, 167 B.C.E., the Temple was thoroughly cleansed, then solemnly dedicated.

Dedication ceremonies lasted eight days. The splendor of lamps and torches, songs of triumph and tribute, and the offering of sacrifices made the occasion memorable.

And as time slipped by, the Feast of the Maccabees, the Feast of Lights, the Feast of Dedication delighted the palate of the ballad-singer and the raconteur who delicately wove the legend into the tapestry of Jewish history. Each, in his own time and place, found new meaning, laid different stress on the story of the Maccabees. This was a great military triumph, thought those who dreamed of Palestine as a re-emerging political power to be the redemption of the Temple, reckoned with in their world. This was a powerful religious victory, thought others who saw \textit{Esra}

Israel’s mission was to live on the holy soil in accordance with the Torah.

But the heir of this Jewish epic who stands on the banks of time and observes the stream of Jewish tradition, there is a noticeable undercurrent which swells the tide and lends added direction. The Maccabean revolt, he sees, signifies the first instance in human history of men taking up arms in defense of freedom of conscience.
But for the Jew personally, it is more than that. The Maccabees battered down the sickening cowardice of flabby-minded Jews who, thinking the "melting pot" their salvation, wished Israel to cast off his traditions, lose his identity, and slip insensibly as to an amorphous clod.

Because of the Maccabees' determination that Jews will dignify survive as a people among peoples, because they routed the first fascist hordes havenwoeck, because they made freedom of the human soul a balled ideal, Jewish fathers, mothers, and children around the world saw in this evening light the first Chanukah candle, and jubilantly sing "Hos'os Tsur", Rock of Ages,

To them, the candelabrum, the dreidle, the lakes, the stirring melodies have become cherished symbols, gilded with memories of the glorious past, and suffused with meaning for the uncertain future.