



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series I: General Correspondence, 1914-1969, undated.

Sub-series A: Alphabetical, 1914-1965, undated.

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Asch, Sholem, 1952.

January 21, 1952

Mr. Sholom Asch
121 North Hibiscus Drive
Miami Beach, Florida

My dear Friend:

I am returning herewith the manuscript which you requested me to read. It is difficult in the compass of the letter to give my reactions to its basic ideas. Some day I hope we shall have an opportunity to discuss them

I should like to make just a few observations. To be sure, Judaism and Christianity have much in common, but neither informed Jew nor informed Christian will agree that they are identical. To be sure, the Judeo-Christian tradition in terms of its ethical and spiritual content represents the salvation of our Western civilization and the one dependable dyke against the totalitarian barbarism of our day. But it is not in the belief in the physical resurrection of the dead nor in the miracle-working powers of a personal Messiah that the salvation of our Western world lies. Neither of these ideas is as fundamental to Judaism as you seem to believe, however large they may loom in Christianity. The essential teachings of Judaism are summed up in the classic definitions of Micah and Jeremiah.

"Thou hast been told, O man, what is good and what the Lord doth require of thee; only to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with Thy God."

- - Micah 6.8

"He judged the cause of the poor and the needy, then it was well. Is not this to know Me, sayeth the Lord."

- - Jer. 22.16

The ideals which the Judeo-Christian tradition can offer the Western world are those of a God of justice and love, the brotherhood of man, the dignity and sanctity of human life, the inalienable rights of all men as children of God, tolerance and compassion

January 21, 1952

with all human suffering. To realize these ideals Jews and Christians should and can work together in our troubled and menaced world.

The quest of God - "Seek me and live", etc. - references to which are found so abundantly in Biblical literature, is not at all identical with awaiting the coming of the Messiah.

Judaism and Christianity were not the only religions which have a Messianic coloring. There is Messianism also in Islam, and faithful Mohammedans from time to time looked for the coming of a Mahdi. There is a Messianic strain in other Oriental religions - in none, however, as dominant and as essential and as indispensable as in Christianity.

I think the difficulty lies in the fact that from time to time you employ symbolic language and imagery freighted with history which have one connotation in Judaism and quite another one in Christianity, so that while the author may be thinking of one thing, the reader assumes that the author is thinking of quite another thing.

I was delighted to see you and Mrs. Asch in your home. I was happy, too, to see you at the meeting. I do hope that good fortune will favor me, and that we might meet again soon.

With warmest regards in which Mrs. Silver joins me, I remain

Most cordially yours,

ABBA HILLEL SILVER

AHS:er
Enc.