



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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The Faith Unconquerable, 1935.

ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE
EAST 105TH STREET AND ANSEL ROAD ON SUNDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 22, 1935

THE FAITH UNCONQUERABLE

The religious world-view of Israel, which was the unique creation of its prophets, had struggled to maintain itself against the ancient world for more than five centuries by the time Antiochus, in the second century B.C., attempted to destroy it. This world-view which we call ethical monotheism was grounded in the concept of the unity of God and the unity of Mankind and was as revolutionary in its day in the religion as Copernicus in his day was in astronomy. But it had made very little headway even among the most civilized peoples of antiquity. Except among a few philosophers in Greece and Rome, it was unknown. The official religions of all the nations was polytheistic and idolatrous. Little Judaea, alone, clung tenaciously to its heroic revolutionary religious tradition, and when the Greco-Syrian empire under Antiochus sought to "co-ordinate" it religiously with the rest of the empire and to destroy its religious uniqueness, the pious elements of the people rose in desperate resistance. Politically, Judaea had not been independent for centuries but its religion had never been molested. Now it felt that its very soul was being violated and that its unique significance and destiny in the world were being destroyed.

It is interesting to speculate what would have happened if the Jews under the Maccabees had not resisted the attempt of Antiochus to wipe out Judaism or if they had lost the war. This is one of the intriguing "ifs" of history. Judaism would certainly have disappeared and Christianity, which stemmed out of Judaism two centuries later, would probably never have appeared. The whole character of Western European culture which was molded by the two forces of Hellenism and Hebraism would have been radically different.

Today some of the classic teachings of Judaism are again being challenged by a renascent heathenism. The re-establishment of the worship of tribal gods is

again being called for in countries like Germany. War is being exalted as an end in itself and as the supreme destiny of nations. Hatred of the stranger instead of brotherhood, the law of blood, instead of the law of justice, mass tyranny instead of the sacredness of the individual -- these pre-Judaic and pre-Christian concepts are again abessing the minds of large sections of mankind. Many a tyranny is again defiling the sacred temples of mankind in the same way as Antiochus defiled the Temple of Jerusalem in the days of the Maccabees. And the same desperate courage is needed in our day to safeguard the precious altars of mankind from such defilement.

