



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

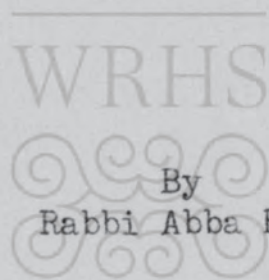
Reel
157

Box
56

Folder
523

Friends of Mankind, 1937.

473
FRIENDS OF MANKIND
Lincoln - Washington - Tom Paine



By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, February 14, 1937

There have been, my friends, destroyers of mankind, tyrants who ravaged the world and conquerors who drenched the earth in the blood of men. There have been numberless Attilas and Genghis Khans and Napoleons. There have been religious exploiters of mankind, men who have suppressed reason, cast the race in darkness, in ignorance and in superstition. There have been economic exploiters of mankind whose lust for wealth and power led them to oppress mankind, needlessly draining their very life blood for the sake of personal gain.

The records of mankind are all too abundantly filled with the deeds of these enemies of mankind. But if there had been only such and no others, mankind would still be in the midst of barbarism and life would be brutal, ugly, mean.

Fortunately there have been many others in the soul of mankind, friends, men who healed where others wounded, built when others destroyed, enlightened, shared where others sought only to expropriate. And oftentimes these friends of mankind performed their service of healing and building and service at the cost of great personal sacrifice, at danger to themselves and oft-times at the cost of their very lives. Such men are truly the friends of humanity, "B'nai Elohim", Children of God.

America is this month celebrating the birthday as it does every year, of two such great friends of mankind. And thoughtful Americans will at this time also commemorate the 200th anniversary of a third, of another great man. I refer to Abraham Lincoln, George Washington and Thomas Paine. It

is fortunate for our people that the history of our people began not as conquerors or destroyers but with a group of idealists, liberalists, men who dreamed a great dream of mankind.

Two of these three, Washing^{ton} and Paine lived at the very dawn of American history which was simultaneously the new great dawn of a new epoch of world history. Mankind turned a sharp corner with the American Revolution. One came to a close, another one began. And the third of these three completed the Revolution which was begun in 1776, when he liberated the slaves.

Of these three outstanding Americans and world patriots it is highly interesting to inquire as to their religion. What did these men believe in? What was their faith. All three were religious men though not religious in any strictly orthodox sense. George Washington was not a communicant of any church. An orthodox Christian would not regard him as a Christian at all. In the numerous correspondence which has come down to us, in his letters, there is never a mention, for example, of Jesus. Nevertheless he was a deeply religious man, so deeply religious, that he maintained that the moral life of a man or of a nation must be grounded at all times in religion.

In his farewell speech to the American people, you will recall, he declared: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports; and let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained with^{out} religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education in minds of peculiar

structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

Similarly, Abraham Lincoln, that Father of Democracy, the most beloved figure in American history, too, was a deeply religious man though not in any orthodox sense. Abraham Lincoln, as you well know, was steeped in the Bible. It was one of the few books he had available in his youth. He read and re-read it and his mind and soul became saturated with the spiritual outlook. When you read his first inaugural address, his second inaugural address or his Gettysburgh Address, too you seem to hear the echo of the Old Testament - the words, the images, the phrases, the accents.

One of the great biographers says of Abraham Lincoln: "No important men in American politics since Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams had spoken so strangely, intimately and sympathetically of ~~rom~~ roamings and findings in a Bible that was a personal companion and a spiritual ^{re}source."

Soon after Abraham Lincoln's death, Congressman Deming, was called upon to deliver a memorial address before the legislature of Connecticut and among others things he said that he asked Lincoln one day why he refused to join a church; and Lincoln said unto him: "I have never united myself with any church because I have found difficulty in giving my assent without mental reservation to the long complicated statements of the Christian doctrine ~~to~~ which characterize the articles of belief and confessions of faith. When any church will inscribe over its altars as its sole qualification for membership the Savior's

condensed statement of the substance of the law and the gospel: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' - that church will I join with all my heart and with all my soul." What Abraham Lincoln is saying here is that he accepts the religion of Judaism.

Thomas Paine was also a deeply religious man although he has been called by unthinking people, an atheist, an infidel, and what not. Thomas Paine has been, perhaps, the most maligned person in American history. Theodore Roosevelt, in a moment of thoughtlessness, spoke of him as a "dirty little atheist."

Thomas Paine was one of the most powerful and influential writers of the American Revolution. More than anyone else he championed the idea of the independence of the American colonies - the complete separation of the colonies from the mother country. And it was due to his remarkable book, pamphlet, "Common Sense" which was written at the beginning of the fateful year 1776, a book that in a few months reached a circulation of over one hundred thousand which, in a total population of two million, meant that everyone was reading or discussing that book. It was due to that powerful call to American independent thought, this book Common Sense, that the ~~firm~~ strong movement for independence among the American colonies started. There was very little sentiment in behalf of a total break from England at the time. They resented taxation without representation. But very few thought of separating themselves or of setting up a new government. During the trying years of the war, it was Thomas Paine who encouraged the soldiers. He reminded the men of his day. He said "These are the times which try men's souls". It was

at the beginning of one of these pamphlets that he reminded the people that "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of men and women."

Thomas Paine was the strong, close friend of Washington, of Jefferson, of Franklin. And he was not an infidel. He was not an atheist. He believed in God. He believed in the God-given soul of man. He believed in retribution. He believed in immortality of the soul and in the future life. Such a man is not an atheist or an infidel. He, like so many of the leaders among our Founding Fathers of this country, was a deist. He believed in what we call "Natural Religion" rather than in "Revealed Religion." Deism was a philosophic movement quite widespread in England in the 18th century. The central thesis of this religion was that belief in God is not predicated upon revelation or authority but upon reason inherent in man. Belief in God is established and demanded by the mind of man. In each man is implanted an inner light and that inner light which is of God tells man that there is a God and that it is the duty of man to serve that God and to serve him through virtue and moral life. And this light was reason whose source is God himself. There is such a thing as a future life. And that religion, these deists believed, was the original, the pure religion of mankind and only later on was it diverted by priests and ecclesiastics.

The source of morality is not a book or a church but the conscience of man. Man, therefore does not require for his religion, a Bible. All that man needs to do is to look out and see the creation all around him and the cosmos of God. The true

Bible of mankind is God's own creation.

And so, in his challenging book which has damned him now for a century, called "Age of Reason", Thomas Paine writes: "Could a man be placed in a situation, and endowed with the power of vision, ^{to} behold at one view, and to contemplate deliberately, the structure of the universe; to mark the movements of the several planets, the cause of their varying appearances, the unerring order in which they revolve, even to the remotest comet; their connection and dependence on each other, and to know the system of laws established by the Creator that governs and regulates the whole; he would then conceive far beyond what any church theology can teach him, the power, the wisdom, the vastness, the munificence of the Creator. He would then see that all the knowledge man has of science, and that all the mechanical arts by which he renders his situation comfortable here, are derived from that source; his mind, exalted by the scene and convinced by the fact, would increase in gratitude as it increased in knowledge; his religion or his worship would become united with his improvement as a man; any employment he followed that had connection with the principles of the creation, as everything of agriculture, of science, and of the mechanical arts has, would teach him more of God and of the gratitude he owes to him than any theological Christian sermon he now hears."

Thomas Paine was a deist, one of the most eloquent, most passionate of that school of deists. Some of the most brilliant minds, some of the most outstanding persons of the 18th and 19th centuries not only in this country but in the Western World were deists and believed in "natural religion" rather than in "revealed religion".

Thomas Paine, too, indulged in bitter attacks on the Jewish and Christian Bibles. His book, "The Age of Reason" is a criticism

of the Bible. Thomas Paine borrows a good deal from two Jewish sources, Ibn Ezra and Spinoza. He sets out to prove that the Bible is not the work of one authority, the product of revelation, but that it is a composite work, a group of works, the work of men living in different periods of time, different outlooks and philosophies. There are contradictions in the Bible. There are fallacies. Much of his criticism of the Bible is rather shallow. He was not a great scholar or a robust thinker. Much of the literary grandeur and moral depths of many portions of the Bible seem completely to have escaped him. He was so much intent upon disproving the idea of the infallibility of the Bible, the orthodox notion of the Bible as the perfect revelation of God that he brushes aside so much that should have caused him to pause and contemplate.

He bitterly attacks the Church and Christianity. I read the following sentences not because I approve of it but only because it it reveals Thomas Paine's attitude to the church.

"Of all the systems of religion that ever were invented, there is none more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself, than this thing called Christianity. Too absurd for belief, too impossible to convince, and too inconsistent for practice, it renders the heart torpid or produces only atheists and fanatics. As an engine of power, it serves the purpose of despotism; and as a means of wealth, the avarice of priests; but so far as respects the good of man in general, it leads to nothing here or hereafter."

He charges the Church with being responsible for the mass illiteracy of mankind. The age of ignorance began with the domination of the Church over the life of the people. He charges that the Church opposed science because it wanted to keep the masses in ignorance. He had very little good to say about Judaism in the Bible or Jews of Biblical times. Nevertheless, that sharp acrimonious, and in many places unjust criticism of the Old Testament served to a degree a very good purpose. It shook the foundations of traditionalism and orthodoxy and caused people to recanvass their religious position. Even theologians, men of the Church and of the Synagog paused to restudy basis upon which their religious convictions were established.

And with all the attacks on orthodoxy, Thomas Paine was not intolerant. "The Will of Almighty", he says, "that there should be diversity of opinion among the people."

The position of Deism was undermined in later generations by the philosophy of Kant, by the theories of Darwin. This "priori assumptious" - that reason in man is implanted by God himself, perfected from the very beginning, telling man unfailingly what is true and what is right - that of course, has been negated by the progress of science and by the later theories of science.

Nevertheless it is wrong to call a man like Thomas Paine a Godless man and infidel because he was the very reverse. Thomas Paine must have been crowned with the crown of exalted religion for like very few men in his day or since, Thomas Paine championed the ideals of justice, liberty, brotherhood, good will, among men.

He championed the right of man to revolution. During the French Revolution, Thomas Paine wrote a little rejoinder called the "Rights of Man" in which he championed the rights of man as against the order, the rights of the individual as against tyrannical government. Paine shared with all the Founding Fathers of America a profound distrust of government. "Society", he wrote in his book, "is produced by our wants and government by our wickedness." The sole function of government is to protect us from oppression, give us security, protect our property.

Thomas Paine attacked the old institutions of Monarchy and Royalty as no man ever since. In doing so, this severe critic of the Bible calls upon the Bible for proof and substantiation - Samuel.

Thomas Paine was a great champion of the emancipation of the slaves. He denounced the people of his day for sacrificing the slaves. He called for an immediate discontinuance and renunciation of slavery. He asked that the colonists give the slaves free land to establish settlements for themselves on the frontiers. Of course, Thomas Paine was not listened to. The framers of the Constitution compromised the principles of the Declaration of Independence. In the Declaration "All men are created equal." However, the Constitution legalizes slavery. Thomas Paine was ignored. But later generations paid with their blood in a ghastly civil war for this crime of the American people, against which Thomas Paine had warned them three-quarters of a century before.

So, Thomas Paine belongs to that group of men, with

Abraham Lincoln and George Washington whom we can rightfully call friends of mankind. I wish that someone would write today those three books that Paine wrote a century and a half ago. We need a book called "Common Sense" today in a world bereft of common sense in this made age. We need a book called "The Age of Reason" in an age when the State so strong encroaches upon the individual, denying him inalienable rights. We need again a book called "Rights of Man" to reassert the sovereignty of man against any one organization or any majority. Perhaps out of those who will remain true to the guiding principles which inspired Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Paine and Lincoln, those few simple dynamic truths in our day, truisms shoved aside, generally accepted but ignored - perhaps out of handful still accepting these truths as the most vital and indispensable in civilization, if civilization is to be worth the name, there will come such as write ~~public~~ theses such as Paine wrote more than one hundred and back fifty years ago who will bring/to mankind its reason, its common sense, its sanity, its vision.....

1. Destroyers - ravagers. Tyrants - Conquerors - drenched -
 1 numberless Attilas and Genghis Khans.
Religious exploiters - Keep race in superstition + ignorance
Economic " - lust for wealth + power - oppressed
drained life - blood - kept men in subjection, poverty.
2. If there were only these - barbarism - brutal, mean, ugly
 But - others - "Friends, M..." - who healed when others -
built - enlightened - shared when others appropriated
 Oft-times at personal sacrifice, danger, death
Not only Friends, M. but as well as.
3. Amos - 3.
"fortunate - hegemon - liberator, idealist - "Friend"
4. 2 of them lived at blacks... Turning-point -
 Other completed revolution 7 1776. - hegemon
5. It is interesting to inquire about the religion....
 All 3 were religious men - not in any orthodox sense
 (a) Washington - no communicant of any Church. no
 evidence - Christian revelation; thousands of letters
Jesus.
Nevertheless - (quote I). Morality based on R.
 (b) So with Lincoln. (Quote 2). Bible -
 "a duty better than" -
 (c) Thomas Paine - Atheist - liberal - one of greatest
figures - most influential writer

Champion of Independence; "Common Sense", 1776

Encouraged: "These are the times which try men's souls"

"The sun men, rocks and the sunshine patient will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man's men"

Friend of Washington - Jefferson.

This man was not an infidel - a theist. He believed in God,
Revelation, Immortality.

He, like Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, was a Deist.
Believed in "Natural" rather than "Revealed" religion

Deism, movement - England 18c - widespread.

"Belief in God", demanded and established, not by revelation
tradition, authority, but by Reason

In each man implanted "a natural light". Tells us
that there is God - Revelation - Duty to worship
Him by moral life - Fatherly life

Man by Reason always knew that - devised
some morality - conscience

Man does not need Bibles - miracles - Creation
tells of God. (Intro p. 177)

6. This led Paine to sharp attack on J. Chr. Bible - be-
held of "authority" for revelation and religion.

"Age of Reason" - criticism, Bible - for Egypt and
Sparta - discovering ^{statue} etc. "World of God".

much of criticism - shallow - not a good scholar

Hasty, ill-tempered, false. literary grandeur - moral depths
escaped him - "Cruelty" - fragments of morality...
Except for "cosmic" psalms (19) and "Job" -
But helped to shake "traditionalism" = ^{not Jewish} little good abt ancient Jews

7. Bitterly attacks Church - & Christianity (Intro p. 175)
Age of ignorance began with church domination
charges church opposed "science" & natural learning
to enlighten his

7th - But Tolbrant protest all conscientious professors of religion
~~8. Many have gone to say of O.T. "will of Almighty that there should~~
~~be diversity of religious opinions among~~

8. Hume & Kant & Darwin - destroyed basis of beliefs
"a priori assumptions" - Reason - "Self evident truths"

Nevertheless wrong to call men such a lame Jafdel...

High passion of Reformers - Truth - Freedom - Equality

There are Religion in action - Mandates - and
Whether one believed God reveals - Nature or Man
... of his conduct...

9. Championed right to Revolution. (Intro 3)

Should distrust of Govt - Evil -

"Society is produced by our wants and Govt by our ^{impressible} weaknesses"

Man possesses Natural Right (creator) ^{impressible} inalienable, "Liberty,
property, security, Freedom from oppression"
Govt. is instituted to protect these rights -

10. Oppose Royalty - "Samuel" - Bible. "Sin"
Law is King! Democracy. "Rights, Man"

11. Slavery - sacrifice of conscience to Golden idol.
Bloody business.

Appeals to America - You complain, esclaves.

On Eve of Revolution - "immediately to discontinue
and renounce slavery!"

Give them land - settle them on frontiers - Wages

Counsel not heeded - Civil War - Remained for
and the generation to pay with their blood -

12. Paine was of race Washington Lincoln
Friends, Manland.

13. We need their vision to-day.

"Rights, Man" - Nazis -

"Ap, Reason" - in an ap, Madness

"Common Sense" - in world full of wildest non-sense