



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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Jewish influence in western culture, undated.

1. Have been asked to discuss "Jew. Rel. in Western Culture." - and I shall try to limit myself to that - not passing beyond to what might be an interesting discussion of the "Jewish influence generally - and ^{considerably} exclusively, ^{its} religious - in Western Culture". Thus we shall ^{then} have to evaluate the contributions of such Jews as Spinoza, Karl Marx, Sig. Freud, Albert Einstein ~~to it~~ and many others to the fashioning of the modern world and its cultural complexion.

2. The greatest single influence which has molded the moral & sp. life, the western world has been the Hebrew tradition which reached it through the Bible and the Christian church. Matthew Arnold regarded that influence as one, the two - Hellenism being the other one - which gave ~~us~~ the European civilization.

3. The genius of the Jewish religion expressed itself most fully in its prophecy whose major theme is ethical monotheism, and it is the formulation of this concept of a spiritual and universal God whose nature is moral and whose worship is the moral life which constitutes Judaism's ^{major} contribution to the ~~religious~~ total culture, the mankind, & ~~which~~ part, the western, ~~and~~ and the Arab ~~world~~ parts of it.

4. When the tribes of Israel first appeared on the scene of history, the ancient world lying bet. the Nile and the Euphrates and dominated by the great ~~Empires~~ Empires of Assyria-Bab. and Egypt - was already very old and ~~for~~ relatively far advanced in civilization. The art of Tutankhamun's tomb shows a high degree of ^{artistic} development, and the pyramids were built a 1000 yrs. before them. The Code of Hammurabi which in many of its enactments is comparable to the legal codes, the Bible antedates ~~the~~ by centuries the times of Moses. Prof. Breasted has recently traced many of the ethical & sp. ideas of the Bible to much earlier sources in Egypt.

5. The genius of Israel, ~~was~~ in which produced Judaism, lay in its power to transvaluate the values of the ancient world, ~~which it found~~. Israel found an old civilization and sp. renovated it. It found

an old world and made it new. It gave new content to old forms. It purified and refined ~~conceptions of~~ the ethical and sp. heritage of the ancient world, and by a passionate championing of these newer values, it succeeded, as Judaism & Christianity and Islam, in supplanting the paganism and heathenisms of half the world.

6. This process of transvaluation we call Periphery. ^{During} These centuries of turbulent national experience, strong and unique personalities arose ~~who~~ in Israel, whose new insight and powerful pronouncements, re-energized the religious concepts, their people, and through it, the world. There were many prophets. Their back-grounds, callings, temperaments and style were different, their message, by and large, was the same: God, and the true way of His worship.

(1) They identified God with the highest moral aspirations of men. They proclaimed Him as the source not only of the physical world - its creator and ruler - but also, the inner, moral world of men and nations. The worship of God was no longer the way of cult and ritual, of prescribed, mystic acts, magic and sacrifices calculated to persuade or compel Him to desired ends, but the way of moral action and improvement. They ~~detached~~ religion from magic, priest-craft and ritual, and centered it in faith and in the inner life of man. "To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God" - that became the content and mandate of the acceptable worship of God. ~~That is the essence of Judaism and its worship, religion thus is still left in the modern West world.~~

(4)

(2) The prophets were neither philosophers nor formal theologians. They were the people's demand. They proclaimed! Their authority was neither logic nor science, but overwhelming, spontaneous certitude akin to intuition or inspiration which was reinforced by personal spiritual experience, and by ~~an inner~~ a reading of the experiences of their race. God to them, was a primary datum of spiritual observation - a Reality, the "pan the" from

They are the golden strands of moral and sp. truths in the
great tapestry of Western European culture.

7. There are other elements in Judaism which have affected,
directly or indirectly, the life, the European people and their
culture. (a) Jewish mysticism, for example, was a powerful
factor in Christian mysticism. The great mystics of ^{Christianity}
found in the mystic and apocalyptic sections ^{theurgy, magic, magic, magic, magic, magic} of the Bible, the
Apocrypha, the Apocalypses, and even in the Targums, the
Talmud, much of their source-material, and their terminology, their
^{their imagery} terminology, and to speak, their inspirations.

(b) Jewish law, helped to shape to a degree, the code of
jurisprudence of the Western world. In the "Legacy of Israel"
Prof. I. E. Cass, has a very interesting chapter on the "The
Influence of Judaism on Western Law". The Code of King
Alfred, the thematic State of Calvin, ~~the~~ Puritan England
and colonial America copied the laws of ancient
Israel.

(c) Puritanism, which so vitally transformed the temper
of England, and which left its imprint upon that people
to this day, was a product of the ^{O.T.} Bible. ~~The~~ ^{The} moral
power, ~~the~~ ^{the} love of liberty, ~~into~~ the moral sense of the presence of God
in the affair, men and nations, which are the outstanding
characteristics of Pur. are derived from the O.T. which ~~it~~ ^{it}
~~directly influenced~~ they read so avidly & revered so
highly.