



The Abba Hillel Silver Digital Collection

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 1: General Correspondence, 1914-1969, undated.

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

Reel
52

Box
19

Folder
1276

Religious Freedom Committee, 1955.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM COMMITTEE, Inc.

118 EAST 28th STREET

NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

MURRAY HILL 5-1361

Co-Chairmen:

Rev. Paul W. Caton
Rabbi Oscar Fleishaker
Rev. U. J. Robinson, D.D.

Treasurer:
Rev. Lee. H. Ball

Secretary:
Miss Janice M. Roberts

Executive Committee:

Rev. Paul J. Allured
Rev. Cameron Alstork
Rev. Robert J. Ash
Rev. Edward E. Brewster
Rev. Dudley H. Burr
Mr. A. M. Butler
Mrs. Charles Campbell
Rabbi Jonah E. Caplan
Rev. Paul W. Caton
Rev. Mark A. Chamberlin
Rev. Henry Hitt Crane
Rabbi Abraham Cronbach
Prof. Kermit Eby
Rabbi Oscar Fleishaker
Rev. Miss Marion C. Frenyear
Rt. Rev. Charles K. Gilbert
Rev. Edler G. Hawkins
Rev. Donald Edgar Hicks
Rev. Edward D. McGowan
Mr. Jesse M. Mall
Rev. Clarence T. R. Nelson
Rev. George L. Paine
Rev. Edward L. Peet
Mrs. Mary Phillips
Rev. U. J. Robinson
Miss Vida D. Scudder
Rev. Guy Emery Shipler
Miss Louise Pettibone Smith
Rev. H. S. Southgate
Rev. Frederick K. Stamm
Rabbi Joshua Trachtenberg
Prof. Leroy Waterman
Rev. David Rhys Williams
Rev. Loyd F. Worley
Rev. Paul Wright

Administrative Committee:

Rabbi Michael Alper
Rev. Lee H. Ball
Rev. Edward G. Carroll
Rev. Edler G. Hawkins
Rev. Donald Edgar Hicks
Mrs. Dorothy Haven
Rev. Lewis Kuester
Rev. William Howard Melish
Rev. James Rhinesmith
Miss Janice M. Roberts
Rev. Warren P. Sheen
Rev. Jesse William Stitt
Rabbi Joshua Trachtenberg
Rev. Clifford H. Vessey
Rev. Wayne White

March 15, 1955

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, D.D.
Rabbi of The Temple
Cleveland, Ohio

Dear Dr. Silver:

A year ago we were very happy to note that you were one of the courageous signers of a petition to Senator Langer asking that there be an investigation of the use of paid informers by the Department of Justice. The developments since then have more than substantiated the correctness of your protest.

The recent revelations in the Harvey Matusow case have opened the eyes of innumerable Americans to the situation which you and your colleagues were pioneers in disclosing. We believe that the time is ripe for you and the other signers of the petition to make a fresh overture to the Senate. We would suggest, in personal and courteous fashion, that you write to Senator Thomas C. Hennings, Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Constitutional Rights of the Senate Judiciary urging in the light of developments that his Committee now proceed to do the thing that you requested a year ago.

Religious Freedom Committee has no desire to be related to any action that you take, other than by way of this very informal suggestion.

Faithfully yours,

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM COMMITTEE

Janice M. Roberts
Secretary

A PETITION TO A SENATE COMMITTEE

[Reprinted from *The Churchman*,
Mar. 1, 1954]

This petition was sent recently to the Hon. William Langer, chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate.

DEAR Senator Langer: We address this petition to you as chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate and request that you refer it for investigation and report to the Sub-Committee on Civil Rights, of which the Honorable Robert C. Hendrickson is chairman and which is entrusted with investigating infringements on civil liberties and the Bill of Rights.

We wish to call to your attention, and ask you to call the attention of the Sub-Committee on Civil Rights, the use being made of the testimony by informers and the character of the persons whose testimony is being used to besmirch the reputations of American citizens, many of them Protestant clergymen and Jewish Rabbis, some of whom are no longer living and able to defend themselves.

We would make a distinction between informers and investigators employed by government agencies. The investigator obtains information for the agency he serves but does not function as a public accuser. If the investigator uncovers evidence of criminal activity against a citizen, the citizen may be indicted and tried by due process of law. The informer is a public accuser. When functioning under government protection or privilege the informer accuses with immunity. Up to now, informers who have been profuse in accusations against fellow citizens, have not been cited for or charged with perjury in a court of law. Yet we have strong reason to believe that some informers who have traduced large numbers of citizens have not spoken the truth. Sworn admissions by some of them, conflicting statements at different times, and the testimony of ministers of the Christian church and others as to the untruthfulness of various of these professional witnesses should be the subject matter of investigation by the Sub-Committee on Civil Rights.

We submit that any investigatory process, whereby citizens are subjected to attacks against which they have no opportunity for rebuttal, so that guilt is implied upon the ground of baseless accusation or mere association, is an un-American practice. It is contrary to the citizen's constitutional rights of due process. Such a procedure, moreover, lays too heavy a burden upon the aggrieved citizen, who, in order to clear his name, must oppose the government which sponsors the informer. It thus violates every American concept of fairness and the equality of all citizens before the law.

It is also our considered judgment that the character of some of the people whose testimony is being used in political trials and before congressional committees would be a fruitful subject for investigation.

Another pertinent subject for investigation would be the cost of overlapping investigations. Different congressional committees frequently follow the same trails, and the fact that a citizen has been subjected to attack under most trying conditions of publicity by one committee by no means assures that he will not be subjected to the same experience before another. It

concerns us that in a time of promised national retrenchment large sums of money should be spent in duplicate efforts to achieve what often appears to be propaganda and publicity rather than searching for information not already in the possession of the committees.

A distressing feature of many of these congressional committee investigations has been the release to press and public of unverified information and gossip from supposedly secret files. Such public releases, even though the committee giving them out disclaims having verified their truth, are inevitably accepted as having had committee scrutiny, verification and approval.

We hope, therefore, that hearings will be held by the Sub-Committee on Civil Rights to investigate and report on the above matter, which, in our considered judgment, represents one of the greatest dangers to freedom of speech, press and religion which has ever confronted our country. Such an investigation should prove helpful in connection with various bills now pending which are designed to correct and improve the procedures of investigating committees.

Respectfully submitted,

HORACE W. B. DONEGAN, D. D.,
Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York.

JOHN WESLEY LORD, S. T. D.,
Resident Bishop Methodist Church, Boston Area.

CHARLES K. GILBERT, D. D.,
Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York (retired).

JAMES A. PIKE, D. D.,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (Protestant Episcopal), New York.

DANA MCLEAN GREELEY, S. T. B.
Pastor Arlington Street Church, (Unitarian), Boston.

RALPH W. SOCKMAN, D. D.,
Minister, Christ Church (Methodist), New York.

NORMAN B. NASH, D. D.,
Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts, Boston.

PHILLIPS PACKER ELLIOTT, D. D.,
Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn.

FITZ H. ALLEYNE, D. D.,
United Pentecostal Church, Brooklyn.

ABBA HILIEL SILVER, D. D.,
Rabbi of The Temple, Cleveland.

JOHN HOWLAND LATHROP, D. D.,
Minister, First Unitarian Church, Brooklyn.

DAVID J. SELIGSON,
President, New York Board of Rabbis, Rabbi of Central Synagogue, New York.

DONALD B. CLOWARD, D. D.,
Executive Secretary Council on Christian Social Action of American Baptist Convention, New York.

JOHN W. BRADBURY, D. D.,
Editor, Watchman-Examiner (Baptist), New York.

LEO JUNG, PH. D.,
Rabbi of The Jewish Center, New York.

EDWIN T. DAHLBERG, D. D.,
Former President, Northern Baptist Convention; Minister, Delmar Baptist Church, St. Louis.

ALBERT BUCKNER COE, D. D.,
President, Massachusetts Congregational Conference, Boston.

BISHOP LEWIS O. HARTMAN, S. T. D.,
Former President, Methodist Federation for Social Service. Professor of Theology, Boston University School of Theology.

CLARENCE PICKETT,
American Friends Service Committee.

In spite of the fact that Senator Hendrickson promised "immediate hearings" on this petition, presented over a year ago, no action was ever taken. The promise was made in the Senator's office to the editors of two Protestant journals.