



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
148

Box
52

Folder
166

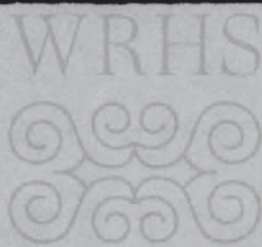
Shall We Save Europe?, 1923.

"SHALL WE SAVE EUROPE?"

RABBI ABBA H. SILVER,

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

NOVEMBER 11, 1923, CLEVELAND.



Ever since the outbreak of the war in 1914 appeals have been made to America, as periodic crises developed in Europe, to come over and save the world. The bases of these appeals were always the duties and the opportunities of the American people to salvage mankind. These appeals, as a rule, came after the crisis developed, not before. The statesmen of Europe proceeded with their purposes without consulting America, regardless of American opinion or the opinion of the rest of the world, but when their plans and purposes brought disaster upon themselves and upon others, they at once turn in pathetic appeal to America to come over and save the world.

These appeals are, as a rule, very carefully prepared and maneuvered, and before such an appeal is made to the American people, a flood of propaganda is let loose through our press depicting the horrors abroad and the imminent danger to the whole of civilization, and when that has satisfactorily percolated through the rank and file, then some popular and clamoring personality is sent over-- a Clemenceau, a Foch, a Lloyd George--ostensibly as a disinterested and friendly caller; in reality the mouthpiece of the nation which is interested in shouldering us with the new task of cleaning the stables of Europe.

These great men are wine'd and dine'd; they address our Rotary clubs, and our Advertising clubs, and

our Chambers of Commerce; they lay the corner stones of our public buildings; and then they tell us what a wonderful people we are, and how we alone are the potent saviors of mankind. And we like to hear that sort of thing. Every man likes to be told that he belongs to the class of the saviors instead of the class of those to be saved. We purr under these pettings, adulations, because at heart we are all Babbitts, and we like to be told how great and wonderful we are.

And then from press and pulpit and editorial room the cry goes up from good and honest and earnest and well-meaning people for us to go forth and save the world. Just how, we are not told definitely. But surely there must be a way, for haven't we been told that we are the saviors, if only we choose to be?

A few days ago I read a very pathetic article from the pen of one who was a nurse in France during the War, called, "Have we kept the faith?" And this fine soul, who saw the horrors and the tragedies of the war, recounting some of the more heartbreaking scenes which came under her eyes in her service, concludes her article with these words: "Hundreds of thousands of us saw these horrors and worse. However we refused to talk about them, however tightly we locked their appearance in our breasts, they are not hidden from us. We are still shaken with the same vibration of the shock and hideousness of it all. We think of those who bravely died. We think, too, of our dead

selves who once vowed that these others should not have died in vain. Can we, dare we, travel our smooth road farther, farther away from those great peoples of the earth whose companions we once were?"

Now the spirit back of this is a most commendable one and a most beautiful one, and yet if this writer were asked just what she expects the American people to do at this particular time, just how we are to save Europe, and what we are to do--the means and the wherewithal, I am rather afraid that she would be at a loss definitely to say.

The impression that one gets from reading these articles, and others, is that, somehow, we have become disinterested, hard-hearted, selfish, and Europe stands there pitifully begging us to come over and help, and we stubbornly and selfishly refuse. That, I am afraid, is the implication of the message sent forth yesterday by the ex-president of the United States, Mr. Woodrow Wilson, and that, I am afraid to say, is utterly, utterly untrue.

We did respond once--in 1917. We joined the war, a war not of our own making, a war we did not have to join if we followed selfish motives. Ex-ambassador Harvey, now returned from England, a man whose tongue runs far ahead of his mind, told the English people that we entered the war out of pure selfish motives. Our rights were being invaded, Germany was threatening our sovereignty upon the seas, and so we entered the war. But that is a pitifully inadequate

statement of the case. Had we no stomach for an heroic enterprise, did we not relish war for the sake of a great ideal, we could have adjusted our difficulties with Germany in twenty-four hours.

But we knew, we felt, at least, that what was at stake was much more than our own prerogatives and privileges. We scented, somehow, that the whole fabric of what we wish to call civilization was being menaced, and our ideal of the open hand of cooperation among peoples was being enfeebled and endangered by the mailed fist of Prussianism, of autocracy; that, somehow, the rattle of the sabre ultimately, unless checked, would drown the music of international harmony and concord.

So we entered the war to save the precious ideals of mankind--at least, we thought so; and we poured forth abundantly of our spirit and of our treasure, and we gave joyously and freely of all we had, of all we possessed of the energy and the devotion of our soul to this cause. We entered upon a program--a program defined by the greatest hero and the greatest victim of the war--Woodrow Wilson; a program which held within it the seeds of human regeneration. And that covenant was sealed in blood, and the millions we sent over, fresh and unwearied from years of warfare, turned the tide of battle, and the war was won.

And so I say that anyone who, in the face of the sixty thousand graves of American lads in France, in the face of a quarter of a million wounded and maimed, in the

face of thirty thousand millions of wealth expended, in the face of the heroic undertakings to feed and clothe half of Europe,--I say, anyone who, in the face of these selfless sacrifices of the American people would say that we have become selfish, hard-hearted and careless about the suffering of mankind, is either a fool or a knave or a hireling.

And we have always responded. What nation responded so magnificently in 1917? What nation was caught up as our nation was, and what nation was cast down, was disillusioned, as we were? Five years have passed now since the signing of the armistice, an act which we greeted with almost delirious joy as the beginning of a new epoch. Five years have passed now since the last American lad, brought over to a stranger land three thousand miles away from home by a crusading people, gasped out his soul there amidst the poison gas and the shrieking shrapnel and the barbed wire entanglements--a testimony of our mighty purpose and our great devotion. Five years have passed now since an armistice on the basis of our program--mind you, our program--was signed. And here we are in 1923 with not one hope which then moved and inspired us realized, and not one dream come true.

We had hoped for concord, and, behold, discord; we had hoped for democracy--this was a war to make democracy safe--and, behold, not alone autocracy but dictatorship everywhere. In Italy a dictator, in Spain a dictator, in Hungary a dictator, in Turkey a dictator, in Germany a

dictatorship coming. We had hoped that imperialism, that monster, would receive its death blow from the hands of the ten millions who died in the attempt, and, behold, the victorious allies today are as ravenously imperialistic as any people was in the days before the war.

This world of 1923, this world of today, was not at all the world we pictured. Was it? This world of hunger and civil strife and inflation and economic disorganization and conspiracies and bread riots---this world was not at all the world we pictured in 1917, when we sent our boys over to fight and save the world. Since the signing of the armistice we have had five or six little wars, and five or six little coups, and five or six little revolutions and counter-revolutions. Since the signing of the armistice we have had more misery and more misfortune than Europe experienced in three generations.

And those slogans, those heroic words which sent us into battle, why, they sound so hollow and so disconsolate today. "Open covenants openly arrived at!" Where in the world today have you an open covenant openly arrived at? "A war to end war!" "Disarmament!" Where in the world today have you an attempt, even an attempt, at disarmament? Why, France today is armed to the teeth. Every nation in Europe today is an armed camp. Poland, which hasn't enough to keep her nationals decently, in patches, struts about Europe with an army of hundreds of thousands.

England and the United States, in spite of the

Washington Conference, which was to limit armament, are today spending as much money for their navies as they did before the conference. The most tragic of all, the same ^{type of} men and the same systems which brought about the holocaust of 1914, the same points of view, the same attitudes of mind, are in control of the situation today. The same secret diplomacy, which fired the shot at Serajevo and kindled the universal conflagration, that same secret diplomacy is at work and has been at work since the signing of the armistice in Paris, in Rome, in London, in Constantinople--intriguing, scheming, conspiring, one against the other, fomenting civil strife, international strife, war.

And we are asked to save Europe. And we are told that we deserted Europe. We never deserted Europe. Europe deserted us. Europe never needed us, really. It needed our wealth, and it needed our money. It never needed nor asked our advice, our counsel, our ideals. Hungry, it asked for our food; impoverished, it asked for our money; enfeebled, it asked for our men. But as for our ideals, as for our vision, why, once having obtained the need of things, Europe cynically, almost contemptuously, disregarded them. SM

The story told of Clemenceau is very typical of the mind of Europe. When President Wilson was endeavoring to foist upon an unwilling Europe his Fourteen Points or Articles, Clemenceau, that keen, shrewd, materialistic, cynical leader of a conquering people, said, "Well, the good

Lord gave us the Ten Commandments, and we have disregarded them. President Wilson is now giving us Fourteen Points. We shall see."

When an European people is strong and powerful it does not want us; it does not need us. Germany did not want us in 1914, or in 1917. It did not need us. France does not want us in 1923 because it does not need us. We were at all times ready to help Europe. At every important conference in Europe the American government had an observer, ready at all times to give the benefit of counsel and advice--waiting, waiting patiently for the opening of the door. But never was the opportunity granted. They would not listen to us. The only thing that an European people, that all European peoples are anxious and eager, prayerfully eager, to discuss with us is the subject of the cancellation of debts.

We made one effort, our last effort, two weeks ago. It was worth while making. It was a fine, splendid thing that we made the effort, and I hope and pray that we shall never cease from making such efforts. I hoped that we would make it a year ago last April. When the Genoa conference collapsed you will recall that I said then: "I think that the Genoa conference resulted indirectly in this forward step: in bringing Russia and Germany into the world again, and, secondly, in that it paves the way for a real conference, a real conference where economics and not politics will be discussed; a conference in which I hope America will

be represented, for America must be represented in these negotiations. We may think that we can remain politically isolated; we certainly cannot remain economically isolated."

Even as I hoped for such a conference, and hoped that America would enter such a conference, I was very skeptical of the outcome of the negotiations, knowing that at least one great power in Europe does not wish such a conference held. Just because we insisted that the success of such an investigation as was proposed depends entirely upon its thoroughness, that only as it can go to the bottom of the whole subject of reparations, only insofar as it can make an exhaustive study of the economic capacities of the German empire, can it be of any service at all, France politely, but very firmly, told America to keep out; just as it told England a year ago in the Genoa conference that no conference can be held in Europe that undertakes to discuss the problem of German reparations and disarmament.

And why? Because France does not wish the subject of the legality of its invasion of the Ruhr discussed. France does not wish the subject of these intrigues, of hatchings, of separatists movements in the Rhineland, these opera bouffe republics, investigated--conspiracies instigated by her own generals and officers, by her own treasury. France does not wish the subject of her extortions in the Rhineland, and taxations, studied. France does not wish the agreements now about to be made between

French industrialists and German industrialists, these ghouls who have fed on the misery of the German people,--I say France, or Poincare, the lobbyist of the coal and steel trusts of France, does not wish to have these agreements, which set out to place the whole burden of reparations upon the shoulders of the masses, the laboring classes of Germany, leaving free the industrialists who have gorged themselves with wealth in Germany during the war and since the war,-- France doesnot wish to have that subject investigated and discussed. And so France killed the project; and France was able to do it, because France is now strong and victorious, with a mighty army and the largest air force in the world, with Poland, Roumania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Belgium as allies, and France can defy the world today as Germany defied it in 1914.

And we are to save Europe! What can we do? England asked France in August of this year to come to some understanding about German reparations. England protested the invasion of the Ruhr; England threatened to dissolve the entente if France continued; England threatened to begin separate negotiations with Germany if France does not yield. And France politely but firmly told England to go right ahead.

Where England failed how can we succeed? How can we save Europe when Europe is unwilling to be saved? Europe has at hand her own means of salvation if so she chooses. Europe has a league of nations; Europe has an international court of arbitration. If the statesmen and

diplomats of Europe are sincere, why, they in twenty-four hours can call a conference and prepare the way for the ultimate pacification and stabilization of Europe.

Europe does not need America to be saved. If we were to cancel all our debts and pour additional billions into Europe, we couldnot save Europe, for these additional billions would just go to increase their armaments, to bring additional millions of men into the soldiery of Europe. Europe can save itself if Europe wishes to be saved. But the time is not yet. It is tragic; it is sad to say, but the time is not yet. Europe has yet to walk the via dolorosa--the sorrowful road. There is yet to be internecine strife, revolution, bloodshed, war, hunger, in Europe before the peoples of Europe will find themselves.

Germany may yet have to go through a period of disruption, disintegration and suffering such as she or any other people has not been called upon to go through. But nothing that we can do can save Germany, or France, or England, or any other people in Europe. Europe must save itself. The law of human stupidity is now at work in Europe. Peoples will not profit from the experiences of the past. Nations will not read the handwriting on the wall, and nothing can save these peoples but themselves.

What shall America do in the meantime? Bide our time, of course. Wait for other opportunities and again make the proffer of helpfulness and cooperation. Conditions in Europe cannot remain long what they are today. The

diplomatic checkerboard will shift before very long, and other opportunities, other openings, will be given unto us. For the time being let us keep faith with the dead by putting our own house in order. Before we try to save the world let us try to save our own souls. Much has happened in the last five years in these United States which is a mockery of the faith of those who lie slain in the fields of France. That high pitch of enthusiasm, of idealism, of brotherhood, which enswathed us all as with a glorious halo during the days of the war has fallen pitifully. We are now spiritually a depressed and a disorganized people; jarring notes, strident, petulant, hostile voices are heard here and there, and throughout the land organized hate is come upon this land which was said to be the savior of mankind.

We have much to do to save our own ideals and to save our own democracy from these besetting and menacing sins and follies and stupidities of racial and creedal and religious animosities and hatreds. Let us turn our energy and our thought to America, and let us clean house here first before we presume to save mankind, because if this last oasis of peace and quiet, of democracy, is destroyed because of our own follies and our own blindness, humanity will be in sorry plight, indeed.

How shall we keep faith with the dead?

Simply by organizing, each one of us, our own lives, so that we will have a little less of acquisitiveness and a little

more of the spirit of sharing; a little less of the passion for competition and a little more of the joy of cooperation; a little less of the spirit of chauvinism--my country, right or wrong--and a little more of intelligence, citizenship and patriotism; a little less of intolerance and bigotry and a little more of sympathy and understanding and good will; a little less of the lustful pursuit of wealth and aggrandizement, and a little more of the spiritual, the ideal.

That is how we can keep faith with those who died that we might live more abundantly and more fully.

Let us try to save our own souls.

