



## 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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Nazi Germany, 1933.

## Abstract of

Sermon Delivered at Temple Ansel 48.105 by  
Rabbi A.H. Silver on Sunday May 21st

The eyes of the world are now focussed on Germany because three great dramas are being enacted at one and the same time, the drama of a war vanquished people struggling to regain its rightful place in the world, the drama of a young Republic being mangled and dismembered by a ruthless dictatorship and the drama of a community of 600,000 souls being strangled and destroyed in one of the cruelest pogroms known to history.

I have watched the first drama unfold itself ever since the war and in its present denouement with the greatest interest and sympathy. Every fair-minded man cannot but help sympathize with the legitimate aspirations of the German people. I was among the first to champion the cause of defeated Germany and to denounce those articles of the Versailles Treaty which seemed to me unjust. If, then, I speak in bitterness and disillusionment of the present regime in Germany, it will, I am sure, not be attributed to any lack of understanding or of sympathy for its just demands for fair treatment and equality. It is because the present Nazi Government is denying that fair treatment and equality to its own people, to citizens of its own Reich, that has even alienated the good will of the staunchest friends of Germany all over the world. We Jews who have suffered so much from the world's injustice will not permit ourselves to become unjust to the righteous claims of the German people who will outlive Hitler as we outlived Haman. The speed with which the German Republic was destroyed amazed me. I was in Germany when it happened. I witnessed the last great public demonstrations of the Socialists, the Communists and the Trade Unionists. I listened to their heroic words spoken in defense of the Republic. They would die to the last man if Hitler would dare to usurp the Government. That was on Sunday. On Monday,



Hitler was made Chancellor and on Tuesday there was no Socialist Party left to speak of, and no Communist Party. The "Iron Front" had collapsed like a wall of confetti. The German Liberals and Socialists are ready to fight the whole world in defense of their principles except--the German policeman.

The German working classes who might have been the mainstay of the Republic were hopelessly divided into two bitterly hostile camps--Socialist and Communist. They fought each other to a point where Hitler was able to fight both of them and destroy them. The Socialists when in power had failed to clean house thoroughly and had permitted the former reactionary element to remain in important government posts. The Socialists made Hindenburg President, a man thoroughly out of sympathy with almost everything they stood for. They voted for him against Hitler. They contributed to the Hindenburg myth. And it was this Hindenburg, influenced by his son and Von Papen, who gave the German Republic the coup de grace by appointing Hitler Chancellor. It was Hindenburg who made Hitler Dictator, not the German people. He is a very old man and much will be forgiven him for the great service which he had rendered his country during the war. But the future historian who will pass judgment on these events in German history will not fail to note the faithful part which Hindenburg was led to play in this national drama.

What was Hitler's strength? How was it possible that a fire brand like him with no political training, no great intellect and ~~gxxx~~ no great promise could win so great a following among a people noted for its high degree of intelligence. While it is true that Hitler is no genius, he is no fool either. It was folly to underestimate the driving power of the man. He is not a leader but a remarkable inciter. He is a great haranguer and propagandist. He knows how to appeal to the primitive instincts and loyalties of man. In normal times his talents would be wasted and perfume on desert air, but in the hectic and abnormal times in



which Germany found itself since the end of the war, his talents and his passion for exterminism made him a national figure.

Hitler capitalized all the disaffections which existed among the various classes of the German people. He also capitalized the sense of nationalism, of national hurt and national pride. The Socialists and Communists spoke of class struggle, of a divided nationalism. Hitler, like Mussolini, spoke of a unified nation in which all classes would cooperate for the glory of the State, and it has been proved over and over again that the sense of nationalism and of patriotism is stronger than class loyalties or even religious loyalties. There seems to be no group sentiment as strong in the modern world as that of nationalism--unless it be racialism, and Hitler has capitalized both.

Nazi Germany must be regarded as one of the national casualties of the World War. We have all paid the price for the last war in economic and spiritual decline. But in no country is the spiritual chaos so marked as in Germany. A large section of the population seems to have lost all faith in those values for which the human race has struggled through the bitter centuries--democracy, liberalism, tolerance, peace, academic freedom. Germany has abdicated as a self-governing people and has surrendered all its political rights to a group of men who embody the crudest medieval concepts of life and government. The dry rot in Germany's spiritual life today is most in evidence in the servile and supine submission of its intellectual classes, its writers, journalists, professors, artists and clergymen to the suppression of all freedom and the perpetration of acts of the crudest infamy within the Reich. Hardly a protest was raised when liberals and peace advocates were interned in prison camps like criminals, when the press was muzzled, when schools and universities were turned into propaganda for Nazism, when books were burned publicly, like in the dark ages, and when eminent scholars, jurists, physicians and public servants were driven from their posts and



and forced into exile and to suicide because of the offense of their being Jews.

The third drama which is being staged today in Germany is the cruellest pogrom of Jews known to Jewish history. We are not strangers to persecution, but I cannot recall in all our checkered history such a diabolically planned program of extermination as the Nazis have set on foot. I am not referring to the vast orgy of arrests, vendetta parties and straff expeditions which followed Hitler's rise to power. These acts of physical violence were negligible in enormity to the acts of ~~the~~ legal violence which followed -- the economic program which has been put into effect by the government intended to drive Jews from the professions and arts, the schools, the public service, from commerce and industry, in fact from every opportunity to earn a living. Jewish doctors have been dismissed from public hospitals. Teachers and professors, many of them famous for the contributions which they have made to the sciences have been driven from their posts. Jewish artists, conductors and directors have been forced to resign. Journalists have been denied the right to pursue their professions. Laws passed last month in Germany make it impossible for a Jew to be in the Civil Service or for a Jewish lawyer to practise. Exceptions are made only of those Jews who have fought in the World War or whose father was killed during the war. If he was too young to go to war, or if his father did not have the good fortune to be killed, the son cannot practise Law in Germany. By a decree of April 25th, Jewish children are to be driven from the schools if their numbers exceed a certain percentage of the total attendance. One can imagine the poisonous atmosphere in which Jewish children find themselves in the schools where they have been singled out for humiliation. And what cruel and needless mental suffering must be theirs.

The Jews of the world will not cease to wage war upon Nazi Germany until these unspeakable and inhuman acts are ended and the rights are restored to the



Jews of Germany whose ancestors have lived there for more than a thousand years. We shall continue to arouse public sentiment against this barbarism and we shall do all in our power to thwart and arrest that regime until it is discredited or until it abandons its anti-Jewish policy.

We must also rally quickly to the assistance of the German Jews. Fifty thousand have already fled. These refugees must be helped. Those who are compelled to remain in Germany and whose economic positions have been disrupted must be assisted to reconstruct their lives and to find some means of earning a livelihood. Many of them will soon need bread. Their children will need schools. Their young men will have to be trained to earn a living in the few fields which will still be left them. German Jews need immediate financial support.

