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156

Box  
55

Folder  
483

My twenty years in the ministry, 1935.

WRHS  
MY TWENTY YEARS IN THE MINISTRY

By  
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

at  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, April 28, 1935





I began my ministry twenty years ago, the first year of the World War. I was ordained in the month in which the Lusitania sank. Now twenty years in a profession is not a very long time. I know some of my colleagues who have been in the ministry thirty-forty-fifty years. I don't know how they manage it. But some of them do. But by common agreement, these last twenty years have been very unusual and extraordinary years. You will agree with me that more has happened in the last two decades than in the last two or three generations preceding. And because of the swift tempo of private and group existence in the last twenty years, because of the breath-taking changes which took place, a teacher, a preacher, a leader -- or any man who occupies any key position in a social group was compelled to crowd in so much more of living into his days, was compelled to make many more adjustments, engage in so many more activities than people in similar positions a generation or two ago.

Ministers in former times had a much easier time physically and intellectually. Life was more orderly. Life pursued a more even tenor. Of course life was not quite as placid or idyllic even then as some people imagine. We have a way of complaining of the age in which we live and of assuming that the times that were were far better than the times that are here. Nevertheless it is a fact and truth that never was life in the past few generations at least quite like the seething cauldron which it has been since 1915, the years since the World War -- the years of my ministry which ran parallel to the years since the World War.



The sheer mention of the events which have taken place in the last twenty years will give an idea of the tempestuous, often desperate times which we passed. There was the World War. There was America's announced neutrality followed by the renunciation of our neutrality, followed by our entrance into the World War, followed by almost two years of feverish, hectic war years in which men engaged - war propaganda, war parades, Liberty Loans, revolution in Russia, Armistice, Revolution in Germany, treaty making in Paris, the map of the world completely changed, empires dissolved, new states formed, the League of Nations, the World Court, communism in Russia, Fascism in Italy, the Harding scandals in the United States, the Tea-pot Dome, Prohibition, the crime wave, boom years, the Jazz Age, the economic collapse of 1929, the triumph of Naziism in Germany, the banks closed in the United States, America faces industrial collapse, fifteen million unemployed, a new election, a New Deal, the NRA codes, economic reorganization, strikes, the red scare, the rise of Fascism in America, the decline of Democracy -- all these within the brackets of twenty brief years.

And in our own Jewish world -- just think back what has happened in these years. The effects of the World War upon the Jewish communities, particularly in Eastern Europe, hundreds of thousands of refugees scattered all over the world, the bloody massacres in the Ukraine, the relief campaigns, the break up of Jewish communal life in Russia, the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the vast development of Palestine, the Nazi attack on the Jews in Germany, protest, the rise of Naziism in Germany, the Boycott, the spread of anti-Semitism all over the world, the spread of anti-Semitism in the United States -- all these epochal, turbulent, many of them chaotic movements. What a world this has been in the last twenty years. What confusing years they have been.



As I was going over the facts of the last few -- these landmarks, the confusion, its miseries, its unhappiness, I was reminded of a story of the rabbi who went to the tailor and ordered a suit of clothes. He waited and waited for it and lost patience. Finally, he said to the tailor, "The Lord made the world in six days and you haven't my suit ready yet -- after many weeks." The tailor answered, "But look at the kind of a world it is and look at this suit of clothes."

I entered the ministry twenty years ago as a very young man. I lived through these events not as a disinterested onlooker, not even as an interested spectator, but as one very vitally involved intellectually and emotionally in all that was going on and at times an active participant in all movements going on. Through experience I have learned a few things and have had to unlearn many other things. I think it was Swift who said that the "The latter part of a wise man's life is taken up in curing the follies, prejudices and false opinions he had contracted in the former." In the next twenty years I shall have to spend my time curing false opinions which I entertained in the last twenty years.

Among the things I learned which I suppose all thinking men learn is that the task of reforming the world, shaping it a little nearer to one's heart's desire is not as easy as I thought it was. My devotion and enthusiasm to social reconstruction is quite as ardent as it ever was. I believe that I have lost something of that impatience, something of that ~~intensity~~ which fills all youth with idealism and hopefulness. Whereas as a young man I was inclined to attribute all social evils to sheer human perversity, wickedness and malice of individuals, I have come through the years to understand the vast forces operating in the life of man and society.



I have come to understand something about systems which good men, well-intentioned men, quite unconsciously, quite against their own wills, are made to work iniquity. I have come to seek for solutions not only in ethical improvement of individuals, in the spiritual regeneration of man himself, but in the re-organization of the whole social and economic set-up so that the individual will have a better chance to work for a better life.

I have come to understand during these years something about the imperfections which are inevitable, which are inescapable in all social organizations. I have come to understand that public morality can never reach those summits which private morality can reach. An individual can lift himself by self-improvement to magnificent heights of moral perfection. The individual must always be challenged to rise above the normal order of his group. The social group itself must be challenged and prodded on to advance. One must not lose patience with this seeming immobility to the seeming inertia of the group because the group cannot make advances as rapidly or as easily as the individual.

Bearing this in mind, an individual is saved from many heartaches which would be his when he looks about him and sees those retrogressions and throwbacks in our social living. That does not mean that a leader, a preacher and social thinker must however consent to compromise to social imperfections, social evils. He must learn to attack them with greater deliberateness and with longer-ranged plans, realizing that there are no quick methods of social reform.

Thus, for example, I was wrong about Prohibition. I was outraged by the curse of drunkenness, the miseries which it brought about and I believed, as millions of other people believed, that these evils could be done away with by prohibiting the sale of liquor. But the years



have taught me as it has taught many other people that that is not the way to do it. There is no quick method of changing the habits of a people, that the more patient painstaking laborious methods of education, control, guidance are the ways which may yield some appreciable gain in the solution of this problem.

I was wrong on the subject of the World War. I was twenty-two years old when this country entered the World War. As a young man I was caught up by this messianic dream that this would be a war to end war, a war that would make the world safe for democracy and I believed that it could be made safe for democracy and that this war would end war. But I was wrong. War will never end war. Democracy can never be made secure or saved by violent bloodshed.

So today, when I think of peace, I try to keep myself from thinking of it along romantic lines, from pinning my hopes on some humanly impossible technique such as pacifism, realizing that the mood of pacifism is possible only to the aristocrats of the human race. But the masses are not that kind of people. And so my hope for ultimate peace lies today in those detailed constructive efforts step by step to strengthen those international agencies such as the League of Nations, such as the World Court which will make in the course of time war less and less likely and armament less and less necessary.

Through these years I have also become much less enthusiastic about the promise and performance of both political and economic radicalism, now that I have seen radicalism in action. I have seen in Italy, Germany and Russia and other parts of the world, movements seeking to bring about kingdom



come over night. And I have had occasion to observe their ruthlessness and impatience and intolerance and readiness to sacrifice means to ends. In an effort to pour new wine into old bottles, they not only pour out much precious old wine but they frequently destroy the bottles themselves. I have seen some of the most sacred human values for which men have struggled trampled under foot because of the radicals' stampede for Kingdom Come which stampede can never lead to any Kingdom Come.

I have of course far greater sympathy for the motives of the radical lefts than for the radical rights but I have no sympathy for their method of sacrificing means to ends. I have come through the years a much more convinced liberal than I ever was.

The other day I happened to call on an old friend of mine to solicit a subscription for the Jewish Welfare Fund. In the course of conversation he told me that he stopped coming to The Temple because he found me too liberal in my views. I wish he had been a little more liberal in his contribution. But I thought of that old Yiddish proverb: "When a man doesn't like the voice of the cantor, he stops reciting the Sh'ma." For this friend of mine an otherwise very intelligent person, I was too liberal. For some of my radical friends, I am too conservative. Frankly, I find it difficult to pigeon myself doctrinally in economics, politics or theology. I have always hated the shackles of blind partisanship. I am not a doctrinaire, nor an orthodox devotee of any program or platform. I insist on my right to choose, dissent, accept or reject.

The years have taught me to know the evils in the present-day economic struggle. I know and understand and have frequently had occasion



to point out sometimes at great cost, these evils of individualist society. On the other hand, I know the evils of bureaucratic state absolutism. While I am convinced that a measure of social ownership in our country will have to come, that while I am convinced that the wealth of our nation should be more equitably distributed, while I am persuaded that the highly concentrated wealth of the nation in the hands of a few ought to be wiped out of existence, I am not persuaded that communism is the other alternative and the only other method today. These highly radical forces cannot be brought about through our control apparatus and democratic machine. I am not persuaded that all private ownership is morally wrong, that all private ownership should be destroyed, that all private agriculture should be collectivized, that all economic functions should come under the head of central bureaucratic organization. I have lost my veneration for absolutes, for counsels of perfection, for extremism. They ask too high a price for their millennial promises.

My twenty years too, my friends, have given me a sense of movement in history, a sense of transition in history. I have come to understand the implication of the poet who said "For each age is a dream that is dying and one that is coming to birth." I have lived through wars and revolutions and depressions. I have heard men talk and I have talked myself about the collapse of civilization in the world. But civilization has not collapsed. The world has not come to an end. I have come to feel more and more the vitality of human life, the capacity which it has for blundering through its seemingly insurmountable difficulties. In this part of the world there is reaction, in that country failure, etc. The human race is moving forward, checking up year by year some additional gain, some new



precious value which is added to the sum total of communal good which we call civilization. I am more persuaded now than ever in the reality of human progress.

After twenty years, I find that Jewish life today is far more vital, far more purposeful than when I first entered the ministry. Jews today face problems much more realistically. Assimilation which was a real problem twenty years ago has been completely liquidated. The Jew is accepting his inevitable status in the world and is making proper adjustment in the way of living in the midst of non-Jewish life. A Jewish communal life has developed, educationally, socially. Two years after I entered the ministry, the Balfour Declaration called into existence a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It was a dream then. In the last twenty years, the dream became a reality in Jewish life and Palestine is becoming the great Jewish homeland. Yearly, thousands of our people are settling there. Palestine already sent its current of revitalization through Jewish communities throughout the world today.

I believe that the vitality of the synagogue has increased. Many Temples and Synagogues are centers of education and culture. Many of their leaders are spokesmen of the great prophetic ideals of the great prophetic ideals of the synagogue.

I believe that we have lost in one regard. Too much of the service is centered in the sermon or lecture. Congregations are too much like audiences than like worshipers. A quiet hour of communion with yourself and God is far more valuable, far greater than any sermon ever preached. The habit of worship, I believe, has suffered sharp decline in recent years. How to recapture it is, to my mind, the most important factor today.



Personally, I feel highly rewarded. It is a privilege to serve my people and my God. It is very difficult for a man in my position to estimate success of work. He cannot measure success. A doctor can measure his success by the number of successful operations; the lawyer, by the number of cases won; the painter, in terms of portraits and paintings. There are ways for most man to evaluate. There is no way at all for the minister and the rabbi. Of course, some priests and rabbis do receive applause. All men love applause. All men love appreciation. A man must guard himself against the sweet seducing charm of people's applause. They make the heart warm but the head giddy. A man in my profession will remember that warning which we find in the New Testament: "Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

A sensible man in my profession will come to be as grateful for his enemies as for his friends. I suppose the only way we have of satisfying ourselves that our work has not altogether been in vain is in the faith that perhaps at some time or another, one word of ours did fall on fertile ground, that perhaps at some time or other, we did succeed in strengthening the hand of someone in trouble, of comforting some heart in sorrow, of guiding some youth in the right way of life. I suppose that our satisfaction lies in the knowledge that we did the utmost of our ability and strength. I suppose it is with these things intangible, in the faith that we followed the light of the everlasting God in faithfulness, in devotion unfalteringly, that the success of a Rabbi's work can be counted.

And so at the end of twenty years in the Rabbinate, my friends, I feel that my apprenticeship is about over. I am about ready to become a rabbi in Israel. I am not so sure that life begins at forty. I am convinced that life does not end at forty. And so, today, I am ready to adopt that

beautiful motto of Michael Angelo: "Ancora Imparo" - I am still learning.





1. Began my ministry 20 yrs. ago - first year - in my month - September  
 20 yrs. not a long time - colleagues - how they manage it - Some do!  
 { Common agreement - unusual + extraordinary years.  
 More actually happened - 2 decades -  
 And bec. of swifter tempo of private + group existence - breath-taking  
 change - a teacher... crowded, expand, engage, adjustments  
 7 ~~the~~ generation before whose lot  
 the minister, in former times, had a much easier time - phys. well  
 { World more orderly, life more evenly. The fury  
 of current life was not quite as placid radically - Inclined to  
complain of age we live in - to assume that time that was  
 Nevertheless it is a fact that never was life in last few generations,  
see thing could not - since water was - year, my mind

2. Sheer mention - serve to indicate tempestuous, often desperate, chaotic  
 The World was  
 Our announced neutrality.  
 "renunciating"  
 "Entered into war"  
 2 feverish, hectic war years  
 Millions transported  
 War propaganda  
 "parades - missions"  
 heavy loans  
 - Revolution in Russia  
 - Armistice  
 - Revolution in Germany  
 { - Treaty drafting in Paris  
 - The world's map remade  
 { Empires dissolved - new states formed  
 League, Nations - World Court  
 { Russia goes Communist.  
 Fascism in Italy. Squad, Dictatorship  
 Harding scandals in U.S. - Tea-Party Down -  
 Prohibition - Crime Wave  
 Boom year - Jazz Age  
 Econ. Crash of 1929.  
 Japan scraps with Manchuria  
 Nazism in Germany.  
 Banks close in U.S. - American Econ. Disaster  
 15 m. unemployed.  
 New Deal - N.R.A. - Codes - Econ. reorg.  
 { Situations - Red Scare -  
 Talk of Fascism in Am. South, Peru.



### 3. Jewish life

Trapeche, war.

Refugees all over world  
Mandates in Ukraine

Relief campaigns

<sup>Communist</sup>  
Jewish life shattered in Russia

Hasidic Decline - Palestine. Rites -

Nazi attack on Jews in Germany  
Protests - Boycott -

Spread of Antisemitism in America.

What a world! (Said & wrote)

Look at the kind of a  
world this - and look  
at the kind of Jew - I am  
wondering how  
confused & perplexed - entered

4. Out to first stages - wrought turbulent  
- while still a very young man

I lived thru the events - not as an unaffected observer -

Have learned a few things - Had to unlearn

Swift (Jude)

5. Learned - all men - task of reforming

My devotion and enthusiasm - social reconstruction - not abated -  
impatience - cry for immediacy - how!

whereas, as a young man, inclined to attack all social evils

- withness, freed of malice of individuals -

- mass, impersonal forces which operate

- to understand systems in which good men

- to seek solutions not merely in ethical improvement of ind.

- reorg. of social & econ. set-up, so that - better chance

6. Come to understand that some imperfections are inherent in group  
existence - involves

- Public morality -

- Ind. can rise to new levels

- The ind. must always be challenged to rise

- The group, too - must be more patient - Security must be  
- humbly and -



- (a) Bearing this fact in mind, we saw - heartaches - recurrent
- (b) Not to compromise - attack with great deliberation -  
and large-range plan - NOT amenable
- (c) Wrong on Prohibition - insipiduous -  
" " War - end war - 22 yrs old
- (d) Will not now call for men to turn pacifists elite -  
- under. agencies - under. force -
- (e) As passionately devoted to cause, peace - romantic  
- eloquent plan -

7. Less enthusiastic about promise & <sup>performance</sup> ~~the~~ performance of pol. Econ. Radicalism  
- Now that I have seen  
✓ Their impatience - intolerance - brutality - science superior to ends -  
✓ I intent upon forming new work  
✓ I have seen sacred human values - freedom etc -  
painfully now than ages, struggle - destroyed staple  
✓ I have of course great sympathy with motives, left -  
abstr. identical method, supremacy etc  
✓ was compromised > ever in my liberals in

8. The other day - friend -

My more radical friends  
I would find it difficult to label - pipe - into myself doctrinally  
I will not willingly - shackles, blind partisanship  
Not a doctrinaire - a thorough devotion, any program or platform  
I insist upon my right to choose - dissent, accept, reject.



I am as much interested in conserving - part - part  
I turn the evils of present-day econ. ind.  
" " also beautified state absolutism  
X I do not cease <sup>only</sup> choice has but. then 2.  
I am convinced that a means of social ownership -  
" " " equitable distribution of wealth  
" " " largely concentrated wealth -  
" " not persuade, Russian, Communist, only alternatives,  
only method, a cannot be attained under democracy.  
a that all private ownership is morally wrong  
" " " " econ. enterprise should be destroyed  
" " " agriculture should be collectivized  
" " " econ. activity should be represented by central  
planning.  
✓ Not my veneration for absolutism - corrosion of perfection.  
too high a price, for millennial promises.

9. My 20 years - sense of movement in history - transition -  
"Each age ... (Jude)"  
Better armed against extremist optimism persimmon  
✓ Lived than ways - revolutions - depressions  
Collapse civilization -  
Civilization has not collapsed! World has not ended  
Tremendous resilience - Survivor crises!  
In one part of world - reaction - failure -  
I believe, now & ever, in human progress.



10. After 20 yrs - Jewish life -

more energetic - purposeful

Facing our problems more realistically

Ammitation - which was a problem - legislated

Jew is accepting his status

J. communal org - schools - hitters - memories

J. are building Poles - 2 years - Barfones - a dream -

11. Vitality & synergy - increased

Center of education - culture

Leaders - champions

we have lost in one regard - too much centered in books

- audience - a weekly period of communion

Sermons have their value

12. Personally - feel highly rewarded - to serve -

cannot measure

Our reward does not lie in the applause given -

All men love applause - guard what, seducing charm  
warm the heart - make head piddy.

Searchable man - "Woe unto you -

grateful is evermore -

A minister's reward lies in the faith

13. - And so after 20 yrs - I feel my worship - affection

I am not sure that life begins at 40 -

"Encora impado" - "I am still learning" -



"The latter part of a wise man's life is taken up in curing  
the follies, prejudices, and false opinions he had contracted  
in the former" - Swift.

✓ "For each age is a dream that is dying  
and one that is coming to birth."

"Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you!  
for so did their fathers to the false prophets"





ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE, ANSEL ROAD AND EAST 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 28, 1935.

### MY TWENTY YEARS IN THE MINISTRY

After twenty years I feel that my apprenticeship is about over and that I will soon be able to serve adequately as a minister. I am not sure that life begins at forty, but I am sure that life does not end there. I am inclined to adopt the motto of Michael Angelo: "Ancora imparo." (I am still learning.)

Personally, I feel highly rewarded for the privilege which has been mine to serve my people and my God these twenty years. A minister's reward does not lie in the applause of his fellow men for while all men love applause, they should guard themselves against its sweet seduction. It has a way of making one's head giddy. A sensible man in the ministry will recall the admonition: "Woe unto you ~~when~~ when all men speak well of you." And I will be as grateful for the enemies which I was compelled to make as for the friends I was privileged to win.

Historically, these last twenty years have been a seething cauldron. Having lived through the events of the past two decades, not as a disinterested onlooker but as one who was vitally involved both intellectually and emotionally in all that was going on, I have learned a few things and have had to unlearn many other things.

Whereas, as a young man I was inclined to attribute all social evils to human perversity and to the greed and wickedness of individuals, I have come through the years to understand some of the mass impersonal forces which operate and I have come to understand our systems in which even good men with the best intentions frequently work inadequately. I have come to seek for solutions not merely in the ethical improvement of the individual but in the reconstruction of the social and economic set-up so that individuals will have a better chance to achieve the better life.



I have come to understand that individuals can rise to moral summits unattainable by the group, that public morality can never reach the heights of private morality, that while the group must constantly be challenged to advance, one must be more patient with its seeming immobility. Social evils must not be compromised with but they must be attacked with greater deliberateness and with ~~x~~ longer ranged plans, for they are not amenable to quick and forthright solutions.

I have become far less enthusiastic about the promise and performance of political and economic radicalism now that I have seen it in operation. Intent upon pouring new wine into old bottles, they not only pour out much precious old wine, but frequently destroy the bottles. Some of the most sacred human values, painfully won through centuries of struggle, have been sacrificed in the radicals' stampede to Kingdom Come. I am <sup>more</sup> ~~not~~ convinced than ever in my philosophy of liberalism. My veneration for absolutes and for counsels of perfection is gone. They demand too high a price for their millennial promises.

I am better protected today against excessive optimism and excessive pessimism. I have lived through wars, revolutions and depressions. I have heard much said and have myself said much about the collapse of civilization. And civilization has not collapsed. There is tremendous resiliency and vitality in the human race and it survives seemingly fatal crises. In one part of the world there may be reaction. In others, there is progress. Failure here and advance there. I believe more than ever in the reality of human progress.

Jewish life is more energetic and purposeful than it was two decades ago. Jews are facing their problems more intelligently and realistically. Jewish communal organizations, philanthropic and educational are better and more numerous than they were. The vitality of the synagogue is increased. Many synagogues and temples are centers of education and culture. Many of their leaders are true spokesmen



of the true prophetic ideals of Judaism.

In one regard we have lost. Too much of the service is centered in the sermon or lecture. Too many of our people come as listeners rather than as worshipers. A weekly period of communion with one's self and with one's God is far more salutary than the best sermon which was ever preached. The habit of worship has declined among our people.





Sermon 435

No. 435

Don't put

WRHS

MY TWENTY YEARS IN THE MINISTRY

By

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

at

The Temple

On

Sunday morning, April 28, 1935





I began my ministry twenty years ago, the first year of the World War. I was ordained in the month in which the Lusitania sank. Now twenty years in a profession is not a very long time. I know some of my colleagues who have been in the ministry thirty-forty-fifty years. I don't know how they manage it. But some of them do. But by common agreement, these last twenty years have been very unusual and extraordinary years. You will agree with me that more has happened in the last two decades than in the last two or three generations preceding. And because of the swift tempo of private and group existence in the last twenty years, because of the breath-taking changes which took place, a teacher, a preacher, a leader -- or any man who occupies any key position in a social group was compelled to crowd in so much more of living into his days, was compelled to make many more adjustments, engage in so many more activities than people in similar positions a generation or two ago.

Ministers in former times had a much easier time physically and intellectually. Life was more orderly. Life pursued a more even tenor. Of course life was not quite as placid or idyllic even then as some people imagine. We have a way of complaining of the age in which we live and of assuming that the times that were were far better than the times that are here. Nevertheless it is a fact and truth that never was life in the past few generations at least quite like the seething cauldron which it has been since 1915, the years since the World War -- the years of my ministry which ran parallel to the years since the World War.



The sheer mention of the events which have taken place in the last twenty years will give an idea of the tempestuous, often desperate times which we passed. There was the World War. There was America's announced neutrality followed by the renunciation of our neutrality, followed by our entrance into the World War, followed by almost two years of feverish, hectic war years in which men engaged - war propaganda, war parades, Liberty Loans, revolution in Russia, Armistice, Revolution in Germany, treaty making in Paris, the map of the world completely changed, empires dissolved, new states formed, the League of Nations, the World Court, communism in Russia, Fascism in Italy, the Harding scandals in the United States, the Tea-pot Dome, Prohibition, the crime wave, boom years, the Jazz Age, the economic collapse of 1929, the triumph of Naziism in Germany, the banks closed in the United States, America faces industrial collapse, fifteen million unemployed, a new election, a New Deal, the NRA codes, economic reorganization, strikes, the red scare, the rise of Fascism in America, the decline of Democracy -- all these within the brackets of twenty brief years.

And in our own Jewish world -- just think back what has happened in these years. The effects of the World War upon the Jewish communities, particularly in Eastern Europe, hundreds of thousands of refugees scattered all over the world, the bloody massacres in the Ukraine, the relief campaigns, the break up of Jewish communal life in Russia, the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the vast development of Palestine, the Nazi attack on the Jews in Germany, protest, the rise of Naziism in Germany, the Boycott, the spread of anti-Semitism all over the world, the spread of anti-Semitism in the United States -- all these epochal, turbulent, many of them chaotic movements. What a world this has been in the last twenty years. What confusing years they have been.



As I was going over the facts of the last few -- these landmarks, the confusion, its miseries, its unhappiness, I was reminded of a story of the rabbi who went to the tailor and ordered a suit of clothes. He waited and waited for it and lost patience. Finally, he said to the tailor, "The Lord made the world in six days and you haven't my suit ready yet -- after many weeks." The tailor answered, "But look at the kind of a world it is and look at the suit of clothes."

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I have come to understand something about systems which good men, well-intentioned men, quite unconsciously, quite against their own wills, are made to work iniquity. I have come to seek for solutions not only in ethical improvement of individuals, in the spiritual regeneration of man himself, but in the re-organization of the whole social and economic set-up so that the individual will have a better chance to work for a better life.

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Bearing this in mind, an individual is saved from many heartaches which would be his when he looks about him and sees those retrogressions and throwbacks in our social living. That does not mean that a leader, a preacher and social thinker must however consent to compromise to social imperfections, social evils. He must learn to attack them with greater deliberateness and with longer-ranged plans, realizing that there are no quick methods of social reform.

Thus, for example, I was wrong about Prohibition. I was outraged by the curse of drunkenness, the miseries which it brought about and I believed, as millions of other people believed, that these evils could be done away with by prohibiting the sale of liquor. But the years



have taught me as it has taught many other people that that is not the way to do it. There is no quick method of changing the habits of a people, that the more patient painstaking laborious methods of education, control, guidance are the ways which may yield some appreciable gain in the solution of this problem.

I was wrong on the subject of the World War. I was twenty-two years old when this country entered the World War. As a young man I was caught up by this messianic dream that this would be a war to end war, a war that would make the world safe for democracy and I believed that it could be made safe for democracy and that this war would end war. But I was wrong. War will never end war. Democracy can never be made secure or saved by violent bloodshed.

So today, when I think of peace, I try to keep myself from thinking of it along romantic lines, from pinning my hopes on some humanly impossible technique such as pacifism, realizing that the mood of pacifism is possible only to the aristocrats of the human race. But the masses are not that kind of people. And so my hope for ultimate peace lies today in those detailed constructive efforts step by step to strengthen those international agencies such as the League of Nations, such as the World Court which will make in the course of time war less and less likely and armament less and less necessary.

Through these years I have also become much less enthusiastic about the promise and performance of both political and economic radicalism, now that I have seen radicalism in action. I have seen in Italy, Germany and Russia and other parts of the world, movements seeking to bring about *Kingdom Come*



~~some~~ over night. And I have had occasion to observe their ruthlessness and impatience and intolerance and readiness to sacrifice means to ends. In an effort to pour new wine into old bottles, they not only pour out much precious old wine but they frequently destroy the bottles themselves. I have seen some of the most sacred human values for which men have struggled trampled under foot because of the radicals' stampede for Kingdom Come which stampede can never lead to any Kingdom Come.

I have of course far greater sympathy for the motives of the radical lefts than for the radical rights but I have no sympathy for their method of sacrificing means to ends. I have come through the years a much more convinced liberal than I ever was.

The other day I happened to call on an old friend of mine to solicit a subscription for the Jewish Welfare Fund. In the course of conversation he told me that he stopped coming to The Temple because he found me too liberal in my views. I wish he had been a little more liberal in his contribution. But I thought of that old Yiddish proverb: "When a man doesn't like the voice of the cantor, he stops reciting the Sh'ma." For this friend of mine an otherwise very intelligent person, I was too liberal. For some of my radical friends, I am too conservative. Frankly, I find it difficult to pigeon myself doctrinally in economics, politics or theology. I have always hated the shackles of blind partisanship. I am not a doctrinaire, nor an orthodox devotee of any program or platform. I insist on my right to choose, dissent, accept or reject.

The years have taught me to know the evils in the present-day economic struggle. I know and understand and have frequently had occasion



to point out sometimes at great cost, these evils of individualist society. On the other hand, I know the evils of bureaucratic state absolutism. While I am convinced that a measure of social ownership in our country will have to come, that while I am convinced that the wealth of our nation should be more equitably distributed, while I am persuaded that the highly concentrated wealth of the nation in the hands of a few ought to be wiped out of existence, I am not persuaded that communism is the other alternative and the only other method today. These highly radical forces cannot be brought about through our control apparatus and democratic machine. I am not persuaded that all private ownership is morally wrong, that all private ownership should be destroyed, that all private agriculture should be collectivized, that all economic functions should come under the head of central bureaucratic organization. I have lost my veneration for absolutes, for counsels of perfection, for extremism. They ask too high a price for their millennial promises.

My twenty years too, my friends, have given me a sense of movement in history, a sense of transition in history. I have come to understand the implication of the poet who said "For each age is a dream that is dying and one that is coming to birth." I have lived through wars and revolutions and depressions. I have heard men talk and I have talked myself about the collapse of civilization in the world. But civilization has not collapsed. The world has not come to an end. I have come to feel more and more the vitality of human life, the capacity which it has for blundering through its seemingly insurmountable difficulties. In this part of the world there is reaction, in that country failure, etc. The human race is moving forward, checking up year by year some additional gain, some



precious value which is added to the sum total of communal good which we call civilization. I am more persuaded now than ever in the reality of human progress.

After twenty years, I find that Jewish life today is far more vital, far more purposeful than when I first entered the ministry. Jews today face problems much more realistically. Assimilation which was a real problem twenty years ago has been completely liquidated. The Jew is accepting his inevitable status in the world and is making proper adjustment in the way of living in the midst of non-Jewish life. A Jewish communal life has developed, educationally, socially. Two years after I entered the ministry, the Balfour Declaration called into existence a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It was a dream then. In the last twenty years, the dream became a reality in Jewish life and Palestine is becoming the great Jewish homeland. Yearly, thousands of our people are settling there. Palestine already sent its current of revitalization through Jewish communities throughout the world today.

I believe that the vitality of the synagogue has increased. Many Temples and Synagogues are centers of education and culture. Many of their leaders are spokesmen of the great prophetic ideals of the great prophetic ideals of the synagogue.

I believe that we have lost in one regard. Too much of the service is centered in the sermon or lecture. Congregations are too much like audiences than like worshipers. A quiet hour of communion with yourself and God is far more valuable, far greater than any sermon ever preached. The habit of worship, I believe, has suffered sharp decline in recent years. How to recapture it is, to my mind, the most important factor today.



Personally, I feel highly rewarded. It is a privilege to serve my people and my God. It is very difficult for a man in my position to estimate success of work. He cannot measure success. A doctor can measure his success by the number of successful operations; the lawyer, by the number of cases won; the painter, in terms of portraits and paintings. There are ways for most man to evaluate. There is no way at all for the minister and the rabbi. Of course, some priests and rabbis do receive applause. All men love applause. All men love appreciation. A man must guard himself against the sweet seducing charm of people's applause. They make the heart warm but the head giddy. A man in my profession will remember that warning which we find in the New Testament: "Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

A sensible man in my profession will come to be as grateful for his enemies as for his friends. I suppose the only way we have of satisfying ourselves that our work has not altogether been in vain is in the faith that perhaps at some time or another, one word of ours did fall on fertile ground, that perhaps at some time or other, we did succeed in strengthening the hand of someone in trouble, of comforting some heart in sorrow, of guiding some youth in the right way of life. I suppose that our satisfaction lies in the knowledge that we did the utmost of our ability and strength. I suppose it is with these things intangible, in the faith that we followed the light of the everlasting God in faithfulness, in devotion unfalteringly, that the success of a Rabbi's work can be counted.

And so at the end of twenty years in the Rabbinate, my friends, I feel that my apprenticeship is about over. I am about ready to become a rabbi in Israel. I am not so sure that life begins at forty. I am convinced that life does not end at forty. And so, today, I am ready to adopt that



beautiful motto of Michael Angelo: "Ancora Imparo" - I am still learning.





435 My 20 yrs.  
4-28-35 in the  
ministry

I began my ministry twenty years ago <sup>IN</sup> the first year of the World War. I was ordained <sup>DURING</sup> in the month in which the Lusitania sank. Now twenty years in a profession is not a very long time. I know some of my colleagues who have been in the ministry thirty-forty-fifty years. I don't know how they manage it. But some ~~of them~~ do. <sup>II</sup> But by common agreement, these last twenty years have been very unusual and extraordinary years. You will agree with me that more <sup>ACTUALLY</sup> ~~has~~ happened in the last two decades than in the ~~last~~ two or three generations preceding. And because of the swift tempo of private and group existence ~~in the last twenty years~~, because of the breath-taking changes which took place, a teacher, a preacher, a leader -- or any man who occupies any key position in a social group was compelled to crowd in so much more of living into his days, was compelled to make many more adjustments, <sup>AND</sup> engage in so many more activities than people in similar positions a generation or two ago.

Ministers in former times had a much easier time physically and intellectually. <sup>The world</sup> ~~Life~~ was more orderly. Life pursued a more even tenor. Of course life was not quite as placid or idyllic even then as some people imagine. We <sup>ARE INCLINED TO</sup> ~~have a way of complaining~~ of the age in which we live and <sup>TO ASSUME</sup> ~~of assuming~~ that the times that were ~~were~~ far better than the times that are ~~here~~. Nevertheless it is a fact and ~~truth~~ that never was life in the past few generations at least quite like the seething cauldron which it has been since 1915, the years since the World War -- the years of my ministry which ran parallel to the years since the World War.



The sheer mention of the events which have taken place in the last twenty years will give an idea of the tempestuous, often desperate times <sup>AND CHAOTIC</sup> ~~which~~ <sup>THROUGH WHICH</sup> we passed. There was the World War. There was America's announced neutrality followed by the renunciation of our neutrality, followed by our entrance into the World War, followed by almost two years of feverish, hectic war — years in which <sup>MILLIONS OF MEN WERE TRANSPLANTED —</sup> ~~men engaged~~ — war propaganda, war parades, Liberty Loans, revolution in Russia, Armistice, Revolution in Germany, treaty making in Paris, the <sup>WORLD MAP REMADE</sup> ~~map of the world~~ completely changed, empires dissolved, new states formed, the League of Nations, the World Court, ~~Communism~~ in Russia, Fascism in Italy, the Harding scandals in the United States, ~~the~~ Tea-pot Dome, Prohibition, the crime wave, boom years, the Jazz Age, the economic collapse of 1929, the triumph of Nazism in Germany, <sup>IN 1932</sup> ~~the banks closed~~ in the United States, ~~America faces~~ industrial collapse, fifteen million unemployed, a new election, a New Deal, the NRA codes, economic reorganization, strikes, the Red Scare, the rise of Fascism in America, the decline of Democracy -- all these within the brackets of twenty brief years.

And in our own Jewish world -- just think back <sup>OVER</sup> what has happened in these years. The <sup>TRAIL</sup> effects of the World War upon the Jewish communities, particularly in Eastern Europe, hundreds of thousands of refugees scattered all over the world, the bloody massacres in the Ukraine, the relief campaigns, the break up of Jewish communal life in Russia, the Balfour Declaration, ~~in 1917~~, the vast development of Palestine, the Nazi attack on the Jews in Germany, protest, ~~the rise of Nazism in Germany~~, the Boycott, the spread of anti-Semitism all over the world, the spread of anti-Semitism in the United States -- all these epochal, turbulent, many of them chaotic movements. What a world this has been <sup>THESE</sup> ~~in the~~ last twenty years. What confusing years they have been.



As I was going over the <sup>CONFUSING</sup> facts of the last few <sup>TWO DECADES</sup> ~~these landmarks,~~  
the ~~confusion~~, its miseries, its unhappiness, I was reminded of a story of  
the rabbi who went to the tailor and ordered a suit of clothes. He waited  
and waited for it and lost patience. Finally, he said to the tailor, "The  
Lord made the world in six days and you haven't my suit ready yet -- after  
many weeks." The tailor answered, "But look at the kind of a world it is  
and look at this suit of clothes."

I entered the ministry twenty years ago as a very young man. I  
lived through these events not as a disinterested onlooker, not even as  
an interested spectator, but as one ~~very~~ vitally involved intellectually  
and emotionally in all that was going on and at times an active participant  
~~in all movements going on.~~ <sup>THESE DRAMAS</sup> Through experience I have learned a few things  
and have had to unlearn many other things. I think it was Swift who said  
that ~~the~~ "The latter part of a wise man's life is taken up in curing the  
follies, prejudices and false opinions he had contracted in the former."  
In the next twenty years I shall have to spend ~~my~~ time curing false opinions  
which I entertained in the last twenty years.

Among the things I learned which I suppose all thinking men learn  
is that the task of reforming the world, <sup>OF</sup> shaping it a little nearer to one's  
heart's desire is not as easy as I thought it was. My devotion and enthusiasm  
to social reconstruction is quite as ardent as it ever was. I believe that  
I have lost something of that impatience, something of that <sup>URGENT</sup> ~~impatience~~ which  
<sup>EVERY IDEALIST</sup> fills all youth with ~~idealism and hopefulness~~. Whereas as a young man I  
was inclined to attribute all social evils to sheer human perversity, <sup>TO THE</sup>  
wickedness <sup>GREED</sup> and malice of individuals, I have come through the years to  
understand the <sup>MASS IMPERSONAL</sup> ~~last~~ forces operating in the life of man and society.



I have come to understand something about systems <sup>in</sup> which good men, well-intentioned men, quite unconsciously, quite against their own wills, are made to work iniquity. I have come to seek for solutions not <sup>merely</sup> only in ethical improvement of individuals, ~~in the spiritual regeneration of man himself~~, but in the re-organization of the whole social and economic set-up so that the individual will have a better chance to work for a better life.

I have come to understand during ~~these years~~ something about the imperfections which are <sup>inherent</sup> inevitable, ~~which are inescapable~~ in all social organizations. I have come to understand that public morality can never <sup>rise to</sup> reach those summits which private morality can reach. An individual can lift himself by ~~self-improvement~~ to magnificent heights of moral perfection. The individual must always be challenged to rise above the normal order of his group. The social group ~~itself~~ must be challenged and prodded on to advance. <sup>and</sup> One must not lose patience with this ~~seeming immobility~~ to the seeming inertia of the group because the group cannot make advances as rapidly or as easily as the individual.

Bearing this in mind, an individual is saved from many heartaches which would be his when he looks about him and sees those retrogressions and throwbacks in our social living. That does not mean that a leader, a preacher and social thinker must ~~however~~ consent to compromise <sup>and quietly accept</sup> to social imperfections, <sup>and</sup> social evils. He must learn to attack them with greater deliberateness and with longer-ranged plans, realizing that there are <sup>short cuts to</sup> no quick methods of social reform.

Thus, for example, I was wrong about Prohibition. I was outraged by the curse of drunkenness, the miseries which it brought about, and I believed, as millions of other people believed, that these evils could be done away with by prohibiting the sale of liquor. But the years



have taught me as it has taught many other people that that is not the way to <sup>do it</sup> do it. There is no quick method of changing the habits of a people, <sup>only</sup> ~~that~~ the more patient painstaking laborious methods of education, <sup>control</sup> ~~control~~, guidance are the ways which may yield some appreciable gain in the solution of this problem.

I was wrong on the subject of the World War. I was twenty-two years old when this country entered the World War. As a young man I was caught up by <sup>the</sup> ~~this~~ messianic dream that this would be a war to end war, a war that would make the world safe for democracy and I believed that ~~it~~ <sup>the world</sup> could be made safe for democracy and that this war would end war. But I was wrong. War will never end war. Democracy can never be made secure or saved by violent bloodshed.

~~So~~ Today, when I think of peace, I try to keep myself from thinking ~~of it~~ along romantic lines, from pinning my hopes on some humanly impossible technique such as pacifism, realizing that the mood of pacifism is possible only to the aristocrats of the human race. ~~But~~ <sup>yet</sup> the masses are not that kind of people. And so my hope for ultimate peace lies today in those detailed constructive efforts ~~step by step~~ to strengthen those international agencies such as the League of Nations, <sup>and</sup> ~~such as~~ the World Court which <sup>can</sup> ~~will~~ make in the course of time war less and less likely and armament less and less necessary.

Through these years I have also become ~~much~~ less enthusiastic about the promise and performance of both political and economic radicalism, now that I have seen radicalism in action. ~~I have seen~~ <sup>I have seen</sup> in Italy, Germany and Russia and other parts of the world, movements seeking to bring about <sup>the</sup> kingdom



came over night. And I have had occasion to observe their ruthlessness and impatience and intolerance and readiness to sacrifice means to ends. In an effort to pour new wine into old bottles, they not only pour out much precious old wine but they frequently destroy the bottles themselves. I have seen some of the most sacred human values <sup>PAINFULLY WON OVER THE AGES</sup> ~~for which men have struggled~~ trampled <sup>AND DESTROYED</sup> under foot because of the radicals' stampede <sup>TOWARDS</sup> ~~for~~ Kingdom Come <sup>WHEN ANY PASSION</sup> ~~which~~ stampede can never lead to any Kingdom Come.

I have of course far greater sympathy for the motives of the radical lefts <sup>MOTIVES OF THE</sup> than for the radical rights but I have no sympathy <sup>WHEN ANY PASSION</sup> ~~for their~~ <sup>YET</sup> ~~method of~~ sacrificing means to ends. I have come through the years a much more convinced liberal than I ever was.

The other day I happened to call on an old friend of mine to solicit a subscription for the Jewish Welfare Fund. In the course of conversation he told me that he stopped coming to The Temple because he found me too liberal in my views. I wish he had been a little more liberal in his contribution. But I thought of that old Yiddish proverb: "When a man doesn't like the voice of the cantor, he stops reciting the Sh'ma." For this friend of mine, an otherwise very intelligent person, I was too liberal. For some of my radical friends, I am too conservative. Frankly, I find it difficult to pigeon <sup>hole</sup> myself doctrinally in economics, politics or theology. I have always hated the shackles of blind partisanship. I am not a doctrinaire, nor an orthodox devotee of any program or platform. I insist on my right to choose, dissent, accept or reject.

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I DO NOT CONCEIVE  
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-7-

to point out sometimes at great cost, <sup>THE</sup> evils of individualist society.  
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~~After twenty years~~, I find that Jewish life today is far more <sup>ENERGETIC</sup> ~~vital~~, <sup>AND</sup> far more purposeful than when I first entered the ministry. Jews today face problems much more realistically. Assimilation which was a real problem twenty years ago has been completely liquidated. The Jew is accepting his inevitable status in the world and is making proper adjustment <sup>TO LIFE</sup> in the way of living in the midst of non-Jewish life. <sup>ORGANIZATION</sup> Jewish communal life has developed <sup>BOTH</sup> educationally, <sup>AND</sup> socially. Two years after I entered the ministry, the Balfour Declaration called into existence a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It was a dream then. In the last twenty years, the dream became a reality in Jewish life and Palestine is becoming the great Jewish homeland. Yearly, thousands of our people are settling there. Palestine already <sup>has</sup> sent its current of revitalization through Jewish communities throughout the world, <sup>AND</sup> today.

I believe that the vitality of the synagogue has increased.

Many Temples and Synagogues are centers of education and culture. Many of their leaders are spokesmen of the <sup>high</sup> great prophetic ideals of the <sup>OLD TRADITION</sup> great prophetic ideals of the synagogue.

~~I believe that~~ we have lost in one regard. Too much of the service is centered in the sermon ~~or lecture~~. Congregations are too much like audiences <sup>AND TOO</sup> ~~than~~ like worshipers. A quiet hour of communion with yourself and God is far more valuable, ~~far greater~~ than any sermon ever preached. The habit of worship, I believe, has suffered sharp decline in recent years. How to recapture it is, to my mind, <sup>A CRITICAL CHALLENGE</sup> the most important factor today.



Personally, I feel highly rewarded. It is a privilege to serve my people and my God. It is ~~very~~ difficult for a man in my position to estimate <sup>The</sup> success <sup>And</sup> of work. He cannot measure success. A doctor can measure his success by the number of successful operations; the lawyer, by the number of cases won; the painter, in terms of portraits and paintings. There are ways for most man to evaluate. <sup>Their labors last</sup> ~~There is~~ no way at all for the minister and the rabbi. Of course, some priests and rabbis do receive applause. All men love applause. All men love appreciation. A man must guard himself against the sweet seducing charm of people's applause. They make the heart warm but the head giddy. A man in my profession will remember that <sup>does well to</sup> warning which we find in the New Testament: "Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

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And so at the end of twenty years in the Rabbinate, my friends, I feel that my apprenticeship is about over. I am about ready to become a rabbi in Israel. I am not so sure that life begins at forty. I am convinced that life does not end at forty. And so, ~~today,~~ I am ready to adopt that



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