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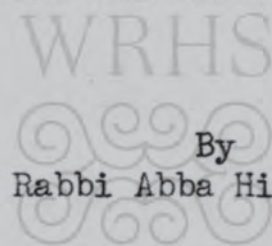
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Where Science and Religion have both Failed, 1940.

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"WHERE SCIENCE AND RELIGION HAVE BOTH FAILED"



By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, April 7, 1940

Recently there appeared in one of the more important magazines of our nation a significant article called "The Light that Failed". The light that has failed, according to the writer, is the Church. The Church has failed democracy today, that at the heart of democracy, according to this writer, are certain spiritual values, absolutes or basic assumptions which cannot be sacrificed except at the moral peril of democracy. American democracy owes a great debt to the spiritual leadership which the Church provided to the nation in its formative days. That leadership is now lacking, has been lacking for some time. The American people, by and large, continues the writer, no longer believes in the Church for they are no longer effectively taught. And this fact is endangering our political and social institutions because as soon as the faith in the absolute spiritual values are lost, these institutions begin to disintegrate. Frequently in the past the Church instead of insisting upon absolute values embraced relative values. As in the case of the Civil War when it rationalized slavery. In the last world war, continues the author, the Church compromised on the issue of war. At first it opposed it. Then it reconciled itself to it and even advocated it. Today, again the Church seems to be opposing war. How long will it be before the Church again changes its mind?

In other words, the Church is not, has not been leading. The flock, rather, is leading the shepherd. The pastor is following the people. The voice of the Church is the echo of the voice of the people rather than the authentic voice of God speaking through the Church. Because this is so, the writer maintains, there has been a menacing rise in materialism in this nation. But unfortunately, the solution of all of our material problems is not to be found within materialism. "And so," he says, "by no conceivable set of circumstances could materialism have produced the great 'solution' of the 18th century that we have come to know as the American system. The American

system has its origin on the one hand, in passionate religious sects who believed in the spiritual absolutes that today are lacking; and on the other hand in those rationalists of the Golden Age of the American colonies, for whom Reason was not merely mechanistic but divine. Similarly, by no conceivable set of circumstances will it be possible to solve by materialism the titanic problems, domestic and international, with which humanity is faced today. The ultimate answers to the questions that humanity raises are not, and never have been, in the flesh."

"If these matters are left in the hands of the laity, to be solved on materialistic grounds, civilization, instead of going forward, will recede. Without effective spiritual leadership the maladjustments of our politico-economic system must inevitably increase; unemployment, lack of opportunity, maldistribution of wealth, and lack of confidence will symptomize a long retreat; collectivism will grow; and what remains to us of the Golden Age, when we were able to believe, will be consumed in revolutions and wars."

"There is only one way out: the sound of a voice, coming from something not ourselves, in the existence of which we cannot disbelieve. It is the earthly task of the pastors to hear this voice, to relate it convincingly to the contemporary scene, and to tell us what it says. If they cannot hear it, or if they fail to tell us, we, as laymen, are utterly lost. Without it we are no more capable of saving the world than we were capable of creating it in the first place."

This was taken from the article which appeared in the Fortune Magazine, a magazine devoted to the interests of the American businessman.

Now undoubtedly there is much truth in all of this. Similarly complaints have been heard before and within the precincts of the Church. When I speak of the Church, I think of the Temple, the Synagogue, I speak of organized Religion, as such. And the answer to the indictment, if it is

an indictment, ought not to be apologetics, but rather penitence and reform. The Church could make, I think, a good case for itself, and I will indicate the case of the Church in a moment. Nevertheless, the prime response to such a charge which contains so much of truth is not a continuous apologetics, but a soul-searching, a stock-taking, a penitence and a reformation.

Some years ago, I was asked to contribute a sermon to a forum on the "The Varieties of Present-Day Preaching", and I devoted my sermon to the subject "Prophetic Preaching". In the course of that sermon I made the following observations: "Religion has not always been faithful to its informing purpose. After the first great impulse which creates a religion embodies itself into an institution, it loses much of its daring and courage. All religions at the first moment of their revelation, when they leap hot and frenzied from the soul of some God-intoxicated seer, are purging fires, consuming flames. They speak in thunder and sweep life with a 'besom of destruction'. They are 'set over nations and over kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build anew and to plant.'... The World stands aghast and frightened. It turns upon the prophets of the new revelation and crucifies them, only to kneel a moment later and worship them."

"But soon the hot coals of religious passion cool off. The heroic mood vanishes. Loyalties lose their sacrificial quality. The voice crying in the wilderness becomes an echo, faint and timid. Enthusiasm is quenched in habit. Religion becomes institutionalized. Hierarchy and vested interests appear. The church becomes an end in itself. When its interests are at stake it will compromise and yield and betray men in their direst needs."

"This danger, of course, is inherent in all organization. Whatever moral pioneering has been done in the world has been largely the work, not of groups, but of individual spiritual adventurers, rebels and non-conformists. Revelations never come to groups. There were schools of prophets in ancient Israel, but they were merely the monitors of ancient superstitions. It was only after the individual separated himself from the school and the group and pursued his own solitary quest of truth, that prophecy discovered its authentic voice and mood."

"The church, therefore, freighted down with organization, must constantly war against itself to save its soul. The church must protect itself against the downward drag of institutionalism and the paralysis of will which result from over-organization and prosperity. The church triumphant often spells the faith defeated. How often has the church been a flunkey to the rich! How often has its revolutionary passion for justice and social righteousness been leashed by worldliness and sycophancy! The church set out to admonish men to put away the evil of their doings, to "cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow," but it ended by truckling to the powerful and the rich, and by sharing in the spoils of the marauders and exploiters of society."

"In the Temple at Jerusalem, there was a flute fashioned out of reeds, an old flute, having come down from the days of Moses. The sound of the flute was sweet and beautiful, ravishing the souls of worshipers. But one day the priests at the sanctuary decided to decorate the flute, and they covered it with gold. The flute was never the same again. Its sweet, clear, cool tones were now harsh, metallic and jarring. Gold had coarsened its melody..."

That is the standing danger which confronts the Church. The Church periodically must confront itself, its own shortcomings and must make an heroic effort to rediscover its essential mission, its dynamic spirit, its prophetic soul. And to that extend, the article, "The Light that Failed" is correct and should be taken seriously to heard by every teacher of religion and by every Church organization as well. Having said this, I have said only half of what should be said, even as the writer in his article wrote only half of what he should have written because when one reads the article, one gets the idea that the laymen is absolved of all that happened and places the total responsibility at the threshold of organized religion. Churches and Synagogues except in rare instances, are not owned or controlled by ministers or rabbis. The Catholic Church may be an exception to the rule, but as far as the Protestant Churches and Synagogues are concerned,, they are lay institutions. They are free fellowships of laymen who select their spiritual guude, and together laymen and clergy define their creeds and fix their official attitudes to vital issues. And very often the laity resents it when ministers go off by themselves and speak for their religious denomination on basic questions of Church problems or politics. The laymen want their views also reflected, and if I may say, rightly so, if these Church organizations are to remain democratic fellowships.

And very often the laymen by the might of their number in Church organizations, and by their financial control will often over-ride these moral absolutes and try to modify them or silence them. Here and there an individual in the pulpit is sufficiently strong, ~~enffien~~ sufficiently independent and will rise above it and even defy such control.

The ancient prophets of Israel who challenged organized religion and the noblemen, and the priests in the name of God and the spirit, did so without

fear. These ancient prophets of Israel were not ministers. They were not pastors in any organization. They had no responsibility in any organization. Clergymen and ministers likewise, as a rule, must work within an organization, with their people. To work with their people they must have the good will of their people. A shepherd who is so far over his flock, can't lead his flock. His teachings will fall short of the absolute to the extent that the laity will tolerate. If the laity wants a more thoroughgoing moral crusade, it must do its share to make it possible by refraining from punishing the ministers who preach it, and rewarding those who avoid it. In other words, the laymen too, ought to become penitent and search their own souls to see how far they have been responsible for quenching the burning fires of religion in the nation.

How often have I heard, and how often have you heard the charge made by laymen against ministers who would speak up in behalf of great prophetic ideals of religion, in behalf of social religislation, in the denunciation of exploitation, how often with insolence and contempt. What is he meddling for with things that do not belong to him.

One is reminded what Ameziah said to Amos who in the midst of an assembly spoke up the word of God as it came to his lips, touching the corruption of the people and the wickedness and oppression of the poor, the orphan and the needy. Ameziah with contempt said to Amos: You don't belong here. This is the King's sanctuary. This is a royal house. Go back to your mountains of Judea. You don't know anything about these things. That sort of resentment or mockery and contempt confronts many an individual who would like to speak the word of God as it comes to him.

I remember that the great Protestant Church, a few years ago, made public a statement on Social Justice which was very thoroughgoing and significant, and immediately some of the prominent lay members of that denomination denounced

these ministers for daring to speak in the name of their denomination, denounced them, and said they represented no one but themselves in their historic Church.

The Rabbis of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, also, two years ago, published a code of Social Justice, very courageous, and echoing the prophetic traditions of our race - and our Jewish laymen also went out of their way to denounce the Rabbis for having done it.

So that if modern Judaism will some day be charged with failure to preach the spiritual and moral absolute, the Jewish laymen should not then try to get from under his share of the responsibility for his failure to subscribe and follow.

It is true that the Church did compromise on slavery, but it is also true that it was a religious movement that started the anti-Slavery movement. And it was also true that there were many great spiritual souls in the Churches both in the North and in the South who spoke up against slavery. And what did the laity do to them. Did they uphold their hands? They persecuted them, drove them out, not only in the South, but absolutist preachers in the North were subjected to persecution.

It is true that during the last World War, many Church leaders who believed in righteousness of the cause of the allies, but there were also many ministers who were Pacifists, who denounced the war. What did the laymen do to them? They were tarred and feathered and crucified. It is true, of course, that readiness for martyrdom ought to be a requisite of the man of God. It is of course true that much may be asked and demanded of a man who assumes to speak in the name of God. But much must also be demanded and expected of the laymen in the Church, for he, too, assumes great moral responsibility if he identifies himself with the Church. Religion is not a monopoly or the

exclusive obligation of the professional minister or Rabbi. Religion belongs to all men who believe in God and its moral law and to establish a Church to propogate our faith.

And when laymen took their religion seriously and personally, as something vital to themselves, and as something necessary to their own people, then they projected leaders who made vocal these yearnings in the souls of the laymen. This is a colloquy to the other fact that greatly inspired individual leaders spoke the word of truth. They were able to influence multitudes and to determine history.

Both the laymen and the man in the pulpit must therefore share in the responsibility for whatever status religion comes to hold at any given moment in history. Here, again the prophets of Israel were wise. They didn't blame the priests only, or the kings, or princes. They blamed all. I read to you this morning from the Fifth Chapter of Jeremiah:

"An appalling and horrible thing is come to pass in the land:
The prophets prophesy in the service of falsehood,
And the priests bear rule at their beck
And my people love to have it so,
What then will ye do in the end thereof?"

There is no localizing of the responsibility for the moral collapse of religion. Certainly as far as our synagogue is concerned, there can be no such functional ~~religious~~ distinction. Our religion is a layman's religion "par excellence!" Ever since the destruction of The Temple there has been no priestly hierarchy in Judaism. Judaism is a religion of common folks. The Torah was given to the people and the Rabbis are obligated to ~~perform~~ perform no more than the average layman. If our religion has not been as effective and dominate in the life of our people as it should be, and it isn't, the entire blame can not be put or unloaded on the Rabbis, or on the institutions.

There is one false note which has crept into the life of our people about which I should like to talk to you for a moment. For the first time in the history of our people, we have come to speak of Jews belonging to a synagogue, to the temple. In the past, Jews didn't belong to the synagogue. They didn't support any synagogue. Men then didn't belong any more to a synagogue than they belonged to their home. It wasn't an orphanage, or a home for the aged, something for others to derive benefits from. The synagogue was part of their lives. It was an expression of profound religious needs and convictions. They went to synagogue to pray, to be guided, comforted. It was a symbol of their life and of their destiny. It was themselves. Why many of these synagogues had no Rabbis at all. It was the home of every Jew which he naturally maintained not for others, but for himself, not as a matter of charity, but as a matter of spiritual necessity.

The light of religion has failed to a degree, and so has the light of science failed. For a hundred years, science crowded religion, forced it to the background. Only recently have scientists come to realize the indispensability of religion in the life of an individual. Only in the last few decades have people come to understand what havoc has been wrought by a civilization built on materialism. Scientists have pointed out the marvelous avenues opened up, but have not succeeded in making life more happy. There is more civic strife, more international war than at any time in the world before. There are many more slums, more unemployment in our midst. In the midst of vast vast technological development there is yet more intolerance and more terror in the world today than there has been in centuries.

Now the failure is not of science nor of scientists although it did

contribute a false interpretation on facts. The fault is with those who opposed religion in the name of science, just as frequently in the past, religious institutions or organizations opposed science in the name of religion. The tragedy is that there has taken place no synthesis of fact with purpose, between the knowledge of nature and the knowledge of God, between what is true factually and spiritually.

The tragedy is that life is departmentalized. There is no channel of inter-communication between all these institutions and systems, each working in its own field, with the result that there has been no systematic progress right down the line for the human race, but sporadic outposts here and there which in many ways endanger the human race.

What our age requires is a harmonization of all truth - factual, spiritual - the correlation of all forces working for the improvement of man, the Church or the school. What is needed is that all men shall work for one common thing - the ennoblement of the human race. Not the clergyman alone in the pulpit, nor the teacher in the school, nor the scientists in the laboratory, nor the businessman in the office, nor the workingman at his lathe, but all men guided in the activities within their respective spheres of influence for one common purpose - the enrichment and the ennoblement of human life, greater peace, greater justice, greater security, greater neighborliness for human beings.

The light has failed us all. And in the darkness which surrounds us - all of us, laity and clergy, we must begin to reach out for the light, the light of God concerning which the prophet and the scientists say: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; of whom, need I then fear?"

1. "The Light That Has Failed" - "Forfeiture"

- At the heart, D. are certain sp. values absolute or assumptive - ^{sacrificed at modern period}
- Am. D. owes a great debt to the sp. leadership which the Church provided in its formative days.
- That leadership is now lacking - has been lacking for some time
- Am. people no longer believe in teachings, Church - for they are no longer effectively taught.
- This is endangering our pol. & social institutions: For as soon as the faith in the abs. sp. values undergoes change as is lost, they are on the way of disintegration
- The Church in the past embraced relative values without absolute values - Civil War - when it rationalized slavery. World War - when it came to sanction war, after being opposed to it. The Church is again opposing war. How long will it be before it changes its mind again?
- The Church is not leading. The flock is leading the shepherd. The pastor follows the people. - Their voices are the echoes of the people's voices. "I see you"
- Hence - rise in materialism. But the solutions to the material problems are not to be found with in materialism (Joshi)

- + If the body wants a more thorough moral crusade - it must do its share to make it possible - by refraining from promoting the ministers who preach it, and rewarding those who eschew it.
- It must be persistent - humble & self-searching in the sight of God & in the presence, the Church's future mission.

3. How often - by men - resented - Wedding - Visionaries - uninformed, in practical - Soul fishermen ^{if - in doctrine} ~~only seen~~ wisdom in hands of pract. bus. men - ~~in their backs~~ ^{scribbles in newspaper columns} - ^{and Royal House} ~~uninformed~~ ^{Amegiah & Kings Society} C.C.G.R. - Social justice - oppressed - Unions - Had every right! - signing a denunc. by unbelievers - But when modern Jud. will some day be changed - with justice to preach Sp. & Moral absolute - the Jew legions - ought not should not then, get from under his share of responsibility - failure to subscribe & to follow!

4) The Church did confession on Slavery - Formal! ^{But Anti-Slavery movement also orig. in a Church - Quakers} But the men heroic chamberlains - in South - who spared it - What did legions - who clamored for moral absolute - do to them - But them - Flee! In North too - adventurers -

- 5/ Wald was - Parents - Tanned & fathered them - (4)
+ of course - ^{Responsibility} ~~Marked~~ should be a pre-requisite for him
7 ~~not~~ and much may be asked of a man
who presumes to be a rel. teacher. But, much may
+ should also be demand of the layman in the church -
- for he too, assumes great moral respons. when
he identifies himself with a church -
- + Rel. is not a monopoly of the exclus. obligation
of the professional minister a Rabbi.
- + It belongs to all men who believe in God - this
moral law - & who estab. churches to preach &
propagate them. For the
- + When laymen took this Rel. personally & seriously
to heart - they ^{projected} ~~discovered~~ leaders who made
vocal their sp. yearnings - & they changed
history. This is the corollary to the fact that
great ^{sp.} leaders also would the lives of people and
also change history.
- + Both the man in the Pew & the man in the Pulpit
share in the respons. for whatever stakes rel.
hold in the life of a people at any given time.
- 6/ Our prophets understood it - they did not localize respons.

"An appalling and horrible thing is come to pass in the Land:
The prophets prophesy in the service, falsehood,
And the priests bear rule at their beck
And my people love to have it so,
What then will ye do in the end thereof?"

always the prophets pushed kings - princes - priests - prophets &
common people in joint responsibility for back-sliding & sin

7/ Certainly no such functional distinctions ever made in
reasons - a layman's rel. "has exclusive!" - since 7091).
דבר - duty to exemplify & propagandize it - לכבוד
הוא - obligations, Rabbin -

If an religious - is not a determinant - entire blame
cannot be unloaded - on Rabbinat - or synag. -

Trend - to "belong" to a synag. - pay dues - and that
act is sufficient participation in Jew. rel. life.

Syn. is "supported" - as an char. institut. - change
- one does not "belong" to this house

But Jews never "belonged" to a syn. - It was an ex-
pression of their professed rel. life & consciousness. In it
they prayed - they studied - they sought guidance, comfort,
inspiration - sympathy, their destiny - Indians, their
undefeated faith!

Many synag. had no Rabbis - I know the wild Jews

and bless the Allied cause. Such hatred for the enemy as there was in the front lines produced no oratory to compare with the invectives hurled against Germany by the men of Christ.

But the reaction from that war to end war was as extreme as the invectives that had urged it on. Nowhere could men see any good in the war; nowhere would men give any credit to the peace. The boys had died in vain. And as for the Church, it, too, retracted; it was ashamed of having called down the fire; a number of its members turned to extreme pacifism; and when the war of 1939 broke out it was *again* opposed to participation almost to a man.

The values used by the Church in reaching its decisions could not have been absolute spiritual values, because by no spiritual logic is it possible to get from one of these positions to the other. The threat to Christianity in 1917 was far less than the threat from Hitler today. The Kaiser's regime, despite its militarism, embodied a culture from which neither religion nor certain political rights were excluded. The regime of Hitler is godless, deriving its strength from the denial of all values except personal power. Yet the men who urged U. S. soldiers in 1917 to face death against an ordinary emperor, whose chief sin was worldly ambition, now conclude that it would be wrong to fight a virtual Antichrist whose doctrines

strike at the base of the civilization which the Church has done so much to build.

How soon could the Church again reverse its views on war? The answer would seem to be clear: the pastors will go over to the other side when, as, and if the people go over to the other side. Their arguments today are the same arguments used by industrialists who urge us to stay out. In dealing with both wars industry has provided a leadership at least as effective as that of the Church. Industry wanted to save democracy in 1917 by fighting; it now wants to save democracy by not fighting. If its point of view is more materialistic than that of the Church, its goal is identical.

Thus the flock is leading the shepherd. And this circumstance, if not corrected, will carve itself deeply in human history.

The first result of lack of spiritual leadership for a people is a rise in materialism. No matter how well intentioned our lay leaders may be, this can scarcely be avoided. Industrialists are not spiritual leaders. The best they can do is to adapt such spiritual truths as they have been taught to the requirements of the arena of action. Their progress is inevitably slow. But it will vanish entirely unless the initial teaching is effective. It is all-important to observe that the solutions to material problems are not to be found within materialism. By no conceivable set of circumstances

6 [could materialism have produced the great "solution" of the 18th century that we have come to know as the American system. The American system has its origin, on the one hand, in passionate religious sects who believed in the spiritual absolutes that today are lacking; and on the other hand in those rationalists of the Golden Age of the American colonies, for whom Reason was not merely mechanistic but divine. Similarly, by no conceivable set of circumstances will it be possible to solve by materialism the titanic problems, domestic and international, with which humanity is faced today. The ultimate answers to the questions that humanity raises are not, and never have been, in the flesh.

— If these matters are left in the hands of the laity, to be solved on materialistic grounds, civilization, instead of going forward, will recede. Without effective spiritual leadership the maladjustments of our politico-economic system must inevitably increase; unemployment, lack of opportunity, maldistribution of wealth, and lack of confidence will symptomize a long retreat; collectivism will grow; and what remains to us of the Golden Age, when we were able to *believe*, will be

consumed in revolutions and wars.

stop ✓ So long as the Church pretends to preach absolute spiritual values, but actually preaches relative secondary values, it will merely hasten this process of disintegration. We are asked to turn to the Church for our enlightenment, but when we do so we find that the voice of the Church is not inspired. The voice of the Church today, we find, is the echo of our own voices. And the result of this experience, already manifest, is deep spiritual disillusionment. The effect of this experience upon the present generation is that of a vicious spiral, like the spiral that economists talk about that leads into depressions. And in this spiral there is at stake, not merely prosperity, but civilization.

There is only one way out: the sound of a voice, coming from something not ourselves, in the existence of which we cannot disbelieve. It is the earthly task of the pastors to hear this voice, to relate it convincingly to the contemporary scene, and to tell us what it says. If they cannot hear it, or if they fail to tell us, we, as laymen, are utterly lost. Without it we are no more capable of saving the world than we were capable of creating it in the first place.



IT WAS a slip of the tongue, but the lady spoke aptly when she telephoned the local radio station and inquired: "When will the waropean news come on?"

—AP