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159

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57

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610

Can Society be Godless and Free?, 1940.

556
CAN SOCIETY BE GODLESS AND FREE?

By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple



On
Sunday morning, April 21, 1940

Judeo
Judeo

It was not a common thing, dear friends, in ancient times for men to challenge authority, either civil or ecclesiastical, or to challenge custom or tradition. For that matter it was not an easy task or a common thing for men to challenge authority at any time.

Someone has spoken of ancient times and referred to them as the "Brutal solidarity of ancient times". That solidarity of ancient times is comparable only to the rigid coordination of the totalitarian states with the exception, of course, that in ancient times the rigorism of the state was not as thoroughgoing because it was not as scientific, stream-lined, expert. That coordination of the total life of the people tended to submerge the individual. Even in areas where law did not decree absolute submissiveness, custom bound the individual to a rigid compliance. The primitive religions, for example and their rituals developed quite unconsciously and impersonally, and men accepted them as a matter of course. The individual did not analyze them nor did they require personal approval. And it was so with all moral conventions. The ancient religions of mankind were the impersonal folk creations. The gods of ancient man were not in any sense personal, but were forces of nature which were symbolized in one image or another. While they possessed great power, they were not altogether free. So that the whole life of man was sheltered by an unconscious self-imposed discipline which controlled him and from which he hardly thought of emancipating himself. Certainly he never thought of challenging it.

B.C.E.

But in the eight, seventh and sixth centuries there arose certain men who did the amazing revolutionary thing. They challenged authority, convention, tradition, the accepted ritual, the accepted cult, the accepted moral code of the people. Strange new voices, the first of their kind in the

history of mankind were heard. These men were called prophets of Israel. These prophets dared to confront kings and denounce them. You heard this morning how a prophet by the name of Elijah, a strange man whom nobody knows, who suddenly appears on the scene and dares to confront the great King Ahab and denounce him for having carried through a piece of expropriation. Because Naboth did not wish to sell his property, the property of his father and his father before him, this man was put to death through a conspiracy on the part of Ahab's wife Jezebel. This nobody who belonged to no ordained class, who had no mandate from anybody, confronts the king and denounced the king with this curse: "The dogs will lick your blood as they licked the blood of the man put to death." The king sees in him his enemy and says, "Have you found me out". And Elijah says, "Yes, I found you out." How dare a commoner find out a king? And strangely enough, this Elijah was not the only one who dared confront a king.

In fact, the Bible is full of accounts where strange people known as prophets faced not only the kings, but the powerful priestly class, and the nobility and the rich and denounced them. Nathan denounced King David and brought him down in contrition and penitence because this unknown prophet found out his sin and crime. And so did Jeremiah with Zedekiah. And so did other prophets denounce others.

Now the question arises, by what authority to they speak? Who commissioned them. By what right did these people come into the Temple and denounce that Holy of Holies as a den of thieves and pronounce doom upon this dwelling place of God? By what authority did these men denounce the rich who were grinding the poor, who were selling the poor men for a shoe-string, who were making the epha small and the shekel large, who were adding house to house and field to field until no man has room to dwell? Who commissioned them?

In whose name did they speak?

They had no authority whatsoever, except the authority of God, the authority of the revelation from God. "Thus said the Lord". They didn't criticise these powerful folk on their own authority. They didn't criticise the moral code of their day on the basis of their own private philosophic speculations, but in the name of God. This is the first lesson that men must learn - that in all ages, wherever and whenever men dared to criticise the economic order, the political order, dared to point at wrong and injustice and corruption, they did it in the name of an authority higher than their own - the authority of the revelation of God. And when that authority was denied, because God was denied, when the prophetic fires were quenched, men fell pray to all forms of tyranny and oppression. Of this fact our age has unfortunately lost sight. What makes men free is God and the revelation of God to man. It is revelation which makes man free. It is that which gives man an authority which transcends all social disciplines and controls. In other words, the basic charter of man's dignity and freedom is God and revelation, and without it, no human society can remain free.

No human society can long remain Godless and free. The Rabbis understood that fully when they said that the revelation on Mt. Sinai was the greatest revelation to our people in our entire history. It is the revelation that made men free. Let me elaborate on this thought a little further, because it is a basic thought.

Faith in the existence of a just God implies the existence of a just moral law, a just moral law which all men should obey because it is the will of God. The violation of this just moral law ~~is~~ is disobedience to God. This puts God on the side of all the victims of injustice and wrong in the world. This makes God the ally, the champion of all those who

struggle against wrong and injustice. This gives God's approval as well as strength and inspiration to all those who struggle for justice in the world.

The existence of God, of a just God, implies the existence of a just moral law, a universal law, and that law is binding upon everybody - individuals and groups of individuals, binding on states, parties. No one is above this universal moral law.

When our modern world came to think of morality not as God-inspired, but as man-made, when our modern world came to believe that the solution of all morality is not God but human convenience, it is clear to see what happened. Morality lost its character, its absolute divine mandate and ^{its} binding on man. The ground was prepared for a new exploitation of mankind, a new subjugation of mankind. The modern totalitarian states derive their entire authority from the materialism of the 19th and 20th centuries which declared that morals are only creations of human convenience subject to the swiftly changing circumstances of time and place. It tries to decree that the state is law unto itself. No society can remain permanently Godless and free. This is history.

Friends of democracy have somehow forgotten the religious origin of the whole democratic thesis ^{in modern} of the world. They have forgotten that political freedom came to the Western World as a result of a long struggle for religious freedom which struggle received its impetus from a demand on the part of deeply religious people ^{the privacy of} for revelation, a deliberate return to ~~the~~ prophetic traditions ~~and~~ ^{ancient Israel sanctions}.

The reason that the democratic movements are perishing in the Western World today, when you look below the surface, is because of the prevalent pessimism of our people which is due to the loss of faith in the individual which is in turn due to the loss of confidence in the reality of revelation, that is of God, in the life of Man.

~~Let me illustrate historically what I mean. The Protestant Reformation undoubtedly marks a turning point in the civilization of the Western World.~~

X The Protestant Reformation ~~which came early in the 16th century~~ was not merely a reformation in the realm of ritual ^{and} ~~a~~ repudiation of the authority of the Papacy. ~~It~~ was much more than that. ~~Even~~ The early leaders ⁱⁿ the Protestant Movement themselves did not fully understand the forces which they represented.

They ~~themselves~~ were confused, and at times very inconsistent. They did not and could not grasp fully what was happening in the mind and heart of the world. What actually was happening was that there was a new and determined ^{uprising} ~~struggle~~ on the part of ^{the} peoples of the Western World for spiritual liberty, for the emancipation of ^{man} ~~man~~ from ~~a~~ System, ~~that man's ultimate submissiveness is not to man but to God.~~ ^{no chains} ~~Even~~ Luther, when still a revolutionary, ^{declared} that "Human authority might be resisted when its mandates conflict with the Word of God." Suddenly ^{everywhere one hears} ~~there flared up throughout the Western World~~ ^{the} such phrase ^{as} "The Word of God". A new authority had come into the life of the world. ~~The~~ authority of direct revelation ^{and it was available to all.} ~~as this "word of God" was valuable to all.~~ It ^{did} ~~not~~ require the mediation of ^a ~~the~~ priest to ^{receive or} understand the Word of God. ~~This led to the direct communion of the individual with his God. That gave to the individual a new dignity which he had not possessed all through the dark ages.~~

^{the} ~~And that~~ demand for spiritual liberty soon expressed itself in ^{demands for} ~~all~~ other forms of liberty. Peasant ^{followed.} ~~Revolts~~ ^{and} ~~Political rights~~, economic rights were clamored for, ~~and they did it in the name of Whom?~~ By what authority?

They had no authority. They had no law to which they could point. They were rightless. In whose name did they speak? In the name of God, in the name

of ^a ~~the~~ revelation ^{from} of God. They ^{declared that} ~~said~~ all men ^{are} equal because God made all men ^{equal.} ~~free.~~ They ^{which they} ~~said~~ the things ^{we} demand ^{was} ~~are~~ the things ^{which} the Bible ^{concedes} ~~grants~~ to all men.

after ... The point I stress is that that great peasant uprising was only quelled after the social revolutions of the sixteenth century which were quenched only a hundred thousand peasants were massacred, ~~It was a social revolution this great~~

~~clamer~~ ^{their} for freedom. It received ~~its~~ inspiration from religion and revelation.

The best of the spiritual passion of the Protestant Reformation and which most affected the life of the American people ^{is found} ~~you find~~ among the Anabaptist ^{sects} which ~~sect~~ ^{sprang up in the wake} arose right on the heel of the ~~Protestant~~ Reformation. ^{Some of these} ~~This sect~~ ^{was} ~~was~~ hundreds of years ahead of ^{then} ~~its~~ time. They believed in the freedom of the ^{of the individual} ~~will~~ the absolute moral responsibility, ^{and in his interest} ~~the right of every individual~~ to interpret the Scriptures according to his own inner light. ~~No minister~~ possessed any authority to preach unless he had received a call such as the ~~prophets of old~~ received.

The duty of the State was only to protect ^{the} good and to punish and ^{the evil} beyond that the state itself was an evil. ^{The individual was free.} These sects were the first to demand absolute dis-establishment, ^{the} separation of church and state. They were the first to preach universal toleration and freedom of worship.

Roger Williams who established the first free city where men could worship God as they pleased was a disciple of the Anabaptist sect. ^{Maintained} They ~~said~~ that all property belonged to God. ^{Some} ~~Many~~ of them ~~actually~~ practised voluntary communism. ^{These} ~~the~~ doctrines of the Anabaptists, carried over to Holland, to England and then to the United States. ~~Strangely enough,~~ The Founding

Fathers of our country proclaimed many of the doctrines of these

religious fanatics. ^{When they} ~~And the founding fathers~~ wrote "We hold these truths ^{to be self-} ~~evident~~ that all men are created equal. ^{and that they are} ~~All men~~ are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. ^{they were giving political expression to Anabaptist} ~~Thus what the Anabaptists said was that~~ ^{religious} ~~All men~~ are equal because they are made equal not by nature, but because they are made spiritually equal by God. As the spiritual leaders of the Sixteenth Century thought in terms of liberty, the political leaders of America thought also in terms of God, freedom, among which were life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. With the American Revolution came the Bill of Rights which I again remind you has origin in religion ^{and} which was passed over to

the French Revolution. Bill of Rights passed from France to the whole Western World, so that historically, whatever we enjoy in the modern world of political freedom, individual rights, are traceable directly to the prophetic tradition which was rekindled in the Sixteenth Century - the revelation of God.

Therefore, I say again, no system can long remain Godless and free. Do you need any proof of it? All the totalitarian states established in the Western World since 1918 based themselves on irreligion, and began by an attack on religion. Bolshevism set out to uproot it. Mussolini. Nazism is the enemy of all the spiritual concepts which we associate with Christianity and Judaism. That is not accidental. Their concept is based on materialism. No one who wants to maintain absolute totalitarian control of the rights of an individual, the intellectual rights as well as the social rights, can tolerate the dynamics of free prophetic religion in the midst of it. All these totalitarian states are grounded in materialism which they assume to be very scientific. But science has already demonstrated hypocritical and has left man stripped and naked and spiritually beaten. And no intellectual shrewdness is an adequate substitute for spiritual dis-integration.

Man today is small and is becoming smaller every day. Man is becoming a statistical item. His personality is of no account in the world. He cannot speak any more in the name of God, in the name of a moral law. Man is now helpless, subject to the will or whim of a party, of a duce, a feuhrer. That is the tragedy of the modern world. All this because God, and God's revelation, and man's relationship to God have been driven out of the consciousness of man. And men will never re-discover it - never - until - and this is not preaching, my friends, but historical fact - until the whole modern world experiences the sort of spiritual revival that the Western

experienced in the Sixteenth Century - a prophetic revival and a rediscovery of that contact with the source of all authority - God.

The end of dictatorship to the world will not come about through wars or through revolutions. Wars and revolutions may prepare the ground but the regeneration of man will come about through a re-discovery of men's own inner spiritual personalities, through the recapturing on the part of people of the revelation of: "Thus Saith the Lord."



- 1/ It was not a common thing in ancient times for men to challenge authority, civil or ecclesiastical, or custom or tradition. It was not a common thing at any time -
- + "Crustal solidity of ancient times" was comparable only to rigid conservatism of modern total state - except its rigorism not as expert and steam-hired as re. effluent -
- + Even in those areas where law did not decree absolute submissiveness - habit + custom unconsciously bound men to compliance.
- + Primitive obs. & their rituals developed with unwavering + inflexibility and were accepted as a matter of course without submitting them to any personal critique or investigation and it was so with their moral conventions.
- + The ancient rules, manifold ^{also impersonal} ~~was~~ impersonal, plec reactions, and their gods were not personal in nature, sympathy in images. They themselves ^{by very powerful} ~~were~~ not altogether free.

- 2/ But then came in Israel in 8-7 b.c. men who presumed to challenge - in a most amazing + resolute manner all forms of established authority. They were called Prophets - Strange, startling voices, first, then heard in the world -
- + Prophets confront Kings - Saul - David - Ahab. Rehoboam - Baasha - Zedekiah - no brothers - ~~but without~~ belonged to no ordained class - Spoke up - defiance in eminence - no fact - prophecy -
- ~~David~~ - Ahab - Haughty man - art of desert - a guide of
- ~~Nathan~~

leather round his loins" - lick the blood - heaven, / as it
by what authority did these 'troubles, Israel' start?
" " " did they come into Temple - ^{den} - scene by?
" " " offend priests - aroused, led - ?
" " " denounce the nobility - rich - grand -
add - sell - epha small, shekel large - refuse / corn

3/ The fact, the matter is - they had no authority - only
God - a revelation from God - ^{philoso. or ethical speculation} - not
their personal critique
fall into the eyes - had no authority - ^{for}

+ And when that source of authority is denied - bee.
God is denied - then prophetic ^{fires are quenched} ~~are silenced~~ - and
age falls prey to all forms of tyranny & oppression

4/ It is Revelation which makes man free. - God's will re-
vealed to man. ... 21 3177 -

+ It is that which gives man an authority which
channels all social discipline & conduct.

+ The basic charter of man's dignity & freedom is God
and revelation.

- No human society can long remain Godless & free
x.1.17 - x.1.17.

5/ Faith in ^{the existence of} a just God - means the existence of a just, moral law (3) which all men should obey, because it is the will of God. Violation of the law is disobedience to God. This puts God on the side of all the victims of injustice & wrong. He becomes their champion. He ^{appears as a wall of} gives strength & inspiration to them in their struggle for justice & freedom.

+ No one is above this universal moral law. The State is not above it - nor is any ruler - or class -

+ When the modern world came to think of morality not as God-inspired but as man-made, as social custom - & freed it of any root but the human convenience - it robbed morality of its ^{character} absolute, divine mandate & prepared the ground for a new exploitation & subjugation was to attain new forms of tyranny & oppression -

6/ Friends of democracy have proposed the rel. origin of the whole democ. thesis of the modern W. world. They have proposed that pol. freedom came to the W. world as a result of the struggle for rel. freedom & not vice versa. And that this struggle for rel. freedom derived its imp. from a conscious return to the authority of Scripture and the Bible - a deliberate return to the prophet Isaiah, Amos & Isaiah.

The reason that the democ. Movement are perishing in
the W. W. to-day - persecution - loss of confidence in God -
due to loss of confidence in reality of revelation - that is

of God in life of Man -

The Prot Reform. was not merely ritual doctrine - Papacy
not even due to leaders - confused as to focus which
motivated cos. - rather they sought to divert - + unintended
Further began - denounce Princes - greatest folk rogues - thieves
as usurers - lawyers as robbers

+ Struggle for Spiritual Liberty - Liberty of conscience
emancipation of Man from system - Man's ultimate
submission not to authority - Man's life of God -

+ Human authority must be resisted when its
mandate conflict with the word of God

+ this word of God - available to all - not priest +
mediation - Universal Priesthood -

+ new dignity + authority to Ind. - other peoples

^{soon} ~~soon~~ expressed itself in demands for Econ. Pol. rights

Peasant War - based demands on grounds of Rel. + Chr.
Godly justice - in name of Bible

Liberty - 12 Articles drawn up - Memorandum - 1529 -

Abolition of status as Villains - bec. Christ made all men free

Elected authority - Taxes - Right words - not ground
Forced services - ground same fact

~~Have we their authority for their own revolution (p. 180)~~ 5

Best of the sp. passion & Refr - Anabaptists - social phil. 300 yrs
I Freedom, will - Moral Rep - Right, Incl. to interp. Scripture
by inner Illumination - Preaching as "Call" - When shall
I send, & who will go for me?

II. State - protect good - punish evil - nothing else!
no authority in peace / conscience - resisted -
Absolute dis-establishment - Separation, Church & State.
Universal Toleration - Freedom, worship

III All property belonged to God - steward - weedy
Voluntary contributions
These Anabaptists - presented - summarized conference in
16c. England and U.S. Roger Williams -

7/ When founding Fathers - "we hold these truths
- endowed by their Creator" - extended that privi-
- Bill of Rights -
- From them to French Rev - Grand prepared

Lafayette, Washington, Jefferson

Jefferson - Franklin - Paine - John Adams - Joel Barlow -

From France to Europe

Religion handed the torch / Pol. Freedom

+ Religion is extinguishing it -

Behind the construction of liberty, Holland, England
France & U.S. are great rel. movements derived
their authority from Revelation - Divine Illumination

8/ Association of Religion with Social Movement

Wyclif - Walter Tyler - 1381 - abolition of serfdom - special services - social equality -

Huss - Ziska

Puritans - Luther



9/ All total. movements begin with (rejection) of

Religion - Russia - Mussolini - Nazis -

+ Based on Materialism - assumed to be scientific -

+ Left man stupefied + muddled in his sp. helplessness

- for which intell. dimension is no substitute

+ Man is small to large - bec. he is no large
image / fact - "a little lower than angels" created

who can speak with God for two - Recaps: Rel. Pan

1) Revolt ag. liberty.

Up to recently - forces opposed - defensive -

no confident philosophy - to rationalize

Field held triumphantly - ideals of liberalism -

rights, Man - Constit. Govt - Democ.

Had not courage to set up Dict. as label

Here & there an isolated voice - Hegel. Hutzl
Sorel

Some notes - off Key - condemned.

All thru last century - reactionary was

lacked an exact, sent. character

4. Quite diff. now! forces - have a Cause -
a Banner! Crusading zeal.

Out to rebuild world - on Anti - dem
anti-liberalism - Anti - Humanism

Proclaimed bankruptcy - 1st Ideal!

no longer Valid - never was valid

A sham - a delusion - False phub.
and in practice harmful.

Emphasis placed on Ind. Person -

false - So also Ind. Peace - Brotherly

Entire & there, Ind. & the. repudiated

Assault - on all an dog was & his initials

2/ It is main task - interest, Lead. must
be merged State. (Mussolini)
but interest & destroy State - matter
Destroy - to attain power - any method
Nothing must stand in way -
Consideration, Right & Wrong - Treaties
Unquestioning obedience -
Popular control = form & degeneration
at head & State - Superman - Law
into himself -
To follow him - superior privilege -
Fulfillment & ind - is by way & identity -
my himself - with will & leader

3/ new Cult, Tyranny - Myth, Liberty
established -
I deal with Tyranny.
Authoritarian Romanticism - not control
Holy Crusade - Missionary Zeal
Metaphysics walked out to its top
conclusion in Nazi Germany - Italy - Hitler

4) Amazingly Success for!

Ignored, at first, now must be met
not only on Battle field - Ideas -

A counter-crusade! Back to its
fundamentals - Diskenes = Rel. degree

To be Free - must be religious -

Can save itself only - by rekindling rel.
convictions.

For what are the warring forces
of Dem?

What gave Man the Wit & Courage
to set himself free?

escort through the city.

JAPS HIT CHRISTIANITY

Patriots Drive to Eliminate Religion; Call It Threat to Race

TOKYO, (Sept. 23 — (Monday) — The Tokyo newspaper, Hochi, said today leaders of Japanese patriotic organizations have taken up a campaign to eliminate Christianity from Japan.

The move was said to be furthered by a meeting at which a resolution was passed urging Christians to resign from Christian organizations and asking for speedy reorganization of Christian educational institutions and dissolution of the Salvation Army in Japan.

The newspaper quoted the resolution as saying "Christianity, a device of Jewish ideas, threatens to encroach upon the spirit of the Japanese race."



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"The ramparts we watch" is a haunting phrase from our national anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner". This same phrase is being widely employed today to define the frontiers and outposts of America's military security. It suggests that there are certain key positions on this hemisphere, certain strategically important points which must be fortified by us and held at all costs if our nation is to remain secure against attack. Other great nations and empires have such vital defensive points. Gibraltar, Suez and Singapore are ramparts for the British Empire. The Panama Canal, Hawaii, and the recently leased island air-bases in the Caribbean are the outlying ramparts of our own country. A people whose ramparts fall, lies open to invasion and conquest.

All this is, of course, quite clear even to a casual observer. What is not so clear is that nations and civilizations have spiritual ramparts which they must guard at all costs if they are to survive. It takes many years, and sometimes many centuries, to build up powerful bastions for national or cultural security. But they may be captured and reduced in much less time.

Judaism has always concerned itself with the spiritual ramparts of mankind, with those strongholds which make secure the peace and happiness of the inner life of peoples and civilizations. Judaism never offered ^{Israel} any dream of empire ~~and~~ ^{or} of world conquest ~~to the people of Israel~~, but it did offer the dream of a universal spiritual empire for the ~~whole~~ ^{of} mankind, wherein all men of good will would find ample "Lebensraum" - living space - wherein ~~all men~~ ^{they} would live under their vine and under their fig trees with none to make them afraid. Judaism defined the true frontiers of this empire ^{men} of ~~the~~ free ~~spirit of man~~ - this Kingdom of God on earth - and it built the vital and strategic outposts and fortifications to make this empire secure. ^{ideologic} As the capital of this empire of ^{a peaceful society} ~~blessed human values~~, it visioned a spiritual Jerusalem - a City of God - whose walls would be called salvation, and

whose gates, praise. Upon the walls of this city, and over the ramparts of this empire, watchmen would be set, who would keep a faithful watch, day and night - watchmen who "would always remember God."

הוא חומת ירושלים והוא שומר על שם ה' וישראל
הוא שומר על שם ה' וישראל

Judaism hoped that Israel would be the captain of the hosts of these faithful watchmen, who would unceasingly, and without peace or rest to themselves, keep guard over these ^{this blessed} ramparts of ~~the~~ empire of man. And in very truth, through long and weary centuries, the bravest and noblest of our people did keep their appointed watch upon these ^{battlements} walls. They who "always remembered God", never deserted their posts, though the days were full of menace and the nights were dark and long. So much so, that men have been moved to call Israel the "Swiss guard of Jehovah" - soldiers who chose death rather than surrender.

Enemies more powerful, cunning and dangerous than at any time in the past are today assaulting these same ramparts of mankind. Again must these strongholds be defended with the blood and bravery of ^{their} these faithful watchmen. What are these ramparts which Israel, and all other peoples whose spirits were nurtured by the great faith of Israel, ^{have defended and} are now summoned to defend? ^{again?}

First is the rampart of faith in God. Faith in God is the strongest bulwark of a free society. Human freedom begins ^{an} when men become conscious that above and beyond society and physical nature there is a God who created them, who breathed ^{His} spirit into them, who fashioned them in His likeness, and that they are, therefore, possessed of intrinsic and independent significance and worth, and are endowed as individuals with original and irrevocable rights and authority. (This is the spiritual basis of man's charter of freedom.) Men ~~have~~ ^{came}

^{solidarity of ancient times} ~~came~~ to challenge the authority of kings or magistrates, of custom or tradition, - ^{the brutal} in the name of the higher mandates which ^{derive} they received from the spirit of God within them, in the name of moral sanctions which ^{emanate} ~~derive~~ from man's relationship to God. Man became free when he acknowledged a higher authority ^{than} to that of state or class or system, ^{or man} God was the inspiration and the refuge of the free man. Modern

democracy was born in the struggle for religious freedom in the ²sixteenth and ²seventeenth ⁵centuries. ^{add} Out of the victories which were won for religious freedom on the battlefields of the spirit, there stemmed ^{later on} other victories ^{won} for man's political, economic and social ^{emancipation} freedom. The power of king and state was first curbed by the religious spirit of man which demanded, at the point of revolution, the right, not ~~for~~ ^{to} universal suffrage or better living conditions, but the right to worship God as it saw fit.

Struggles for human freedom, uninspired by a living faith in God, often led mankind to disaster. ^{In recent years} Russia ~~sought~~ ^{attempted} to build a free and happy society without God. It succeeded only in building up a dictatorship and an enslaved society. Fascist and Nazi states in Europe also sought to build ³socialized communities ^{is} without God. They succeeded only in establishing a brutally regimented and terrorized society. The ²⁰⁻⁶⁰⁰⁰⁰⁻¹¹⁵ "new" orders which these Godless revolutionary efforts achieved were only variant forms of old despotisms. ^{though} They pride themselves upon being young and dynamic, ~~but~~ they are young and dynamic only in the sense of being immature, raw, untempered and cruel. A society can achieve real renewal only through ~~inner~~ inner spiritual renewal, through a re-discovery of a confident faith in a living God.

The soldiers of Cromwell marched into battle singing Psalms. And for three centuries the spirit of Cromwell and of his Puritan hosts has molded the free life of the English peoples. Roger Williams established the first free society in the New World in the name of the God of Freedom, whose faithful minister he was. The spirit of Roger Williams has permeated the free life of nation to this very day. The American Revolution kindled its torches at the flame of a religious dogma that men were created by God to be free and equal, and that they were by Him endowed with certain elemental and inalienable rights. The long protracted struggle in this country to emancipate the slaves received

-4-

its powerful momentum not from economics, but from deep religious convictions, *or from any materialistic conception of history* which revolted against the enslavement of human beings, and which saw in the Civil War ~~to~~ ^{which} divine retribution for the sins ^{committed} of the nation against the black man, and which heard in the tramp of men marching to battle to free the slaves, the footsteps of God and of His eternal truth marching on....

Why do all the enemies of human liberties turn against religion? Because religion is their death warrant. They see in Judaism and in its offspring, Christianity, the intrepid and unwearied watchmen over the ramparts of human liberties, who must be destroyed before their Godless, materialistic revolutions can be firmly established. It isn't the Jews whom the dictators wish to drive out of Europe, but Judaism, that entire complex of ethical and spiritual ideas which are at the very heart of Western-European civilization, which they wish to supplant.

They are anti-Semitic because they know or sense that liberty is Semitic in origin and character. The so-called Aryan must trace his ^{political} traditions back to the oriental despotism and to the slavish submissiveness of ancient Persia and India. Even the Greeks ^{had} ~~have~~ no strong democratic traditions. Plato and Aristotle opposed the democratic form of government. Aristotle defended slavery. But the Semite of the desert, from whom Israel is descended, neither knew nor tolerated any despotism. The democratic motif runs like a golden thread through the whole political, social, economic and religious history of Israel from the earliest nomadic period unto the present.

There is a form of magic called homeopathic. By it, if you are superstitious, you try to destroy your enemy by destroying an image of him. In the eyes of the Nazi and Fascist Revolutionists of ^{Moral} Nihilism, the Jew is the image or symbol of all those spiritual concepts of life which they must destroy if they are to succeed. And so they are practising the black art of homeopathic magic. They are hoping to destroy them by destroying the Jew.

This ^{is} ~~is~~ not mere theory. ^{Here is the latest proof} The day after Japan joined the Berlin-Rome Axis, the following news item came out of Tokyo: (Quote)

Among the great themes of Yom Kippur are the existence and unity of God, and the freedom of man. Coming as an heroic climax to the day-long service is the proclamation: "The Lord, He is God," and ^{then} the shofar ~~is~~ ^{is} sound^{ed}. Why is the shofar sounded at the conclusion of the Yom Kippur Service? To remind us of the shofar which was sounded in ancient Palestine on each jubilee year which ~~was to~~ proclaim^{ed} freedom throughout the land and unto all the inhabitants thereof. When the sound of that shofar was heard, every bondsman was ~~to be~~ released, "for unto Me are the children of Israel servants; they are not servants unto servants." Even the land ~~was~~ ^{had to be} redeemed and restored to its original owners, so that no man shall remain an impoverished and landless dependent. No land could be alienated in perpetuity "for unto Me belongeth the ^{whole} earth."

God and freedom! As long as there is God, there is ~~the~~ hope of freedom for man.

There is another rampart which Judaism has watched through the long centuries, another rampart which is being assaulted today - the solidarity of the human race. One God and one Humanity! Judaism sought to integrate a scattered and broken humanity, and in the name of the Unity of God, to achieve the unity of mankind. To affirm the Unity of God is, according to Maimonides, the great goal of Jewish history. Israel did not divide humanity into Aryans and non-Aryans, superior and inferior races, humans and sub-humans. It did not evolve a convenient political ethnology to rationalize and excuse ^{and the suppression of other nations} its imperial aggressiveness. It recognized, of course, that peoples differed as to race, color, creed, social and cultural advantages, but it insisted that in spite of all these differences, men were all children of one God, all fashioned in His image, all possessed of the dignity of that elemental and indistructible kinship, and all bound together by a common destiny. They were therefore all admonished to help one another, the stronger to help the weaker, the richer to assist the poorer, the wise to instruct the unlettered. There were no insurmountable barriers which separated one group

of men from another, and no inherent right ⁱⁿ ~~for~~ one group ~~of them~~ to aggrandize *Itself* ~~themselves~~ at the expense of another.

"If I did despise the cause of my man-servant,
Or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me -
What then shall I do when God riseth up?
And when He remembereth, what shall I answer Him?
Did not He that made me in the womb make him?
And did not One fashion us in the womb?

The Jewish people, through its long history, was frequently persecuted. In Egypt and Babylon it experienced exile and slavery. It therefore understood the soul of the persecuted and of the suffering, and its ethical code as reflected in the Bible, the Talmud, and other great texts, sought to mitigate the hardships of all the handicaps of life, to ease all burdens, to break all rods of oppression.

From its history, Israel also learned that the Jew is never persecuted alone. ^{His} ~~for~~ persecution is usually the forerunner of large-scale persecutions of other peoples. Thus the Jews were exiled from Spain in 1492 by a combination of religious bigotries and nationalistic intolerance. But simultaneously, the Mohammedans also were expelled from Spain. ^{That} ~~The~~ ^{devastating} same religious intolerance was soon carried by the armies of Spain into the Netherlands, and under Charles V and Philip II, it swept with blood and horror, with sack and massacre, all through the Christian Lowlands. The Inquisition which at first tortured ^{only} Jewish Marranos, came to torture also Mohammedan Moriscos and Christian heretics.

The Nazis began their persecution of minorities in Europe with the Jews. But it did not stop there. It soon swept over other minorities and small nations until today nearly the whole of Europe is groaning under the heels of this barbarism which first vented its fury and madness upon the helpless Jews in Germany.

Knowing from its own experience what persecution is, and how it spreads, and the universality of the persecution mania, Israel ~~has~~ sought to teach all the peoples and races of the ^{earth} ~~world~~ devotion to an ideal of one human brotherhood,

If we need nations to
one humanity united in victory and in defeat, ~~defending~~ their own freedom by
defending the freedom of others. One of the moving prayers of Yom Kippur is
"May all the children of men bow before Thee in humility and may they become as
one league to do Thy will with a perfect heart."

11) And there was yet another rampart which Judaism has watched over faithfully -
a dream - a messianic dream - the dream of a golden age when all social wrongs and
injustices would cease to exist, when nations would ground their arms and cease
to fight for land or wealth which God has created ⁱⁿ ~~abundantly~~ ^{to} for all - a golden
age of peace and righteousness. Judaism was never a pacifist religion, but
certainly it was never a militaristic religion. It refused to idealize war,
and to regard fighting as man's supreme good and ^{his supreme} opportunity for self-expression
and fulfillment. Judaism rejected the notion that life is will to power. Life is
will to serve God and man. The Messiah of mankind, figuratively speaking, was
to come not like a mailed and helmeted conqueror on a fiery steed of battle, but
as a poor man riding in humility, but bringing healing and blessings to all men.

This rampart of universal peace is being stormed today by forces of evil
which thrive on war and conquest, which sow the dragon's teeth of hatred and civil
dissension wherever they go, and which have proclaimed war as man's supreme destiny.

Our future is secure *only if we keep our standards water over these ramparts*
and defend them with our lives. We are the captives of the host who must
keep guard, always 'remembering God'. Some day we shall be vindicated and
our role and our sacrifice will be fully understood and acknowledged.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts: In those days it shall come to pass that ten men
shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, shall even take hold of
the ^{garment} skirt of him that is a Jew and say: We will go with you, for we have heard
that God is with you."

- כוהן גדול וכוהן קטן וכוהן ממונה -

Sermon 556

CAN SOCIETY BE GODLESS AND FREE?

By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, April 21, 1940



It was not a common thing, dear friends, in ancient times for men to challenge authority, either civil or ecclesiastical, or to challenge custom or tradition. For that matter it was not an easy task or a common thing for men to challenge authority at any time.

Someone has spoken of ancient times and referred to them as the "Brutal solidarity of ancient times". That solidarity of ancient times is comparable only to the rigid coordination of the totalitarian states with the exception, of course, that in ancient times the rigorism of the state was not as thoroughgoing because it was not as scientific, stream-lined, expert. That coordination of the total life of the people tended to submerge the individual. Even in areas where law did not decree absolute submissiveness, custom bound the individual to a rigid compliance. The primitive religions, for example and their rituals developed quite unconsciously and impersonally, and men accepted them as a matter of course. The individual did not analyze them nor did they require personal approval. And it was so with all moral conventions. The ancient religions of mankind were the impersonal folk creations. The gods of ancient man were not in any sense personal, but were forces of nature which were symbolized in one image or another. While they possessed great power, they were not altogether free. So that the whole life of man was sheltered by an unconscious self-imposed discipline which controlled him and from which he hardly thought of emancipating himself. Certainly he never thought of challenging it.

B.C.E.

But in the eight, seventh and sixth centuries there arose certain men who did the amazing revolutionary thing. They challenged authority, convention, tradition, the accepted ritual, the accepted cult, the accepted moral code of the people. Strange new voices, the first of their kind in the

history of mankind were heard. These men were called prophets of Israel. These prophets dared to confront kings and denounce them. You heard this morning how a prophet by the name of Elijah, a strange man whom nobody knows, who suddenly appears on the scene and dares to confront the great King Ahab and denounce him for having carried through a piece of expropriation. Because Naboth did not wish to sell his property, the property of his father and his father before him, this man was put to death through a conspiracy on the part of Ahab's wife Jezebel. This nobody who belonged to no ordained class, who had no mandate from anybody, confronts the king and denounced the king with this curse: "The dogs will lick your blood as they licked the blood of the man put to death." The king sees in him his enemy and says, "Have you found me out". And Elijah says, "Yes, I found you out." How dare a commoner find out a king? And strangely enough, this Elijah was not the only one who dared confront a king.

In fact, the Bible is full of accounts where strange people known as prophets faced not only the kings, but the powerful priestly class, and the nobility and the rich and denounced them. Nathan denounced King David and brought him down in contrition and penitence because this unknown prophet found out his sin and crime. And so did Jeremiah with Zedekiah. And so did other prophets denounce others.

Now the question arises, by what authority do they speak? Who commissioned them. By what right did these people come into the Temple and denounce that Holy of Holies as a den of thieves and pronounce doom upon this dwelling place of God? By what authority did these men denounce the rich who were grinding the poor, who were selling the poor men for a shoe-string, who were making the epha small and the shekel large, who were adding house to house and field to field until no man has room to dwell? Who commissioned them?

In whose name did they speak?

They had no authority whatsoever, except the authority of God, the authority of the revelation from God. "Thus said the Lord". They didn't criticise these powerful folk on their own authority. They didn't criticise the moral code of their day on the basis of their own private philosophic speculations, but in the name of God. This is the first lesson that men must learn - that in all ages, wherever and whenever men dared to criticise the economic order, the political order, dared to point at wrong and injustice and corruption, they did it in the name of an authority higher than their own - the authority of the revelation of God. And when that authority was denied, because God was denied, when the prophetic fires were quenched, men fell prey to all forms of tyranny and oppression. Of this fact our age has unfortunately lost sight. What makes men free is God and the revelation of God to man. It is revelation which makes man free. It is that which gives man an authority which transcends all social disciplines and controls. In other words, the basic charter of man's dignity and freedom is God and revelation, and without it, no human society can remain free.

No human society can long remain Godless and free. The Rabbis understood that fully when they said that the revelation on Mt. Sinai was the greatest revelation to our people in our entire history. It is the revelation that made men free. Let me elaborate on this thought a little further, because it is a basic thought.

Faith in the existence of a just God implies the existence of a just moral law, a just moral law which all men should obey because it is the will of God. The violation of this just moral law is disobedience to God. This puts God on the side of all the victims of injustice and wrong in the world. This makes God the ally, the champion of all those who

April 7, 1946

The Church is the only
a 'where there is
religion there is
faith'

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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."

struggle against wrong and injustice. This gives God's approval as well as strength and inspiration to all those who struggle for justice in the world.

The existence of God, of a just God, implies the existence of a just moral law, a universal law, and that law is binding upon everybody - individuals and groups of individuals, binding on states, parties. No one is above this universal moral law.

When our modern world came to think of morality not as God-inspired, but as man-made, when our modern world came to believe that the solution of all morality is not God but human convenience, it is clear to see what happened. Morality lost its character, its absolute divine mandate and ^{its} binding on man. The ground was prepared for a new exploitation of mankind, a new subjugation of mankind. The modern totalitarian states derive their entire authority from the materialism of the 19th and 20th centuries which declared that morals are only creations of human convenience subject to the swiftly changing circumstances of time and place. It tries to decree that the state is law unto itself. No society can remain permanently Godless and free. This is history.

Friends of democracy have somehow forgotten the religious origin of the whole democratic thesis of the world. They have forgotten that political freedom came to the Western World as a result of a long struggle for religious freedom which struggle received its impetus from a demand on the part of deeply religious people for revelation, a deliberate return to the prophet traditions of ancient Israel.

The reason that the democratic movements are perishing in the Western World today, when you look below the surface, is because of the prevalent pessimism of our people which is due to the loss of faith in the individual which is in turn due to the loss of confidence in the reality of revelation, that is of God, in the life of Man.

"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..."

Let me illustrate historically what I mean. The Protestant Reformation undoubtedly marks a turning point in the civilization of the Western World. The Protestant Reformation which came early in the 16th century was not merely a reformation in the realm of ritual or a repudiation of the authority of the Papacy, it was much more than that. Even the early leaders in the Protestant Movement themselves did not fully understand the forces which they represented. They themselves were confused, and at times very inconsistent. They did not and could not grasp fully what was happening in the mind and heart of the world. What actually was happening was that there was a new and determined struggle on the part of peoples of the Western World for spiritual liberty, for the emancipation of Man from a System, that man's ultimate submissiveness is not to man but to God. Even Luther when still a revolutionary declared that "Human authority might be resisted when its mandates conflict with the Word of God." Suddenly there flared up throughout the Western World such phrases as "The Word of God". A new authority had come into the life of the world. The authority of direct revelation as this "word of God" was valuable to all. It did not require the mediation of the Priest to understand the word of God. This led to the direct communion of the individual ~~xx~~ with his God. That gave to the individual a new dignity which he had not possessed all through the dark ages.

And that demand for spiritual liberty soon expressed itself in all other forms of liberty. Peasant Revolt resulted. Political rights, economic rights were clamored for, and they did it in the name of Whom? By what authority? They had no authority. They had no law to which they could point. They were rightless. In whose name did they speak? In the name of God, in the name of the revelation of God. They said all men are equal because God made all men free. They said the things we demand are the things the Bible grants to all men. The point I stress is that that great peasant uprising was only quenched after a hundred thousand peasants were massacred. It was a social revolution - this great

clamor for freedom. It received its inspiration from religion and revelation.

The best of the spiritual passion of the Protestant Reformation and which most affected the life of the American people you find among the Anabaptists which sect arose right on the heel of the Protestant Reformation. This sect was hundreds of years ahead of its time. They believed in the freedom of the will, the absolute moral responsibility, the right of every individual to interpret the Scriptures according to his own inner light. No minister possessed any authority to preach unless he had received a call such as the prophets of old received.

The duty of the State was only to protect good and to punish and beyond that the state itself was an evil. These sects were the first to demand absolute dis-establishment, ^{the} separation of church and state. They were the first to preach universal toleration and freedom of worship. Roger Williams who established the first free city where men could worship God as they pleased was a disciple of the Anabaptist sect. They said that all property belonged to God. Many of them actually practised voluntary communism. The doctrines of the Anabaptists carried over to Holland, to England and then to the United States. Strangely enough, the founding fathers of our country proclaimed many of the doctrines of these religious fanatics. And the founding fathers wrote "We hold these truths that all men are created equal. All men are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Thus what the Anabaptists said was that All men are equal because they are made equal not by nature, but because they are made spiritually equal by God. As the spiritual leaders of the Sixteenth Century thought in terms of liberty, the political leaders of America thought also in terms of God, freedom, among which were life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. With the American Revolution came the Bill of Rights which I again remind you has origin in religion ^{and} which was passed over to

the French Revolution. Bill of Rights passed from France to the whole Western World, so that historically, whatever we enjoy in the modern world of political freedom, individual rights, are traceable directly to the prophetic tradition which was rekindled in the Sixteenth Century - the revelation of God.

Therefore, I say again, no system can long remain Godless and free. Do you need any proof of it? All the totalitarian states established in the Western World since 1918 based themselves on irreligion, and began by an attack on religion. Bolshevism set out to uproot it. Mussolini. Nazism is the enemy of all the spiritual concepts which we associate with Christianity and Judaism. That is not accidental. Their concept is based on materialism. No one who wants to maintain absolute totalitarian control of the rights of an individual, the intellectual rights as well as the social rights, can tolerate the dynamics of free prophetic religion in the midst of it. All these totalitarian states are grounded in materialism which they assume to be very scientific. But science has already demonstrated hypocritical and has left man stripped and naked and spiritually beaten. And no intellectual shrewdness is an adequate substitute for spiritual dis-integration.

Man today is small and is becoming smaller every day. Man is becoming a statistical item. His personality is of no account in the world. He cannot speak any more in the name of God, in the name of a moral law. Man is now helpless, subject to the will or whim of a party, of a duce, a feuhrer. That is the tragedy of the modern world. All this because God, and God's revelation, and man's relationship to God have been driven out of the consciousness of man. And men will never re-discover it - never - until - and this is not preaching, my friends, but historical fact - until the whole modern world experiences the sort of spiritual revival that the Western

experienced in the Sixteenth Century - a prophetic revival and a rediscovery of that contact with the source of all authority - God.

The end of dictatorship to the world will not come about through wars or through revolutions. Wars and revolutions may prepare the ground but the regeneration of man will come about through a re-discovery of men's own inner spiritual personalities, through the recapturing on the part of people of the revelation of: "Thus Saith the Lord."

