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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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A trip to South Africa, 1951.



## A TRIP TO SOUTH AFRICA

November 4, 1951

I was invited this summer, dear friends, to visit South Africa, invited by the Jewish communities of that country, and I gladly accepted the invitation. I was eager to see that part of the world where I had never been before, concerning which I had heard a great deal and read a bit. We spent about five weeks in South Africa and saw a good deal of that country because we flew most of the time, both coming and going to South Africa and within that country. We saw many places and many people. We saw much that was the same that we had seen in other parts of the world, particularly in this country, and we saw much that was different. After all, the world is really one world, and yet, there are no two places in it that are quite alike, and certainly no two peoples quite alike. Each country and each people has its distinct problems and no single formula is quite adequate to solve these problems, although the experience of one people may be of service in guiding another people.

The Union of South Africa, as you undoubtedly know, is made up of four provinces, the Cape itself - Cape of Good Hope - Natal, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. These four provinces were brought together into a union in 1910. The Union is a vast country, in territory equal to the size of France and Germany and Italy combined, although in population the Union has less than one-tenth of the population of these three countries. It is a largely unsettled and undeveloped part of the world; yet one of considerable wealth, both real and potential. South Africa, as you undoubtedly know, is the richest gold and diamond country in the world. Since the discovery of gold back in 1886, there has been mined more than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  billion pounds worth of gold in South Africa. Since the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley, there has been mined over 450 million pounds worth of diamonds. That, of course, has poured tremendous wealth into every area of development of that country.

Besides gold and diamonds, there are other minerals - coal and copper, and iron and lead and platinum and manganese. Besides these metals and minerals, there are also considerable agricultural products in South Africa - corn, wheat, fruit, cotton,



and also wool. Besides mining and farming in recent years there has taken place a considerable industrial and manufacturing development in the Union.

South Africa is a country of sharp contrasts, amazingly sharp and startling contrasts. Its largest cities, its great urban centers are as modern as the 20th century. A city like Johannesburg with a population close on to 900,000 differs very little from its outward appearance from a city of similar size in the United States - a city like Pittsburgh or Cleveland or Detroit or St. Louis. Tall office buildings, fine hotels, theaters, moving picture houses, museums, book shops - the streets are full of automobiles, mostly of American make. There are more automobiles in South Africa per capita than in the United States. Incidentally, South Africa carries on a very active trade with the United States. It imports more than a quarter of a billion dollars worth every year from the United States, and sends to us over a hundred million dollars worth of goods.

I say that in one way South Africa is a modern country in every way imaginable with all the facilities and all the comforts which you find in a 20th century, industrialized community. But one step away from the highways, the boulevards and the streets into the native quarters or a few miles run away from the cities into the native villages, you are back really into primitive times - not even medieval times. And this sharp and startling contrast determines the feature of South African life, and also represents the dominant problem of that country. This sharp contrast of which I speak is not only as between what you might call today and yesterday or a month of yesterdays back in time, and the conflict is not only between the white and the black, which you see at every turn, of course. Of the  $11\frac{1}{2}$  million of inhabitants in South Africa, only 2,300,000 are of European extraction or what you call white. 68% of the population ~~is~~ is black, Bantu. The Bantus are a group of peoples who swept down on South Africa from the North and who practically exterminated the Hottentots who preceded them, who in turn had exterminated the Bushmen who seemed to have



been the original settlers of that part of Africa. These Bantu black peoples by and large by far represent the majority of the population of South Africa. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ % of the population are Indians, peoples who came from India across the Indian Ocean, originally as indentured laborers to work on the sugar plantations and most of them remained, principally in the province of Nataal. About 8% of the population represents what are called half-breeds, mullatoes, the offsprings of the mixed population of white and black. A goodly number of them are called the colored population, as distinct from the native population, and most of them are in the Cape area of South Africa. About 20% are Europeans, so that the white man is outnumbered four or five to one in South Africa, and that fact bedevils the whole life of that country. It is that fact which creates the fears, the bitter suspicions and hatreds which is responsible for the very tense race problem in South Africa. But even among the whites themselves, who represent a minority of the population of the country, there is sharp division, bitter rivalry and animosity.

The white population is made up largely on the one hand of the British or English, and the other hand, the Afrikaaners, the Boers. South Africa came into the ken of the peoples of Europe about the same time that the Western hemisphere was discovered, that same movement to discover new trade routes to India, which sent the Spaniards westward and discovered the Western hemisphere in 1492 sent the Portuguese southward to find a way around Africa to India, and in 1488, just four years before America was discovered, Bartholomew Diaz touched what is now Capetown and a few years later Vasco de Gama actually settled the southern part of Africa and moved on to touch India. But the actual first settlers of the Union were the Dutch, just as the Dutch were the first settlers of New Amsterdam and New York. They came there just about the same time and financed, directed by the same Dutch East India Company that was responsible for the development of Dutch settlements on the Atlantic seaboard. They came in 1652, they settled largely around the Cape area, and later on



they were joined by German immigrants, and when the revocation of the Edict of Nantes took place in France in 1688, quite a number of French Huguenots came from France and settled in the Union. For 150 years thereafter this amalgam of peoples, largely Dutch from Holland plus some Germans and some French, lived in that part of the world rather isolated from the rest of the world and developed their own inner life, quite a distinctive life of their own. They developed a language of their own which is today the Afrikaans, basically Dutch, a language which has gone through its own story of development with words borrowed from the neighboring tribes and from other sources so that while it began as a patois it has now reached the level of an authentic language of its own. A group of peoples and religions, strongly Calvinistic, and when these settlers who lived on the farms needed labor, they took their labor from the natives and enslaved them, and they also imported slave labor from other parts of Africa and from Madagascar, in the same way as the cotton plantations in our South imported slave labor from Africa.

Of course, this developed the same problems for them which were developed for the United States, the problem of Negro slavery, what to do about it. And there developed among the Afrikaners a very strong race and color prejudice which has survived to this day and is one of the basic sources of tensions in South Africa.

In 1814 the British came in. They have a way of coming in and taking over. Well, they came in and took South Africa away from the Dutch. They paid a certain amount of money to Holland, some six million pounds, and in the course of time English immigrants began to flow into the Cape, and before long the towns and settlements began to take on an English aspect, and in the course of the 19th century and the early 20th century the English - their language, their culture, became predominant, largely in the cities. They were the people who developed the mining and the commerce and the industry, banking - they and the Jews. The Afrikaners, who were the farmers, they were also after a while largely represented in the public and the defense forces, the civil and the railway services of the country. And the rivalry



between these two peoples, these two white peoples, the English and the original Dutch - the Boers - continued practically unabated throughout the 19th century to the present time and it led to war. More than 100 years ago, in 1838, the Dutch, who lived in the Cape area, outraged at the fact that the British had abolished slave traffic and had issued an order for the emancipation of all slaves, and fearful, too, that their way of life was being submerged by the English, picked themselves up en masse and with their wives and their children and their cattle, in ox-carts, drove out of the Cape eastward and northward into the wilderness, into the savage country beyond the Orange River, beyond the Vaal River, to set up a state of their own. And the epic of what is called this great trek, the epic of these Voortrekkers, as they are called, is the great epic of South Africa. It was an amazing story of courage, of battle on the part of these hard-bitten, determined men and women, who were prepared to face all the dangers of warfare with the savage tribes and many times many of them were massacred. This story constitutes a brave epic of a determined people.

They won through ultimately because the Bantu or the Zulu Assegai was no match for the muzzle-loading guns of the trekker, of the Boer, and he ultimately established himself in that part of the world and set up two more republics, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal; in 1852 and 1854 Great Britain recognized the independence of these two republics and it was thought for a time that there would be peace in South Africa, but fortunately or unfortunately, in 1868 the diamonds were discovered in the territory of these Boers, and in 1886 gold was discovered, and there took place there as there took place in California, a gold rush. Tens of thousands of fortune hunters poured into these two countries, many of them Englishmen. The city of Johannesburg which in 1886 was a village of a few hundred became in a few years a city of 100,000. And pretty soon the clash between the Dutch settlers, the Boers, and these foreigners, developed sharply. Political tensions heightened and then a



putsch was attempted to capture these two countries, and all this - it's a long story into which we need not enter - all this led to the Boer War of 1899-1902, in which the Boers were completely defeated after heroic resistance and the Boers had the sympathy of the whole world against Britain, you will recall. They were defeated, but English diplomacy was wise and granted these peoples self-government soon after the war and in 1910 there was created this Union of the four provinces - the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal - to make one country. But unfortunately the tensions between these two white peoples have not greatly modulated as a result of this Union. The nationalistic bitterness of the Boers has not abated. There is a strong sentiment among them to this day which clamors for South Africa to get out of the Commonwealth of the British nations and set up an independent republic of South Africa. And during the second world war there was a great element of the population that was opposed to South Africa going into the war on the side of Great Britain, and that element had in it a great deal of pro-Nazi sentiment. It was only the superb statesmanship of the greatest man that South Africa produced, General Smuts, which was responsible for the fact that South Africa did eventually get into the world war. But General Smuts and his party, the so-called liberal party, the United Party, was in May 1948 defeated by the Nationalist Party, the Afrikaaner Party under the leadership of Dr. Daniel Malan, and it is this party with definite pro-Fascistic, pro-Nazi leanings, that is today the controlling government of the Union of South Africa.

So that South Africa presents today the strange appearance of one country which has two European races, two official languages, two capitals - one in Capetown and one in Pretoria - two flags and two national anthems. Now, added to these tensions, the white and the black, between the English and the Afrikaaner, there is the additional racial tension of the Indians, who are not an inconsiderable element in South



African life. They have always been treated as citizens of second class. The great Ghandi, you will recall, was the one who, living in South Africa, aroused the South African Indians to resist passively these discriminations on the part of the other peoples of South Africa, and especially today with India having become a great independent country, these Indians of South Africa feel ~~every~~ even more keenly, more bitterly, the caste discrimination, social discrimination which is being practiced among them. There have been riots between the whites and the Indians and between the Indians and the blacks in Natal.

And so the whole country, you can readily see, is a country full of tensions, of hates and of bitterness. It's a pity because it's a beautiful country, a country which has enough for everybody and for millions upon millions of more peoples to live in comfort and in economic security.

The great tragedy of South Africa is, of course, the treatment and condition of the black man. Those of you who have read Alan Paton's moving, touching story, "Cry, the Beloved Country", will have a good picture and a fair picture of the actual situation in South Africa with reference to the black man. The native village life of the black has been disrupted, his land has been eroded because they have not been taught modern methods of irrigation, agriculture, so that many of the natives are forced to go into the cities. Many of them are coaxed to come into the cities to the mining industry. Those who come to the gold mines and to the diamond mines are compelled to live in compounds like cattle. Others who work in other factories and in other occupations find no housing for them so that they live in the most unspeakable hovels unfit for animals. Disease is rampant among them, infant mortality is appalling. Only one out of five of the black children receives any education at all in elementary school. The blacks are restricted as to occupation and they are restricted as to residence and they are restricted as to movement. No black man can move without a "pass". They are underpaid. For the same work sometimes the white man will receive five and ten times the salary that the black man receives. Vice and crime,



accordingly, are rampant among them. Those of you who read a few weeks ago the article in "Time" magazine on "A City in Terror - Report from Johannesburg" will have fresh in your minds the conditions in a city like Johannesburg. The account is not at all exaggerated. Today this city's 350,000 whites fear its 500,000 natives, and this fear is reciprocated. Johannesburg is probably the tensest city in the world. White Johannesburgers barricade their homes at night and do not venture out in the evening except in cars with revolvers and rifles handy.

Johannesburg's half million blacks are compelled to live in locations segregated from the white residential areas. There is little money for black housing. The blacks have no political vote and no municipal voice. In the unlighted and unpoliced locations in shanty town, the native criminals who prey on the whites have their hide-outs and they prey on the blacks as well. Black homes like white homes are barricaded. At dusk crime begins. People are murdered in the streets at night and chopped with axes.

South African jails are overcrowded, mostly with Negroes. These convicts are used to build more prisons to hold more Negroes. South Africa has about 3,000 killings and 2,000 rapes a year. Crimes classified as serious have increased three-fold in ten years and have doubled in the past two years. On the gold reef there are three murders every two days. Johannesburg, with a total population of 850,000, has twice the number of crimes committed than greater London with a total population of more than 8,000,000.

The South African author, Oliver Walker, commenting on the South African Negroes' many fine qualities has added that the whites re-make of them a hard, crude people in the end. This is happening now.

The only solution which the present government seems to have evolved for this problem is a solution of "Apartheid" - of separation, segregation. Recently a new act was passed called the Group Areas Act which will eventually establish three major



race group areas separated from one another in which one group may be prohibited from owning the occupying property in another area, a rather hopeless and naive attempt to separate and segregate what can no longer be separated or segregated in the modern world.

Now, in this land of riches, of opportunity, of tensions, there also live over 100,000 Jews, some 5% of the white population. I visited the Jewish communities of South Africa - 12 centers. I was very happy to do so. I was very warmly welcomed by them. It was for them and for me a sort of a Yontif. I made 30 speeches during my stay among them, and the Good Lord I hope will forgive me for it. It was good to get in contact with a Jewish community so far away from here. Nearly all of the South African Jews come from Lithuania - they are all Litvaks, about 98% of them. And most of them began coming towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. There were some Jews who had come before 1870. Since 1933 quite a number of refugees from Western Europe, from Germany, have settled in South Africa.

They were attracted to South Africa in the same way as all other Europeans were in the last 50 - 60 years, by gold and diamonds, and the prospects of that fabulously rich country. The Jews of South Africa were the real pioneers of modern South Africa. The development of the gold industry and of the diamond industry and of the coal and iron industry in South Africa owe practically everything to the Jews of that country.

It was Barney Barnato, whose name is undoubtedly known to you, a poor London boy who came to South Africa, who was among the most fabulous and colorful prospectors and developers of the diamond and gold industries, who amalgamated finally with Cecil Rhodes, the great "De Beers Consolidated Mines Co." and became the largest owner of mining in Africa.

His nephews, Wolf Joel and Solomon Joel, followed up the amazing career of their uncle. They, too, came from the squalor of White Chapel and ended up by being among the richest men of the world.



Sam Marks began his career with a pick and shovel, and he became one of the most influential men in the development of diamonds and gold in South Africa. He became a close friend of Paul Kruger who was the President of the Transvaal. He also ultimately became a Senator of the Union.

The name of Alfred Beit must be known to you. He was the first billionaire in the world. First he opposed Barnato and then joined with him and Rhodes. He helped also to develop the railroads of South Africa and began the development of Rhodesia. He was one of the great benefactors, philanthropists of South Africa.

Of course, there is today Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, the wealthiest man in South Africa, the king of diamonds, one of the six richest men in the world. He, too, began his career in a humble way and is now the head of the De Beers and also the Anglo-American Corporation. He is responsible for much of the mining expansion which is now going on in the Union. But not all the 100,000 Litvaks in South Africa are millionaires, although most of them are fairly well-to-do, prosperous. They or their fathers began their careers as the fathers here, as peddlers. They took packs on their backs and went among the farmers throughout the Cape, and later on further north. They were warmly welcomed by the Boers, by the Afrikaners who were people like the Puritans, steeped in the Old Testament and looked upon the Jews as the Chosen People. Later on, these peddlers developed into merchants and sent their sons and daughters to the colleges and universities until today among the 100,000 Jews of South Africa you will find many first-rate doctors, engineers, physicists, scholars, lawyers. Some are in Parliament, some occupy very important positions on the judicial bench.

The South African Jewish community is a very generous community, perhaps the most generous in the world. Their per capita contribution for foreign aid and for the upbuilding of Israel is the largest in the world. It is almost entirely a Zionist community, and South African Jewry has sent not only substance and contributions to



Israel, but some of its fine sons and daughters have gone to Israel and have settled there and are an important element in the development of Israel.

There is great religious mindedness in the Jewish community of South Africa. They have builded their synagogues and their schools everywhere. In Johanessburg alone there are 20 synagogues. In Capetown I visited a synagogue which was established 100 years ago, one of the most beautiful synagogue buildings that I have seen anywhere in the world. Reform Judaism in recent years has made considerable progress. One of our Rabbis of The Temple - some of you may recall - went to South Africa some years ago and is now the head of a very large Reform congregation in Capetown, doing splendidly.

So that the Jewish community of South Africa gave me the impression of being a wholesome, well-knit, integrated, Jewishly-conscious community, which is making its contribution to the life of the country and is making its contribution to Jewish life throughout the world.

They, of course, have been bothered to a degree by anti-Semitism in recent years, more especially in the last few years when the Nationalists came into power. The Nationalists in the campaign of '48 carried on a rather intensive anti-Semitic propaganda in their political campaign because they felt that the Jews were allied with the English as against them. But since their coming into power their relationship towards the Jewish population has been correct. Here in the last few weeks the Transvaal Nationalist Party, which had had a ban against the inclusion of Jews in the membership roster of the Party, have removed that ban and there seems to have taken place an easing up of the situation. In the last few weeks, too, a Jew was elected Mayor of Capetown.

So that, summing it all up, South Africa, which is destined to play an increasingly important role in the affairs of the world, is facing one of the great racial problems of the modern world, the same problem which is tearing India and Pakistan



apart, the same problem which we have not completely solved in the United States. It has not yet found the key, the solution to this problem, nor has South Africa ~~has~~ as yet become really one nation. The sense of unity, of being one people, South Africans - that is just beginning to make its way in that country.

As far as the Jewish community is concerned, it is today one of the most prosperous, by and large one of the most contented Jewish communities in the world, and all things being equal, peace continuing in South Africa, no intensification of racial strifes developing, that community is destined to grow and develop and prosper. My ~~fortnightly~~ visit was a very rewarding one. It is good to get in touch with other sections of world Jewry, to know how very much alike they are - in their outlook, in their composition, in their hopes, in their strength and in their weakness to us here.





1) JNF - 5 weeks - Saw much - Flew - all the way - and in -  
charter plane - 12 cities - Avoid many places - many people -  
- Much that is same - Different - One World - and yet -  
no 2 places - no 2 people - quite distinct - brothers  
have their distinct & important nuances & diversities  
- No one Formula adequate for situation - altho Exp.  
7 on way be helpful to another

2) Union - made up of 4 provinces - Joined in 1960 - is best  
country - Fr. + Ger + Italy = but unlike 150M - Union 11 1/2 M!  
It is largely unsettled and undeveloped - but of considerable  
wealth - actual & potential - By 1946 - 2 1/2 h. from  
richest gold & diamond country in the world - Coal, Copper,  
iron, lead, Plutonium, uranium  
But produces also considerable agr. products Corn, Wheat, Fruit  
cotton, rum.  
Great ~~industrial~~ <sup>ag. products</sup> industrial expansion in recent years  
Steel -  
Great ~~industrial~~ <sup>ag. products</sup> industrial expansion in recent years

3) land of sharp contrasts - Its large Urban Centers -  
are as modern as NYC - John - Belmont & others  
Chambers - Tall [sic] skyscrapers - 110 stories - 14 stories  
Antony > U.S.A. - Trade with U.S. - Export 4% of Export 100%  
One step away into Native Quarter - a few miles from  
village - in another time - Peter - Frantz, S. of 40  
down to the bottom



4) And the Division is not evenly hit <sup>Sharp contrast as only hit. To-day - and not any</sup> White & Black.  
of the 11 1/2 % ~~head~~ only 2, 300,000 are European. The  
rest are Black, Mixed or Colored, and Indian.

{ 68% are Black - Bantu - the Black who usually - Madagascar, Hottentots  
2 1/2% - Indian - indentured worker - Sugar plantation  
8% - Half-breeds - mulattoes  
20% - European - returned 4-5 to one  
Feeds poor European competition - ref. for Poor Whites  
White business of -

5) And Whites Eos hardly divided - English - Afrikaners  
(Boers)

① Portuguese was first to land S.A. - West Point (Indian) new trade routes  
Bartholomew Diaz - Cape, Good Hope 1488 - Vasco da Gama - Natal

② First Settler - Dutch 1652 - established at Cape  
- remnants of Colt, Nantes 1688

For 150 yrs - this analysis lived on new - isolated -  
developed its own way, life - Colonists - Language

"Afrikaners" - originally 170. Dutch - administrators (Yiddish)

When they needed labor - Nature slave labor - or imported  
slaves for E. Afr. Madagascar - (like South Africa in U.S.)

Developed strong Race color prejudice - To this day



6/ In 1814 - British - Holland - 6 M. - English officers  
Trans - gen. Eng - predominance Mining, Commerce,  
Industry, Banking -  
Afrikans - Farming - public defence forces - civil &  
railway service

7/ Rivalry bet 2 peoples - War -  
More 700 yrs ago - Prohibition / Slavery - Augsburg  
Great Trek - 12,000 - North - East -  
Men - women - children - cattle - ox-wagons  
Voortrekkers - Savan - Germany, that  
Assagai - Muggs - loading guns -  
Set up - Rehoboth, then more - Orange Free State  
Transvaal 1852 - 1854

8/ The Rand - Diamonds - Kimberley - 1868  
Gold - Rand - 1886  
California - Job. 100,000  
Rush Fortuna Seeker - Durbach -  
Boer War 1899-1902; Self-Def. Union - 1910



9/ Union did not arrange Nat. literature -  
Strong sentiment - anti-British - independence - Republic  
During last war - pro-Nazi - anti-war (Summit)

10/ Summit Party - May 1948 - The United Party - departed  
and the African Home Party & Republic Nat Party <sup>Foreign relations</sup> <sup>Domestic</sup>  
Mahan - came into office central / <sup>meeting in</sup> <sup>see relations</sup>

11/ Added to <sup>2 Euro. bloc; 2 Third World; 2 Capital; two flows</sup> <sup>2 agencies</sup> tensions bet. White & Black - Engl. <sup>Thompson</sup>  
Judicious - <sup>vital</sup> ~~not~~ class - synergies - not - kind of bridge  
Full Tensions - hate - bitterness

12/ Great Tragedy is Curdish Black Man -  
"Try, the Beloved Country" - Nature Village life disrupted -  
His land eroded - those who came to cities - no houses - horses  
herded into conformity <sup>black horses</sup> no housing - horses  
Education 1 out of 5 -

Restricted as to occupations, residence, movement -  
"Pan" - Underpaid exploited -  
Vice & Crime plumbers - (Jute) "Time"

13/ My situation - "Apartheid" - Segregation  
Group Areas Act - 3 major separate  
separated in special areas of occupation - prohibited from  
buying a property in another area



14/ In this land - amidst the Surfers - he also saw 100.000 lbs (5)  
- some 5%, white Pops.  
visited them - Royally welcomed - 216 pl - 30 speeches -

Rooster

15/ Latvians - Orig <sup>before 1870</sup> some Jews came from Gen. Holland of J. R.  
- their descendants left fold

Must have come since 1870 - Some after 1933 - Refugees  
What attracted them? Immigration must. just at that time

Diamonds - fold - Ostrich  
Real Pioneers - First to develop - Diamonds of the Indian  
Garnet Barnato - the most amalgamated with Geat  
Alvros - De Beers Consolidated Mines Co

Became largest owner of mining & real estate in Joh  
Wolfe Sol - one of richest men in world - Synagogue, White chapel  
Solomon Sol - followed up the away and then under wealthiest man, Key

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer - King, Diamonds 99 51%  
- humble - head, the De Beers & 9 Anglo-American  
corporation - has large gold-mining interest on the Rand  
in Transvaal - Mining Expansion

Sam Marks - pick & shovel - one of wealthiest  
friend of Paul Kruger - Pres., Transvaal - industrialized  
Transvaal - coal, copper. Factories - St. farming -

Senate of Union

- Alfred Beit - German, who first offered Barnato, then joined him  
- under first alliance - Rand - Railway - Bank



