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Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Reel	Box	Folder
167	61	1044

Mr. Abraham Lincoln looks over the scene, 1961.

11001 #72  
no. 965

MR. ABRAHAM LINCOLN LOOKS OVER THE SCENE

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

THE TEMPLE, CLEVELAND, OHIO

February 12, 1961

It was a very dismal national scene which faced Lincoln when he assumed the Presidency of the United States a hundred years ago. The Union was falling apart. South Carolina had seceded from the Union and was followed by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas. A new government had been set up for the Confederate States. It would not be long before Fort Sumter would be fired upon and a civil war, which was to last four tragic years, would begin.

Lincoln, who saved the Union and emancipated the Negro slaves, had much to say to his generation -- words of wisdom and prophecy which are still relevant and timely and which he would utter, I believe, if he viewed the dismal international scene today -- a hundred years later.

It were well for us to remember that the Civil War was not fought by good men on one side and bad men on the other. The men of the South were not all evil men. Many of them were good, religious people -- churchmen, who frequently quoted the Bible. Stonewall Jackson carried the Bible in his mess-kit. His reverence for the Sabbath went so far that he would not mail to his wife a letter to be carried in the mails on a Sunday nor would he open a letter received from her on a Sunday. Robert E. Lee and Jeb Stuart had let their slaves go long before the Civil War. Lee hated slavery and counted on the ultimate emancipation of the slaves through the mild and melting influence of Christianity. He believed, as he said, that "the course of the final abolition of human slavery is onward, and we give it the aid of our prayers and

all justifiable means in our power but we must leave the progress, as well as the result, in His hands Who sees the end, Who chooses to work by slow influences and with Whom two thousand years are but a single day".

Lee, you will recall, was first offered the high command of the Union Armies of the North. At that time he said: "If I owned the four million slaves of the South I would sacrifice them all to the Union". "But", he continued, "how can I draw my sword against Virginia?" He fought against the North without hatred. He would refer to the enemy as "our friends across the river". Lee was opposed to secession. In a letter home, which he wrote in January, '61, he said: "Secession is nothing but revolution. The framers of our Constitution never would have exhausted so much labor, wisdom and forbearance and surrounded it with so many guards and securities if it was intended to be broken by every member of the Confederacy at will. It was intended for perpetual union, so expressed in the preamble and for the establishment of a government, not a compact, which can only be dissolved by revolution or by the consent of all the people in convention assembled. It is idle to talk of secession."

Stonewall Jackson also believed that "it was better for the South to fight for her rights in the Union than out of it". These men and many like them in the South were caught in the web of an evil two hundred and forty years old. "The dragon teeth were first sown in 1620" when the first cargo of Negro slaves was brought into Johnstown! It was for them a long-established and accepted solid pattern, and while they didn't approve of it and hoped for its termination, they saw no way of changing the pattern in the near future.

There were, of course, men in the South like Robert Rhett of South Carolina and William Yancey of Alabama and many slave-owning planters who favored secession, who wanted to dissolve the Union so as to be free to extend slavery into the new territories. Some of them even favored the re-introduction

of the African slave trade which had been outlawed by the Constitution of the United States. But the majority of the people of the South neither wanted a dissolution of the Union nor favored the restoration of the African slave trade. They wanted the right to extend slavery into the new territories. No one seriously threatened the institution of slavery in the states where it already existed. It was the Southern pressure to extend slavery into the new territories which brought on the Civil War.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 which excluded slavery from the Louisiana territory -- except the State of Missouri -- was repealed in 1854. Three years later, the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court of the United States declared that Congress could not constitutionally abolish slavery in any of the territories at any time. This made slavery lawful in all the territories and opened up the prospect of a vast slave empire springing up in the West and in the South. The people of the North and all the enemies of slavery violently opposed this extension. This was the irrepressible conflict which led to the Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln bitterly opposed slavery, but he was not an abolitionist. He saw no way by which the institution of slavery could be uprooted in the states where it existed. He wanted to confine slavery to these states, hoping that ultimately slavery, which he believed was on the down-hill, would be abolished by those states themselves, or that the slaves would be emancipated by purchase on the part of the Federal Government. Reluctantly Lincoln even approved of the Fugitive Slave Law which was so unpopular in the North and which many Northern states refused to enforce. It was in clear violation of the Mosaic law: "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master a slave that is escaped from his master unto thee". The reason for his position was that the Constitution of the United States, which unfortunately had made a compact with the Southern

slave-holding states, without which the Union of the thirteen states would probably not have been effected, provided that "no person held to service in one state under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law, be discharged from such service and shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service may be due". But Lincoln was opposed to the extension of slavery into the new territories, and he maintained that no state can lawfully get out of the Union.

He made his position very clear in his first Inaugural Address which he delivered in March, 1861: "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so and I have no inclination to do so". And in the same Inaugural Address he defined the issue between the North and the South very clearly: "One section of our country believes slavery is right and ought to be extended while the other believes it is wrong and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute". Lincoln urged that this dispute should not be settled by blood-shed or violence. He counselled patience, "Nothing valueable can be lost by taking time". "No good object can be frustrated by taking time". When in his Cooper Union speech of 1858 he declared that "a house divided against itself cannot stand" he had in mind that the house would cease to be divided, that, as he stated, "the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction". Differences and controversies do arise in any free country and its citizens, quite naturally, divide over them into majorities and minorities. He hoped that the minority would acquiesce, else no government can exist. He hoped for a peaceful solution. "Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity and the firm reliance on Him Who has never yet forsaken this favored land are

still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty." The South did not listen to Lincoln and the war came -- a tragic and sanguinary war which could have been averted.

If Lincoln were to view our world today, a hundred years later, in 1961 instead of 1861, he would find many parallels to the issues which tore our country apart in his day. Today the problem is the extension of communism. Many in the free world look upon communism as upon an evil as great as slavery. Many in the communist world look upon capitalism as upon an evil as great as slavery. These people are not quite realistic in their appraisals. Neither communism nor capitalism can be likened to slavery. But there are those who hold such views and there are men in both camps who would like to see either communism or capitalism destroyed. They are the Abolitionists of 1961. Morality and justice were undoubtedly on the side of the Abolitionists in 1861. They wanted to stamp out once and for all the infamous and indecent institution of human slavery. But even in the North the Abolitionists represented a very small minority. The people of the North did not want the Union disrupted over the issue of slavery. There was no assurance at all that with the dissolution of the Union slavery in the South would be abolished. Abraham Lincoln was not elected on an Abolitionist platform and the Civil War was not fought to abolish slavery. Slavery was the cause, once removed. The Emancipation of the Negro came as a by-product of Northern victories in the Civil War.

Free men in the Western World today regard communism as an evil. But most of them recognize that it is firmly established in certain parts of the world, and cannot be destroyed without violence and blood-shed, without nuclear war which would destroy both the free and the communist world. Were Lincoln to survey our present world, he would probably repeat the advice which he gave to his generation

and would urge us "to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty". We should live in peace with what we do not like, hoping that communist societies, in the course of time, because of inner drives or profiting from their own experiences at home, will come to revise their systems and approximate our conceptions of human freedom and democracy. In life nothing is immutable; political or economic history is never static.

The communist world, or at least some of its leaders, have begun to speak of co-existence. Evidently their faith in world revolution has been greatly shaken. The straw of words as some one said, remains, but the grain of reality is no longer there. The world proletariat has not risen, as Lenin and his followers hoped and impatiently waited for. Communism has failed to make headway in the Western world. Nor has the prophecy which was contained in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, the Bible of all subsequent communism, come to pass. "The modern laborer", it had stated, "instead of rising with the progress of industry sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth". The Communist Manifesto based itself on the horrors of the factory systems in the middle of the nineteenth century and could see in the industrial revolution only evil, only the unrestrained exploitation of the working-man. It did not foresee that capitalism in time would work out its own forms of control, that trade unionism would come effectively into the picture, and factory legislation, the minimum wage and unemployment insurance, social security and pensions, the income tax and the use of the power of taxation by the state to redress the inequalities which are involved in private ownership of the means of production. Communism thought of capitalism as slavery -- "naked, shameless, direct brutal exploitation" but through modern capitalism the working-man has achieved a freedom and a standard of living unimaginable in those days, and longed for today even by the millions who are living under communist regimes where pressures are steadily mounting for more consumers

goods, for better housing and freer contacts with the outside world. Communism has been moving steadily to the right towards State Socialism, just as capitalism has been moving steadily to the left towards the Welfare State.

That is why communist leaders today are so insistent about co-existence. Co-existence, of course, is sound and feasible -- if this fails, all fails -- provided communism sincerely resolves to contain itself and not to seek extension into the free world through conspiratorial activities or by force. The democratic world is prepared to meet communism in free and open competition. It is the extension of communism through intrigue, under-mining and subversion that the free world fears and will resist to the utmost. The communist world cannot have it both ways, co-existence and world domination. If it wishes to bury capitalism, as Khrushchev declared, it must do so by developing a way of life and a standard of living at home which would be so superior and so appealing that peoples everywhere will want to copy it. The free world cannot agree to a co-existence which goes hand-in-hand with an active incitement to class struggle, which seeks to capitalize upon every incident of disaffection or unhappiness existing anywhere in the world. All social problems in the modern world can and should be solved without resorting to violent class war.

I believe that our country, under the new administration, is prepared to go much further in the direction of accommodation and towards finding a way of living together in the same world with the communist bloc, but it will not be hood-winked. It will not tolerate a surface co-existence over an active revolutionary underground, a "strategic retreat" such as Lenin executed in 1921 or the Peoples' Front of 1936 and similar temporary revisions of communistic tactics which were resorted to when confronted with an emergency. It would be a gross miscalculation on the part of the Soviet leaders to think that our country and the free world generally would allow itself to be beguiled and misled. Soviet spokesmen

cannot speak one way in Washington and at the United Nations and another way in Moscow. There must be a complete abandonment in word and act of the doctrine of the "permanent revolution" which, though a failure in practice, has nevertheless bedevilled the relationships of East and West to this day. There must be no intervention on either side. Both sides must abstain from unfriendly acts and propoganda. Only forthright and faithful relations will make co-existence possible. Perhaps the extension of aid to undeveloped countries should all be channeled through the United Nations, thereby eliminating competition between the Great Powers and the race to entice these countries into one or another sphere of influence.

There are grave issues which exist between the two world groups but they cannot be solved by war. War is no answer. Here again the words of the Great Emancipator come forcibly to mind: "Suppose you go to war. You cannot fight always and when after much loss on both sides and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions as to the terms of intercourse are again upon you". War today would not only cause much loss on both sides and no gain for either, but when they cease fighting there may be no one left to renew the discussion of the old questions and find terms of intercourse. A struggle between the first and second most powerful industrial countries of the world, each equipped with nuclear weapons, is horrible to contemplate, but is, unfortunately, not impossible. Will the world listen to Lincoln's admonition today? Our nation survived the Civil War, but can the world survive a global war with the vast destruction potentials of our atomic age?

The American government is not out to destroy communism where it presently exists. The communists must not attempt to destroy free governments or neutral governments where they exist. It is the extension of communism which threatens war. This may become the irrepressible conflict of the twentieth century. The danger today lies with the dogmatist and the doctrinaire in both camps, with the extension-ist-at-all-costs.

When Lincoln was assassinated, George William Curtis wrote in Harper's Weekly:

"He saw farther and deeper than others because he saw that in the troubled time upon which he was cast little could be wholly seen. Experience so vindicated his patriotic sagacity that he acquired a curious ascendancy in the public confidence; so that if good men differed from his opinion they were inclined to doubt their own. Principle was fixed as a star, but policy must be swayed by the current. While many would have dared the fierce fury of the gale and have sunk the ship at once, he knew that there was a time to stretch every inch of canvas and a time to lay to. He was not afraid of 'drifting'. In statesmanship prudence counts for more than daring. Thus it happened that some who urged him at the beginning of the war to the boldest measures, and excused what they called his practical faithlessness by his probable weakness, lived to feel the marrow of their bones melt with fear, and to beg him to solicit terms that would have destroyed the nation. But wiser than passion, more faithful than fury, serene in his devotion to the equal rights of men without which he knew there could henceforth be no peace in this country, he tranquilly persisted, enduring the impatience of what seemed to some his painful delays and to others his lawless haste; and so, trusting God and his own true heart, he fulfilled his great task so well that he died more tenderly lamented than any ruler in history."

And what would Father Abraham say in 1961 to the young man in the White House? I believe that he would say: "Your burdens will be many and difficult, as were mine. Mine were domestic problems which led to war. Yours will be world-wide problems which must not lead to war. I could not always see clearly for the mist and the fog which surrounded me, nor will you. But have faith in the people whom you have been called to lead, and in the ideals upon which our country is founded. Be firm and inflexible on principle, but open-minded, receptive and prudent on policy. Lead in courage and in faith; and with malice towards none and with charity for all, help to draw all nations closer together in brotherhood and peace."

Sermon 965

~~SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE~~

February 12, 1961

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio

MR. ABRAHAM LINCOLN LOOKS OVER THE SCENE

It was a <sup>very</sup> dismal national scene which faced Lincoln when he assumed the Presidency of the United States a hundred years ago. The Union was falling apart. South Carolina had seceded from the Union <sup>and was</sup> followed by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas. ~~and~~ A new government had been set up for the Confederate States. It would not be long before Fort Sumter would be fired upon and <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ Civil War, which was to last four tragic years would begin.

Lincoln, who saved the Union and emancipated the Negro slaves, had much to say to his generation -- words of wisdom and prophecy which are still relevant and timely and which he would utter, I believe, if he viewed the dismal international scene today -- a hundred years later.

It were well for us to remember that the Civil War was not fought by good men on one side and bad men on the other. The men of the South were not all evil men. Many of them were good, religious people -- churchmen, who frequently quoted the Bible. Stonewall Jackson carried the Bible in his mess-kit. His reverence for the Sabbath went so far that he would not mail his wife a letter to be carried in the mails on a Sunday, <sup>nor would he open a letter received from her on a Sunday,</sup> Robert E. Lee and Jeb Stuart had let their slaves go long before the Civil War. Lee hated slavery and counted on the <sup>ultimate</sup> emancipation of the slaves through the mild and melting influence of Christianity. He believed, as he said, that <sup>the</sup> course of the final abolition of human

slavery is onward, and we give it the aid of our prayers and all justifiable means in our power but we must leave the progress, as well as the result, in His hands Who sees the end, Who chooses to work by slow influences and with Whom two thousand years are but a single day".

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Stonewall Jackson also believed that "it was better for the South to fight for her rights in the Union than out of it". These men and many like them in the South were caught in the web of an evil two hundred and forty years old. The dragon teeth were first sown in 1620<sup>11</sup> when the first cargo of Negro slaves was brought into Johnstown! It was for them a long-established and accepted <sup>social</sup> pattern, and while they didn't approve of it and

hoped for its termination, they saw no way of changing the pattern in the near future.

There were, of course, men in the South like Robert Rhett of South Carolina and William Yancey of Alabama and many slave-owning planters who favored secession, who wanted to ~~disrupt~~<sup>dissolve</sup> the Union so as to be free to extend slavery into the new territories. Some of them even favored the re-introduction of the African slave trade which had been outlawed by the Constitution of the United States. But the majority of the people of the South neither wanted a ~~disruption~~<sup>dissolution</sup> of the Union nor favored the restoration of the African slave trade. They wanted the right to extend slavery into the new territories. No one seriously threatened the institution of slavery in the states where it already existed. It was the Southern pressure to extend slavery into the new territories which brought on the Civil War.

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~~1:31 p.m. 7/11/31~~  
The reason for his position was that the Constitution of the United States, which unfortunately had made a compact with the Southern slave-holding states, without which the Union of the thirteen states could probably not have been effected, provided that "no person held to service in one state under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law, be discharged from such service and shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service may be due". But Lincoln was opposed to the extension of slavery into the new territories, and he maintained that no state can lawfully get out of the Union.

He made his position very clear in his first Inaugural Address which he delivered in March, 1861: "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so and I have no inclination to do so". And in the same Inaugural Address he defined the issue between the North and the South very clearly: "One section of our country believes slavery is right and ought to be extended while the other believes it is wrong and ought not to be extended. This is/only substantial dispute". Lincoln urged that this dispute should not be settled by blood-shed or violence. He counselled patience, "Nothing valueable can be lost by taking time". "No good object can be frustrated by taking time". When in his Cooper Union speech of

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the Union slavery in the South would be abolished. Abraham Lincoln was not elected on an Abolitionist platform and the Civil War was not fought to abolish slavery. <sup>Slavery was the cause, not recruited,</sup> The Emancipation of the Negro came as a by-product of Northern victories in the Civil War.

Free men in the Western World today regard communism as an evil. But most of them recognize that it is firmly established in <sup>certain</sup> parts of the world, and cannot be destroyed without violence and blood-shed, without nuclear war which would destroy both the free and the communist world. Were Lincoln to survey our present world, he would probably repeat <sup>the</sup> ~~his~~ advice <sup>which he gave to his quarters</sup> and urge us "to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty". We <sup>should</sup> ~~must~~ live in peace with what we do not like, hoping that communist societies, ~~will~~, in the course of time, because of inner drives <sup>or</sup> and profiting from their own experiences at home, <sup>will</sup> ~~will~~ come to revise their systems and approximate our conceptions of human freedom and democracy. In life nothing is immutable; <sup>political and economic</sup> history is never static.

The communist world, or at least some of its leaders, have begun to speak ~~today~~ of co-existence. Evidently their faith in world revolution has been greatly shaken. The <sup>is some in part</sup> ~~straw~~ of words ~~remains~~, but the grain of reality is no longer there. The world proletariat has not risen, as Lenin and his followers ~~believed~~ <sup>hoped</sup> and impatiently waited for. Communism has failed to make headway in the Western world. No <sup>is</sup> has the prophecy which was contained in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, ~~which has been~~ <sup>subsequent</sup> the Bible of all communism ~~since then~~, come to pass. "The modern laborer", it <sup>had</sup> ~~stated~~, "instead of rising with the progress of industry sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth". The Communist Manifesto which ~~was~~

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That is why communist leaders today <sup>are</sup> ~~have been~~ so insistent about co-existence. Co-existence <sup>is</sup> sound and feasible ~~possible~~ -- if this fails, all fails -- provided communism sincerely resolves to contain itself and not to seek extension into the free world through conspiratorial activity <sup>ies</sup> or by force. The democratic world is prepared to meet communism in free and open competition. It is the extension of communism through

intrigue, under-mining and subversion that the free world fears and will resist to the utmost. The communist world cannot have it both ways, co-existence and world domination. If it wishes to bury capitalism, as Khrushchev declared, it must do so ~~only~~ by developing a way of life and a standard of living at home which would be so superior and so appealing that peoples everywhere will want to copy it, ~~but~~ The free world cannot agree to a co-existence which goes hand-in-hand with an active incitement to class struggle, which seeks to capitalize upon every incident of disaffection or unhappiness existing anywhere in the world. All social problems in the modern world can be solved <sup>and should</sup> without resorting to <sup>violent</sup> class war.

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When Lincoln was assassinated, George William Curtis wrote in Harper's Weekly:

"He saw farther and deeper than others because he saw that in the troubled time upon which he was cast little could be wholly seen. Experience so vindicated his patriotic sagacity that he acquired a curious ascendancy in the public confidence; so that if good men differed from his opinion

they were inclined to doubt their own. Principle was fixed as a star, but policy must be swayed by the current. While many would have dared the fierce fury of the gale and have sunk the ship at once, he knew that there was a time to stretch every inch of canvas and a time to lay to. He was not afraid of 'drifting.' In statesmanship prudence counts for more than daring. Thus it happened that some who urged him at the beginning of the war to the boldest measures, and excused what they called his practical faithlessness by his probable weakness, lived to feel the marrow of their bones melt with fear, and to beg him to solicit terms that would have destroyed the nation. But wiser than passion, more faithful than fury, serene in his devotion to the equal rights of men without which he knew there could henceforth be no peace in this country, he tranquilly persisted, enduring the impatience of what seemed to some his painful delays and to others his lawless haste; and so, trusting God and his own true heart, he fulfilled his great task so well that he died more tenderly lamented than any ruler in history."

And what would Father Abraham say in 1961 to the young man in the White House? *I believe that he would say:* Your burdens will be many and difficult, as were mine. Mine were domestic problems which led to war. Yours will be world-wide problems which must not lead to war. I could not always see clearly for the mist and the fog which surrounded ~~them~~ <sup>us</sup>, nor will you. But have faith in the people whom you have been called to lead, and in the ideals upon which our country is founded. Be firm and inflexible on principle, but open-minded, receptive and prudent on policy. Lead in courage and in faith; and with malice towards none and with charity for all, help to draw all nations closer together in brotherhood and peace. "