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The role of the church in industrial dispute, 1928.

"ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES"

BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

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The church must not remain content to speak of social justice in the abstract. The church is not an academy for speculative sciences. It is a dynamic agency equipped for social reconstruction. It must enter the arena of life and do battle for its sanctities.

The church cannot, of course, align itself with a propaganda for one specific economic system as against another. It must not involve itself in economic dogmatism. To do so would be to suffer a severe loss in spiritual prestige and authority. The church would be compelled either to champion an existing order, in spite of its sundry and inevitable flaws, or an imaginary order, which might fail even to approximate the virtues claimed for it. The church is not concerned with systems, but with the safeguarding of principles which each age must be challenged to work into such a system as will best meet its requirements. Whether it be capitalism, socialism or communism, there are basic principles of social justice at stake in each, and the church must under all conditions remain free to defend these ideals for which no system is adequate guarantee.

Nor should the church be called upon to play the roll of arbiter in the numerous minor economic disputes which daily arise in our society, concerning which only the expert economist can today speak with any degree of wisdom or authority. Numerous labor controversies, for example, occur today which do not at all involve such clear-cut moral issues which would warrant the church in throwing the weight of its influence on one side or the other. The church ought not to fritter itself away by introducing itself into every minor economic wrangle which

may possess little or no social significance.

On the other hand there are industrial disputes which do involve basic moral principles in which the welfare of human beings are at stake. There are numerous instances where the working classes have had to resort to the desperate measure of a strike, in order to obtain even a minimum standard of decent living and a chance for themselves, their families and their children.

The coal fields and the steel mills can tell the story of many a bitter struggle of this nature.

Labor has frequently had to fight for the right of organization and collective action. If the church remains neutral in these struggles of men for fairer and juster conditions of living, it is untrue to its own convictions and becomes a social futility.

Nowhere in the world today do those conditions of justice and opportunity fully obtain which would make possible the free, untrammelled unfoldment of personality, the harmonious development of all of God's children according to the measure of their capacities.

In the face of these conditions the church cannot, dare not, remain silent. It must cry aloud. It must lift up its voice like a trumpet to declare unto the people their transgressions. Else its vision is a lying vision and its ritual an abomination.