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

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No substitute for collective security, 1938.



ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER OF THE TEMPLE, CLEVELAND, OHIO  
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE CLEVELAND PEACE COMMITTEE OVER STATION WGAR ON  
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1938.

## NO SUBSTITUTE FOR COLLECTIVE SECURITY

The task of establishing international peace and the machinery for the perpetuation of peace is an especial challenge to organized religion. Not only because peace is essentially a supreme ethical problem, decidedly within the social program of church or synagogue, but also because every great religion avers that it has come into the world to effect peace among men.

Heretofore peace has been an ideal abstraction, and the church has been content to speak of it as <sup>an</sup>ultimate desideratum, a condition highly to be desired but so far removed as to be beyond the pale of practical and immediate concern. But necessity and the events of the last two or three generations have thrust this abstraction into the realm of practical politics and have turned it into the most pressing and perplexing problem of the day.

The church today is confronted with a choice. It can assume one of two roles - the one of leadership or the one of pious irrelevancy. The church must decide whether it means to vindicate its historic claim to be the peacemaker of mankind and aggressively to lead the world along the hard road to international peace, or whether it will remain as heretofore, more cautious than courageous, more shrewd than wise and, refusing to enter the arena of struggle, content itself with a pious repetition of its age-old exhortations to peace and good will. Upon the decision of the church will depend, in a large measure, the future attitude of thinking men and women towards it.

The church will assume leadership in the cause of international peace only when it will transcend the state. In the Middle Ages the church competed with the state. It coveted supreme political jurisdiction. It failed to make good its claim. It was well that it did fail, for temporal power inevitably undermines spiritual power and destroys it.



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With the Reformation the ascendancy of the state began. In the struggle between church and state the state emerged triumphant. Stress was now put upon the autonomy of the state and its supreme authority in all matters. This resulted in two moral set-backs. First, the state presumed to be morally self-sufficient. It claimed to be a law unto itself. Public morality was not necessarily coterminous with private morality. The state alone became the source and criterion of national ethics. Secondly, the church, having lost the role of competitor, assumed the role of ally. It became a state agency. This condition has continued to our own day.

As long as the church does not rise above the state - not in the sense of endeavoring to master it or to control its political fortunes, but in the sense of freeing itself from an alignment which carries with it the endorsement of its political purposes and programs - so long will peace, the traditional and avowed ideal of the church, remain an abstraction. During the last war every church became a state church. The churches proved to be local shrines where tribal deities were worshipped.

Religion must be international in the finest sense of the word. It is not opposed to nationalism. It overleaps it. The concern of religion is not with nationalism and the temporary political and cultural units among men, but with man himself and with mankind. It goes beyond race and creed and boundaries. Its domain is the world of common human needs. Its empire is of the universal spirit.

When religion speaks of truth, justice, peace and love it voices its own essential genius and men may be moved to hearken unto it. But when it loses its own prophetic voice and becomes the echo of the state, it turns into a deception and a most dangerous beguilement.

The church must be the guide, the critic and the censor of the state, - never its tool. It will then be able to render two distinct services to the



cause of peace.

It will be in a position to create a real temperament for peace, a "peaceful frame of mind", a will to peace. Peace is not altogether a question of economics. Nations do not make war or establish peace solely for economic reasons. Men do not live by bread alone nor do they wage war for bread alone. Many other factors, psychological and historical, enter into every situation. If religion will free itself from the shackles which in the past have tied it to the organism of the state, and recovering its own historic peace mission, will proceed to speak fearlessly and insistently, it can enkindle the imagination of mankind with the ideal of peace. It can fire the souls of men. It once set armies in motion crusading to the Holy Land, by sowing a mystic fervor among men for that land. If religion will become imperial again, uttering its own revelations, it can imbue men and women with a glowing, ardent love for peace. It can touch the minds of youth with the heroic ideal of peace.

This is the first service which the church will be in position to render. The other service is the focusing of the attention of men upon the machinery for effecting peace. It is not enough to cry peace, peace, when there is no peace. The church must rally men around those agencies, however provisional and rudimentary they may be, which promise to bring peace, if only one step nearer.

No people will disarm unless and until it feels itself secure. Back of all international competitive armament is fear. Until the nations of the world are assured of a competent international agency which will protect them against unjustified aggression, they will not, they cannot, they should not disarm.

Those who would bring about peace through disarmament are beginning at the wrong end of their task. Disarmament will be the consequence of peace, not its cause. As long as there is wanting a strong international agency which can promptly and effectively insure peace, protect the weaker nation against the



stronger and punish and discourage the aggressor, no nation will disarm.

And it must be an international agency - not a regional pact among a few major powers. The Munich Pact will go the way of the Locarno Pact and similar inner group arrangements; for these carry within themselves the seeds of their own dissolution. They are competitive and exclusive by their very nature, and as a rule, are aimed against some other power or group of powers.

There simply is no substitute for collective security! The first attempt made by the nations of the world, the first attempt in history, to organize for peace, internationally, in a form represented by the Geneva League of Nations, broke down. Or, to be more exact, was struck down by the very nations, including our own, which first sponsored it. Our country whose spokesmen championed the ideal of collective security at the Paris Peace Conference, rejected it and refused to join any international organization for peace whatsoever - even a World Court. This was a shock to the structure of collective security from which it never recovered. The next shock came when Japan invaded China, and Great Britain and France immobilized the League and kept it from moving against the aggressor - for reasons of their own. This was the beginning of the end of collective security in the world. Thereafter, the League became increasingly a mere stage-setting for colossal futility. Other acts of unchecked aggression and unilateral repudiation of treaties soon followed, and Europe and Asia have continued their head-long rush to war and disaster ever since. Desperately the so-called statesmen of Europe, sinking deeper and ever deeper in the morass ~~which~~ which they themselves have created, have tried to avert disaster through regional pacts of mutual assistance, through "no-war" pledges which no one credits, and through shameful and humiliating concessions to war-threatening dictators.

For the ideal of peace, the makeshift of appeasement has been substituted! Avert war by buying off the threatening war-makers with the land, wealth or



rights of other nations (not of your own, of course), instead of discouraging such war-makers by setting up an impenetrable wall of physical and moral resistance against them. It is, of course, clear that you cannot have peace by paying ransom to blackmailers. You simply encourage greater and greater exactions. No imperial hunger has ever been sated. By feeding the voracious tiger, you do not permanently impair his appetite.

There is no substitute for collective security. There is no security for the American people, for example, in isolation, or in neutrality legislation. We are simply not isolated from the great trends, political, social or economic, of the world about us. Many of those very people who two, three years ago clamored for neutrality legislation to keep us out of foreign-war entanglements, clamored for a revocation of the Neutrality Law which was finally enacted, when in recent months an international act of gross immorality was being perpetrated in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, and they became persuaded that the United States ought to do something about it.

There is no security for any nation in super-armaments. Nations do not fight singly today, and no nation knows in advance the prospective enemies against whom it must arm. Czechoslovakia had a splendidly trained and well equipped army of 1,800,000 soldiers, and a seemingly impenetrable line of fortification modelled after the famous French Maginot Line. But faced with war, Czechoslovakia was unable to use her army to strike even a single blow, and its forts surrendered without firing a shot. She suffered a major defeat in the midst of complete war preparedness. No nation can make itself secure even within a system of military alliances against all possible combinations of potential enemies.

There is no guarantee against being drawn into war in a popular ~~referendum~~ referendum on war. Apart from other objections to it, underlying this suggestion is the rather naive assumption that the rank and file of the electorate will vote less emotionally and more intelligently on the subject of war or peace than their



## NO SUBSTITUTE FOR COLLECTIVE SECURITY

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chosen representatives in Congress. By the time the people come to vote on the issue they will have been subjected to such a barrage of propaganda that their decision would be a foregone conclusion.

There is no substitute for collective security! Because its friends betrayed and destroyed it, they who were the victors in the World War have suffered, in peace-time, one major political defeat after another, and democracy is today fighting for its very existence, fighting with its back to the wall.

Because the first attempt at an international organization for peace failed, is no reason to conclude that such an organization is not feasible or is inoperative. It is feasible. It is operative. It is the only way. The alternative is breakdown, chaos, and the death of our civilization. It would have been truly miraculous if that first Geneva League, born out of the fury and passions of the World War, and tied to the provisions of peace treaties not all of them just or defensible, had succeeded. It did not succeed. We must begin anew - avoiding our past mistakes, profiting from our past experiences, in a chastened mood, but undiscouraged. We must begin anew! There is no other way!



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Those who would bring about peace through disarmament are beginning at the wrong end of their task. Disarmament ~~will~~ <sup>will</sup> be the consequence of peace, not its cause. As long as there is ~~no~~ <sup>wanting a</sup> strong international agency ~~which~~ <sup>which</sup> can promptly and effectively insure peace, ~~and~~ protect the weaker nations against the stronger, and punish and discourage the aggressor, ~~there will~~ <sup>no nation</sup> ~~be no disarmament~~. And it must be an international agency - not a regional pact <sup>among</sup> of a few major powers. The Munich Pact will go the way of the Locarno Pact, and similar ~~minor~~ <sup>minor</sup> group arrangements; for ~~they~~ <sup>these</sup> carry within themselves the seeds of their own dissolution. They are competitive and exclusive ~~by~~ their very nature, and, as a rule, are aimed against some other power or group of powers.

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