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Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1946.

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
TO THE 57TH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS
JUNE 25-30, 1946

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER - CLEVELAND, OHIO

To the Central Conference of American Rabbis

My dear Colleagues:

When we last met in convention in Atlantic City on June 25-27, 1945, the second world war was still on, although the European phase of it was over. In order to comply with war-time travel restrictions, our convention, by agreement, was limited in attendance to the officers, past presidents, the members of the Executive Board and the heads of the Conference commissions and committees.

The 57th Annual Convention is our first post-war gathering. It is gratifying to note how eagerly our members have availed themselves of the opportunity to meet again with their colleagues. We all feel that our fellowship in the Conference is richly rewarding, and it is cherished by us because of its work, its traditions, and the gracious associations and contacts which it affords.

We are very proud of the one hundred and forty-two members of our Conference who served as chaplains in the armed forces of our country. Considering our limited membership, it is a remarkable and most commendable record. Twenty-seven of our members are still in uniform, sixteen of them are overseas. This record of service is a tribute both to the religious consecration of these men and to their high sense of duty and patriotism. From all sides, inspiring testimonies have reached us of how well these men served, with what complete selflessness, and how much their ministry of guidance, comfort and strengthening meant to our fighting men. These chaplains have written an illustrious and unforgettable chapter in the annals of American Israel and of the American Rabbinate. To men who in the vast tribulations

of the war faced bewilderment, loneliness, danger and death, they brought the message, the prayers and the solace of our faith. They were with our fighting men when death reaped a grim harvest among them. They were with them when they lay wounded in the hospitals. They rendered the last solemn obsequies at their hallowed graves.

An especial word of tribute is due to those of our chaplains who, swift upon the invasion of Europe, hastened to bring succor and comfort to our fellow-Jews who were languishing in the horrible concentration camps of Germany. They were the first American Jews to reach them. Theirs were the first words of hope and the first acts of compassion to reach our brothers who had for years been living in the Nazi prison pens in deepest despair and unspeakable degradation. From these camps have since come to us the fervent expressions of gratitude and benedictions for these brave American Jewish Chaplains who, by their noble and sacrificial acts, sanctified the Name of God.

I In some appropriate manner, the Central Conference of American Rabbis will wish to honor its members who served as chaplains in the second world war, and to record for future generations the story of these men who went forth -- meshuche milchamah -- to serve their country, and who so nobly matched their hour.

We are happy to learn that the returning chaplains are being rapidly re-absorbed into their civilian ministries or into cognate professions. The placement problem, which loomed so large, presents no serious difficulties today. It may well be that the Emergency Placement Committee which the Conference created, in anticipation of facing a sizable post-war problem, might ask to be discharged. Our congregations have welcomed back their rabbis

who had volunteered for war service. Some of our colleagues have chosen to remain as chaplains in the army and navy. New congregations have been formed and they, as well as some of the smaller communities, are now engaging permanent rabbis. Other of our members are establishing themselves in related fields of Jewish education, social service, or with national organizations which are working in the fields of overseas Jewish relief, and Palestine.

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This Convention should decide, after full consideration of the subject, whether the Conference may regard the entire matter of protecting the interests of the returning chaplain as automatically disposed of or whether it is still desirable to retain some apparatus to meet possible contingencies.

Because of their war experience, our chaplains are returning to their civilian posts with deepened insights and a surer grasp of the fundamentals of their calling. But the rest of us too felt the impact of the war, in the day of the world's adversity and our own people's greatest disaster. All of us have looked deeper into the hearts of men and women during these trying years, and into our own hearts. We have felt summoned to face up to stark new realities and to re-evaluate our ministries. All of us are entering the post-war era deeply affected.

This last year of total war and partial peace has contributed to the deepening earnestness of our rabbinate. The poet, John Dryden, composed a lengthy poem of over three hundred stanzas dedicated to the year 1666, which he called the "Annus Mirabilis" -- the "Year of Wonders." Two extraordinary events were sufficient to justify the poet in characterizing that as a year year/of wonders, -- the London Fire, and the success of England's naval war with Holland. How then shall we characterize the year since we last met, a year which witnessed the end of the greatest war in history, the collapse of Nazism

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Between the promise and the menace of these new beginnings, the spirit of man finds itself today dazed and perplexed. Neither victory nor invention has brought joy to the heart of the world. The memories of the first world war are with us. We won victory then and it turned to ashes. What will our latest victory yield? The aggression of Nazism and Fascism had of course to be stopped if civilization was to survive, but as Maccaulay pointed out, it is in the nature of the devil of tyranny to tear and rend the body which he leaves. The lacerated body of mankind now needs healing. Starvation, disease and misery darken the habitations of men. The spirit of mankind, too, needs healing from shock and disillusion, from pressure and fatigue. Ever-present is the danger of physical collapse and spiritual relapse.

In such times of painful and precarious convalescence, religion faces its greatest challenge and opportunity. The foremost military leaders of our time have referred to the problem with which the atomic bomb confronted our world as essentially a theologic one, involving a spiritual recrudescence and the improvement of human character. A few days ago, Mr. Bernard Baruch, in presenting to the Atomic Energy Commission of the United Nations the proposal of our Government for the international control of atomic energy, declared that "Science has taught us how to put the atom to work. But to make it work for good instead of for evil lies in the domain dealing with the principles

of human duty. We are now facing a problem more of ethics than of physics."

In the legitimate pride of its achievements, science in the 19th Century tended to vaunt its power and its promise, and disparage and dispute religion. But in the middle of the 20th Century, science in a far humbler mood, though far richer in achievements, turns to religion not as to a competitor but as to a desperately-needed ally, and appeals to it to come to its aid so as to deliver mankind from the dangers inherent in the newest and greatest discoveries of science. Thus the rejected may yet become the Queen of all the Sciences, and the ancient wisdom of Israel may yet be vindicated: "The beginning of all human wisdom is reverence of God."

For it was not science but religion which the neo-barbarism of the Twentieth Century renounced. It proclaimed its own dogmas as a substitute for the classic dogmas of religion. It did not reject either scientific knowledge or technology as it set out to build a new world based on the foundations of its anti-religious dogmas. Science did not deter it from resorting to bloody acts of tyranny and oppression, to gas chambers and human abattoirs in order to achieve its objectives.

These neo-barbarians were never illogical. It was only their premises which were false. The Scholiasts of the Middle Ages were not illogical. They made a great ado about logic. It was one of their favorite studies. They could think and reason with remarkable precision and subtlety. But their premises were false, and so their logic could only lead them astray. A water-tight logical syllogism can be a bridge leading from a false premise to a bizarre and fantastic conclusion.

To us it should be clearer than ever that the basic dogmas and premises of ethical religion must be re-asserted in our age and that priority must be given to them in the education of the rising generation. It is not difficult to draft either an Atlantic Charter or a constitution for a new world

organization, or even to bring such an organization into existence. But all such documents and agencies will turn out to be only facades for ghastly futilities unless the peoples of the earth are moved by strong ethical and spiritual convictions to demand their fullest implementation and to persist unflaggingly in their defence. Men speak today of the need for "controls." They are seeking ways to control aggression, to control the atomic bomb, to control a run-a-way scientific civilization. But where, indeed, is to be found the ultimate control if not in the hearts of men?

And so we ministers of religion, after a second excursus in one generation into chaos wrought by Godlessness, are returning to the ancient altars of our faith confirmed in our convictions and more firmly committed to the most important, most difficult and most exalted task in the modern world -- to teach men how "to distinguish the holy from the unholy, the clean from the unclean," and to turn from the broken and polluted cisterns of our world to the fountains of living water.

The Household of Israel stands more in need of the ministrations of its religion than all other peoples on earth because it has suffered more from the ravages of the war and because of the large measure of insecurity in its life. No people lost over a third of its population in the war. The Jewish people did -- and in a most horrible manner, unparalleled in all the dark and cruel annals of mankind. Our people will continue to feel the traumatism of the physical and psychic shock which it suffered long after the second world war will have become a faded memory among men. The Crusades, the Spanish Expulsion and the Chmielnicki pogroms of the 17th Century left their deep scars on the mind and body of our people for generations. Even deeper scars will remain and for a much longer time as a result of the slaughter of the six million Jews of Europe and the total destruction of nearly all centers of creative Jewish life on the continent. A thousand years and

more of Jewish history in the heart of Europe is winding up in an epilogue of blood, terror and death. Our people everywhere, even those who live in lands of freedom, are deeply shaken and disturbed by what has occurred. There is fear in their hearts.

It is not a panicky or cowardly fear which prompts them to seek escape from their destiny. It cannot be said of the Jews of America, for example, that they have become less loyal, less concerned with the fate of their people, more given to apostasy and assimilation and "that the stream of conversion...has become a river." On the contrary, the war years and the great demands which they made upon Jewish loyalty and generosity have revealed an inner strength and soundness in the American Jewish community. We who know our communities well and are not inclined to be complacent about any of their shortcomings are nevertheless not persuaded that social disintegration has set in and that a stampede away from Judaism is on the way. To be sure there is much to be done to strengthen the edifice of this relatively young and rapidly growing Jewish community in the United States. But definitely there is abundant good material with which to do it.

Our danger lies not in disloyalty or apostasy, but in fear and depression which may beat down the spirits of our people and may paralyze their creative efforts. This is our enemy. This was the enemy whom we had to overcome time and again following every one of the great national disasters in the past. One can readily understand why the phrase "al tirah" -- "Do not be afraid" -- recurs like a mighty refrain in the hortative preachments of the men of God who prophesied to their people during and after the Babylonian Exile. It was the one saving message which was most desperately needed in that shattering hour of national collapse.

"So fear not, O Jacob, my servant, is the oracle of the Lord, nor be dismayed O Israel!...For I am with you to save you, is the oracle of the Lord."

The prophet, Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, held out the heartening promise of "v'en machrid" -- "there shall be none to make you afraid." So does the Isaiah of the Exile call, over and over again, to the beaten, scattered and frightened men of his day: "Fear not, nor be disquieted. Why should you be afraid? Why should you forget the Lord your Maker, so that you live in continual dread of the fury of the oppressor when he comes to destroy?" This great seer understood what manner of utterance the times called for, and what the shaken and demoralized exiles needed most to save them from utter route: "Strengthen the feeble hands and the tottering knees make firm; say to those whose hearts beat wildly, Courage, fear not!"


In the same manner, Akiba comforted and sustained the morale of his people after the appalling national calamities of the Second Century. Thus also did Don Isaac Ababranel speak to the victims of the greatest tragedy of the Middle Ages, and Manasseh ben Israel, Yom-Tob Lipman Heller and Shabbetai Ha-Kohen to the survivors of the grim slaughter of 1648.

There is fear in the hearts of our people. The grave accent which American Jews have placed in recent years upon fighting anti-Semitism and on so-called good will movements is a manifestation of a fear which is gnawing at their hearts. We ^{do}/not mean to disparage these activities or to question their value. But clearly they cannot exercise the fear from the hearts which beat wildly nor can they strengthen the feeble hand. Only an ardent concentration and emphasis by the leaders of our people -- lay and religious alike -- upon the religious message of Judaism to the Jews of our day, only the stirring proclamation of its undefeated messianic faith, and its heroic challenge to the men of Israel to live and labor worthily, in spite of all danger and contumely, for the good and just society of free men which our prophets visioned and by whose vision our people was forever covenanted, only such a religious revival, with all of its absorbing tasks and its undergirding

disciplines will set the red blood of courage and confidence coursing through the veins of our people. That, in my humble judgment, is the sure way of putting a new song in the tired hearts of men whose spirits have been brought low within them, because all the waves and billows of misfortune have passed over them.

It remains to be seen whether we of this generation still possess that insight and statesmanship and that sure instinct of survival which stood our ancestors in such good stead in all their trials. One of the re-assuring signs has been the new awareness which has come recently to our congregations and, through them, to their national organization, of the imperative need to expand their programs, to improve the method and content of religious education and of the training of teachers and Rabbis, to found new congregations and to utilize all the facilities of mass education to bring the message of Judaism to our people. It is good that we have been alerted. The new dynamic approach which rejects all doubt and eschews all fear, is in the classic tradition of our unconquered and unconquerable faith.

It is re-assuring too to note that our seminaries and theologic schools are embarking upon important programs of expansion in physical facilities and in academic scope. The academies of Jewish learning in the old world which nourished the mind and heart of our people for generations have nearly all been destroyed. Here upon these gracious shores they must be rebuilt! Here a new generation of scholars and disciples must arise to receive and transmit the unbroken tradition and practice of Jewish scholarship.

 This Conference will wish to record satisfaction with these salutary manifestations of religious progress in American Jewish life and to pledge its fullest measure of support.

American Reform Judaism cleared the way for a notable forward advance during the year by removing the formidable obstacle of a political commitment which was never part of its essential doctrine and which threatened for a time to disrupt it or to isolate it as a minority sect in American Jewish life. The action which the Union of American Hebrew Congregations took at its convention in Cincinnati last March will prove of historic significance for the future of Liberal Judaism. It confirmed the position which had previously been taken by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1935, and again, and this time more definitively, in 1943. The resolution of our Conference, you will recall, read as follows:

"In 1935 at its Chicago Convention, the Central Conference of American Rabbis declared that it would take no official stand on Zionism. It decided that it was to be the prerogative of individual members to determine for themselves, within the framework of Reform Judaism what their point of view on the subject might be. This was and is a salutary policy and should be continued.

"Of late, however, some of our members have renewed the assertion that Zionism is not compatible with Reform Judaism. The attempt has been made to set in irreconcilable opposition 'universalism' and 'particularism.' To the members of the Conference, this appears unreal and misleading. Without impugning the right of members of the Conference to be opposed to Zionism, for whatever reason they may choose, the Conference declares that it discerns no essential incompatibility between Reform Judaism and Zionism, no reason why those of its members who give allegiance to Zionism should not have the right to regard themselves as fully within the spirit and purpose of Reform Judaism."

There were those who sought to perpetuate the anti-Zionist bias of Reform Judaism and to exploit our liberal religious movement for anti-Zionist propaganda. There were even such as attempted in the name of Reform Judaism to deny to Zionists full rights of membership in Reform Jewish congregations. They presumed to speak for great numbers of Reform Jews and to threaten great upheavals if they did not have their way. They failed utterly. When the hosts of Liberal Judaism met in national assembly and the issue was squarely faced, the tumult and the shouting suddenly died away and, mirabile dictu, the formal rejection of anti-Zionism as an essential dogma of Reform Judaism

was made unanimous!

There still remains on the American scene an organization known as the American Council for Judaism whose original founders were some anti-Zionist members of our Conference, who created that instrumentality in the hope of fighting Zionism in the name of Reform Judaism. The well-intentioned members of this group must by now be convinced that the organization which they helped to create has evolved into a purely political agency which has nothing to do with the advancement of Reform Judaism or, for that matter, of any other kind of Judaism. Surely these colleagues of ours must ask themselves whether it is indeed in the interest of Judaism and in the spirit of Judaism that the American Council for Judaism recently petitioned the American Government not to permit the hundred thousand Jews who are still languishing in the internment camps of Europe to go to Palestine unless and until all other recommendations of the Report of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry are first carried out. This Committee had unanimously recommended their immediate and unconditional transfer to Palestine. The President of the United States has repeatedly pressed for it and has stated that the removal of these unfortunate men, women and children to Palestine should be accomplished with the utmost dispatch and should not wait upon the acceptance of the long-range political proposals of the Report which call for further study.

Our colleagues should ask themselves whether their religious sentiments and the tradition of their office can sanction this crude, conscienceless bigotry and the dark and bitter malice of the organization with which they are still identified.

There is on record a resolution of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, adopted in 1943, urging our colleagues, in the spirit of amity and without impugning the right of Zionists or non-Zionists, to express and to disseminate their convictions within and without the Conference "to terminate

this organization." The request may now be phrased "to dissociate themselves from this organization."

IV

I am sure that the Central Conference of American Rabbis will wish to pass a resolution calling upon the President of the United States to stand firm in his resolve that these hundred thousand Jewish refugees should be permitted to proceed to Palestine at once -- a request which he made more than ten months ago and which the Committee of Inquiry unanimously endorsed.

It would be a crime against humanity if these helpless brothers of ours who have passed through all the hells of Nazi terror and persecution are forced to languish and die as homeless refugees, sacrificed to the interests of imperialism and power politics.

In keeping with the community-wide and non-isolationist tendencies of our movement, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, as well as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, joined the American Jewish Conference in 1943. In spite of the heckling and protests of an irreconcilable minority, it has remained a loyal member of that body. The American Jewish Conference has not been a complete success. Considering its composition and its provisional character, its inexperience and the magnitude and controversial character of some of its problems which confronted it, it would have been short of a miracle if it had succeeded fully. The defection of the American Jewish Committee soon after the first meeting of the Conference because it could not have its way on the Palestine Resolution -- a rather startling demonstration of democracy in practice among certain sections of American Jewry -- did not contribute to the authority and prestige of this over-all Jewish body which was called into existence to speak for a united American Jewry on all problems relating to the rights and status of Jews in the world and upon

all matters looking to the implementation of the rights of the Jewish people with respect to Palestine. Nevertheless great and important work was accomplished by the Conference since its inception.

At its last meeting held in Cleveland in February of this year, the Conference considered the question of winding up its work in view of the fact that the war was over, and in view also of the fact that it had not been designed as a permanent body. There was a strong feeling among the delegates that the experience gained during the existence of the American Jewish Conference pointed to the need for a permanent Jewish body which would, in peacetime, give a unified expression of the will of the American Jewish community on all matters vital to it. It was accordingly resolved to explore the possibility of establishing a permanent, democratic, representative Jewish body and to propose ways and means for bringing such a body into existence.

V I recommend that the Central Conference of American Rabbis should energetically cooperate in this task to bring such a body into existence, and should give whatever leadership it can during the period of preliminary negotiations and planning, looking toward an early consummation of a long-cherished hope to achieve as large a measure of unity in American Israel as possible.

The Synagogue Council of America which was established in 1925, through the initiative of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and which comprises the national orthodox, conservative and reform Jewish bodies in the United States, both lay and Rabbinic, has recently reviewed its scope and purposes with the object not alone of obviating what might be called jurisdictional disputes, but also of achieving greater effectiveness in stimulating the religious life of the American Jewish community and in serving more

effectively as its spokesman and representative. After having fixed proper safeguards for the protection of the rights of its constituent bodies, the Synagogue Council may now feel free to move forward energetically and render valuable service in those areas of religious interest which are common to all its constituent groups. The Synagogue Council will, I believe, function best if it will not spread itself too thin and if it will not attempt to do too many things. This is the temptation common to all enterprising, national organizations. It is our hope that the Council will concentrate on a few major objectives of primary importance -- the most vital and urgent in American Jewish life -- such as turning the minds of our people and their hearts to the Synagogue and to religious education and to the programs directly related to them. It will thus completely vindicate its existence, even if its achievements are not spectacular enough to compete in the clamorous market-place with many secular organizations which are cluttering up the American Jewish scene. It need not strive for any exclusive right to speak for American Israel. It is enough for it to go on its chosen way, purposive and resolute, and quietly carry on.

VI

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, which is a member of the Council, whose President this year, Rabbi Isaac Landman, and whose Assistant to the President, Rabbi Aaron Opher, are both members of our Conference, will wish to renew its full and loyal support to the Synagogue Council as it moves forward to carry out its revised and more clearly articulated program of religious activities.

At our last convention, considerable time was devoted to a review of the activities of our Commission on Justice and Peace. It was felt that the work of the Commission is so important and has become so onerous that the Commission

should be divided and, as formerly, two commissions should be set up -- one on Social Justice, and the other on Peace. Our Conference voted to request the Executive Board to consider the matter. It voted also to ask the Executive Board to consider the recommendation of the Commission to engage a full time executive secretary for the Commission. Your Executive Board has not as yet taken action on either of these recommendations.

VII

I recommend that this Convention should instruct the Executive Board to engage a permanent executive secretary. This all important part of our program can no longer be carried on adequately with volunteer help alone. Should the Union of American Hebrew Congregations unite with us to form a Joint Commission, and the Conference agrees to such a Joint Commission, the expense would then be shared by the two organizations.

Many other matters will, I am sure, suggest themselves to you which call for deliberation and action. I pray that this convention may be a fruitful one -- and that it may help us individually in the better discharge of the duties of our calling, and through us, advance the cause of our beloved faith.

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with remarkable precision and subtlety. But their premises were false, and so their logic could only lead them astray. A water-tight logical syllogism can be a bridge leading from a false premise to a bizarre and fantastic conclusion.

To us it should be clearer than ever that the basic dogmas and premises of ethical religion must be re-asserted in our age and that priority must be given to them in the education of the rising generation. It is not difficult to draft either an Atlantic Charter or a constitution for a new world organization, or even to bring such an organization into existence. But all such documents and agencies will turn out to be only facades for ghastly futilities unless the peoples of the earth are moved by strong ethical and spiritual convictions to demand their fullest implementation and to persist unflaggingly in their ~~demands~~^{defense}. Men speak today of the need for "controls". They are seeking ways to control aggression, to control the atomic bomb, to control a run-a-way scientific civilization. But where, indeed, is to be found the ultimate control if not in the hearts of men?

And so we ministers of religion, after a second excursus in one generation into chaos wrought by Godlessness, are returning to the ancient altars of our faith confirmed in our convictions and more firmly committed to the most important, most difficult and most exalted task in the modern world -- to teach men how "to distinguish the holy from the unholy, the clean from the unclean," and to turn from the broken and polluted cisterns of our world to the fountains of living water.

The Household of Israel stands more in need of the ministrations of its religion than all other peoples on earth because it has suffered more from the ravages of the war and because of the large measure of insecurity in its life. No people lost over a third of its population in the war. The Jewish people did -- and in a most horrible manner, unparalleled in all the dark and cruel annals of mankind. Our people will continue to feel the ~~traumatism~~^{the} of ~~this~~ physical and psychic shock which it suffered long after the second world war will have become a faded memory among men. The Crusades, the Spanish Expulsion and the Chmielnicki pogroms of the 17th century left their deep scars on the mind and body of our people for generations. Even deeper scars will

remain and for a much longer time as a result of the slaughter of the six million Jews of Europe and the total destruction of nearly all centers of creative Jewish life on the continent. A thousand years and more of Jewish history in the heart of Europe is winding up in an epilogue of blood, terror and death. Our people everywhere, even those who live in lands of freedom, are deeply shaken and disturbed by what has occurred. There is fear in their hearts.

It is not a panicky or cowardly fear which prompts them to seek escape from their destiny. It cannot be said of the Jews of America, for example, that they have become less loyal, less concerned with the fate of their people, more given to apostasy and assimilation and "that the stream of conversion...has become a river." On the contrary, the war years and the great demands which they made upon Jewish loyalty and generosity have revealed an inner strength and soundness in the American Jewish community. We who know our communities well and are not inclined to be complacent about any of their shortcomings are nevertheless not persuaded that social disintegration has set in and that a stampede away from Judaism is on the way. To be sure there is much to be done to strengthen the edifice of this relatively young and rapidly growing Jewish community in the United States. But definitely there is abundant good material with which to do it.

Our danger lies not in disloyalty or apostasy, but in fear and depression which may beat down the spirits of our people and may paralyze their creative efforts. This is our enemy. This was the enemy whom we had to overcome time and again following every one of the great national disasters in the past. One can readily understand why the phrase "al tirah" -- "Do not be afraid" -- recurs like a mighty refrain in the hortative preachments of the men of God who prophesied to their people during and after the Babylonian Exile. It was the one saving message which was most desperately needed in that shattering hour of national collapse.

"So fear not, O Jacob, my servant, is the oracle of the Lord, nor be dismayed O Israel!..For I am with you to save you, is the oracle of the Lord."

The prophet, Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, held out the heartening promise of "v'en machrid" - "there shall be none to make you afraid." So does the Isaiah of the Exile call, over and over again, ~~upon~~^{to} the beaten, scattered and frightened men of his day: "Fear not, nor be disquieted. Why should you be afraid? Why should you forget the Lord your Maker, so that you live in continual dread of the fury of the oppressor when he comes to destroy?" This great seer understood what manner of utterance the times called for, and what the shaken and demoralized exile^s needed most to save them from utter route: "Strengthen the feeble hands and the tottering knees make firm; say to those whose hearts beat wildly, Courage, fear not!"

^{the}
In the same manner, Akiba comforted and sustained the morale of his people after the appalling national calamities of the second century. Thus also did Don Isaac Ababanel speak to the victims of the greatest tragedy of the Middle Ages, and Manasseh ben Israel, Yom-Tob^f Lipman Heller and Shabbetai Ha-Kohen to the survivors of the grim slaughter of 1648.

There is fear in the hearts of our people. The grave accent which American Jews have placed in recent years upon fighting anti-Semitism and on so-called good will movements is a manifestation of a fear which is gnawing at their hearts. We do not mean to disparage these activities or to question their value. But clearly they cannot exorcise the fear from the hearts which beat wildly nor can they strengthen the feeble hand. Only an ardent concentration and emphasis by the leaders of our people -- lay and religious alike -- upon the religious message of Judaism to the Jews of our day, ^{only} the stirring proclamation of its undefeated messianic faith, and its heroic challenge to the men of Israel to live and labor worthily, in spite of all danger and contumely, for the good, and just society of free men which our prophets visioned and by whose vision our people was forever covenanted, ^g only such a religious revival, with all of its absorbing tasks and its undergirding disciplines will set the red blood of courage and confidence coursing through the veins of our people. That, in my humble

judgment, is the sure way of putting a new song in the tired hearts of men whose spirits have been brought low within them, because all the waves and billows of misfortune have passed over them.

It remains to be seen whether we of this generation still possess that insight and statesmanship and that sure instinct of survival which stood our ancestors in such good stead in all their trials. One of the re-assuring signs has been the new awareness which has come recently to our congregations and, through them, to their national organization, of the imperative need to expand their programs, to improve the method and content of religious education and of the training of teachers and Rabbis, to found new congregations and to utilize all the facilities of mass education to bring the message of Judaism to our people. It is good that we have been alerted. The new dynamic approach which rejects^B all doubt and eschews^{we} all fear, is in the classic tradition of our unconquered and unconquerable faith.

It is re-assuring too to note that our seminaries and theologic schools are embarking upon important programs of expansion in physical facilities and in academic scope. The academi^s of Jewish learning in the old world which nourished the mind and heart of our people for generations have nearly all been destroyed. Here upon these gracious shores they must be rebuilt! Here a new generation of scholars and disciples must arise to receive and transmit the unbroken tradition and practice of Jewish scholarship.

III ~~It~~ This Conference will wish to record satisfaction with these salutary manifestations of religious progress in American Jewish life and to pledge its fullest measure of support.

American Reform Judaism cleared the way for a notable forward advance during the year by removing the formidable obstacle of a political commitment which was never part of its essential doctrine and which threatened for a time to disrupt it or to isolate it as a minority sect in American Jewish life. The action which the Union of American Hebrew Congregations took at its convention in Cincinnati

last March will prove of historic significance for the future of Liberal Judaism. It confirmed the position which had previously been taken by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1935, and again, and this time more definitively, in 1943. The resolution of our Conference, you will recall, read as follows:

"In 1935 at its Chicago Convention, the Central Conference of American Rabbis declared that it would take no official stand on Zionism. It decided that it was to be the prerogative of individual members to determine for themselves, within the framework of Reform Judaism what their point of view on this subject might be. This was and is a salutary policy and should be continued.

"Of late, however, some of our members have renewed the assertion that Zionism is not compatible with Reform Judaism. The attempt has been made to set in irreconcilable opposition 'universalism' and 'particularism.' To the members of the Conference, this appears unreal and misleading. Without impugning the right of members of the Conference to be opposed to Zionism, for whatever reason they may choose, the Conference declares that it discerns no essential incompatibility between Reform Judaism and Zionism, no reason why those of its members who give allegiance to Zionism should not have the right to regard themselves as fully within the spirit and purpose of Reform Judaism."

There were those who sought to perpetuate the anti-Zionist bias of Reform Judaism and to exploit our liberal religious movement for anti-Zionist propaganda. There were even such as attempted in the name of Reform Judaism to deny to Zionists full rights of membership in Reform Jewish congregations. They presumed to speak for great numbers of Reform Jews and to threaten great upheavals if they did not have their way. They failed utterly. When the hosts of Liberal Judaism met in national assembly and the issue was squarely faced, the tumult and the shouting suddenly died away and, mirabile dictu, the formal rejection of anti-Zionism as an essential dogma of Reform Judaism was made unanimous!

There still remains on the American scene an organization known as the American

Council for Judaism whose original founders were some anti-Zionist members of our Conference, who created that instrumentality in the hope of fighting Zionism in the name of Reform Judaism. The well-intentioned members of this group must by now be convinced that the organization which they helped to create has evolved into a purely political agency which has nothing to do with the advancement of Reform Judaism or, for that matter, of any other kind of Judaism. Surely these colleagues of ours must ask themselves whether it is indeed in the interest of Judaism and in the spirit of Judaism that the American Council for Judaism recently petitioned the American Government not to permit the hundred thousand Jews who are still anguishing in the internment camps of Europe to go to Palestine unless and until all other recommendations of the Report of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry are first carried out. This Committee had unanimously recommended their immediate and unconditional transfer to Palestine. The President of the United States has repeatedly pressed for it and has stated that the removal of these unfortunate men, women and children to Palestine should be accomplished with the utmost dispatch and should not wait upon the acceptance of the long-range political proposals of the Report which call for further study.

Our colleagues should ask themselves whether their religious sentiments and the tradition of their office can sanction this crude, conscienceless bigotry and the dark and bitter malice of the organization with which they are still identified.

There is on record a resolution of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, adopted in 1943, urging our colleagues, in the spirit of amity and without impugning the right of Zionists or non-Zionists, to express and to disseminate their convictions within and without the Conference "to terminate this organization." The request may now be phrased "to dissociate themselves from this organization."

TV ~~I~~ I am sure that the Central Conference of American Rabbis will wish to pass a resolution calling upon the President of the United States to stand firm in his resolve that these hundred thousand Jewish refugees should be permitted to proceed to Palestine at once -- a request which he made more than ten months ago and which the Committee of Inquiry ~~has not~~ unanimously endorsed.

It would be a crime against humanity if these helpless brothers of ours who have passed through all the hells of Nazi terror and persecution are forced to languish and die as homeless refugees, sacrificed to the interests of imperialism and power politics.

In keeping with the community-wide and non-isolationist tendencies of our movement, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, as well as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, joined the American Jewish Conference in 1943. In spite of the heckling and protests of an irreconcilable minority, it has remained a loyal member of that body. The American Jewish Conference has not been a complete success. Considering its composition and its provisional character, its inexperience and the magnitude and controversial character of some of its problems which confronted it, it would have been ~~was~~ a short of a miracle if it had succeeded fully. The defection of the American Jewish Committee soon after the first meeting of the Conference because it could not have its way on the Palestine Resolution -- a rather startling demonstration of democracy in practice among certain sections of American Jewry -- did not contribute to the authority and prestige of this over-all Jewish body which was called into existence to speak for a united American Jewry on all problems relating to the rights and status of Jews in the world and upon all matters looking to the implementation of the rights of the Jewish people with respect to Palestine. Nevertheless great and important work was accomplished by the Conference since its inception.

At its last meeting held in Cleveland in February of this year, the Conference considered the question of winding up its work in view of the fact that the war was ~~was~~ over, and in view also of the fact that it had not been designed as a permanent body. There was a strong feeling among the delegates that the experience gained during the existence of the American Jewish Conference pointed to the need ~~of~~ ^{for} a permanent Jewish body which would, in peacetime, give a unified expression of the will of the

American Jewish community on all matters vital to it. It was accordingly resolved to explore the possibility of establishing a permanent, democratic, representative Jewish body and to propose ways and means for bringing such a body into existence.

3 spaces
✓ I recommend that the Central Conference of American Rabbis should energetically cooperate in this task to bring such a body into existence, and should give whatever leadership it can during the period of preliminary negotiations and planning, looking toward an early consummation of a long-cherished hope to achieve as ~~a~~ large a measure of unity in American Israel as possible.

4 spaces
The Synagogue Council of America which was established in 1925, through the initiative of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and which comprises the national orthodox, conservative and reform Jewish bodies, in the United States, both lay and Rabbinic, has recently reviewed its scope and purposes with the object not alone of obviating what might be called jurisdictional disputes, but also of achieving greater effectiveness in stimulating the religious life of the American Jewish community and in serving more effectively as its spokesman and representative. After having fixed proper safeguards for the protection of the rights of its constituent bodies, the Synagogue Council may now feel free to move forward energetically and render valuable service in those areas of religious interest which are common to all its constituent groups. The Synagogue Council will, I believe, function best if it will not spread itself too thin and if it will not attempt to do too many things. This is ~~a~~ temptation common to all enterprising, national organizations. It is our hope that the Council will concentrate on a few major objectives of primary importance -- the most vital and urgent in American Jewish life -- such as turning the minds of our people and their hearts to the Synagogue and to religious education and to the programs directly related to them. It will thus completely vindicate its existence, even if its achievements are not spectacular enough to compete in the clamorous marketplace with many secular organizations which are cluttering up the American Jewish scene. It need not strive for any exclusive right to speak for American Israel. It is enough for it to go on

its chosen way, purposive and resolute, and quietly carry on.

3 spaces

VI ~~VII~~ The Central Conference of American Rabbis, which is a member of the Council, whose President this year, Rabbi Isaac Landman, and whose Assistant to the President, Rabbi Aaron Opher, are both members of our Conference, will wish to renew its full and loyal support to the Synagogue Council as it moves forward ^{to carry out} with its revised and more clearly articulated program of religious activities.

4 spaces

At our last convention, considerable time was devoted to a review of the activities of our Commission on Justice and Peace. It was felt that the work of the Commission is so important and has become so onerous that the Commission should be divided and, as formerly, two commissions should be set up -- one on Social Justice, and the other on Peace. Our Conference voted to request the Executive Board to consider the matter. It voted also to ask the Executive Board to consider the recommendation of the Commission to engage a full time executive secretary for the Commission. Your Executive Board has not as yet taken action on either of these recommendations.

3 spaces

VII ~~VII~~ I recommend that this Convention should instruct the Executive Board to engage a permanent executive secretary. This all important part of our program can no longer be carried on adequately with volunteer help alone. Should the Union of American Hebrew Congregations unite with us to form a Joint Commission, and the Conference agrees to such a Joint Commission, the expense would then be shared by the two organizations

4 spaces

Many other matters will, I am sure, suggest themselves to you which call for deliberation and action. I pray that this convention may be a fruitful one -- and that it may help us individually in the better discharge of the duties of our calling, and through us, advance the cause of ~~union~~ beloved faith