



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1950.



I have written down my remarks not only in order to keep within the limits of the time allotted to me, but also to subdue any unruly emotions which might be aroused in the course of the debate, by contact with cool, white paper and the double-check of the written word.

I believe that we are all agreed that a rabbinical placement bureau is advisable. In the past when our rabbinate was small and the number of congregations also ~~rela-~~ ~~tively~~ small, it was perhaps not necessary, but by the grace of God our numbers have multiplied and are continuing to multiply to a point where an agency to service ~~both~~ <sup>to</sup> rabbis and congregations is very desirable. On this I believe there ~~seems to be~~ <sup>is</sup> general agreement.

The one question the answer to which seems not to be clear is whether such a placement agency should be voluntary, compulsory or quasi-compulsory. I should like to urge upon you that such an agency be set up on a purely voluntary basis. In the letter which Dr. Freehof and I sent last February to the Joint Placement Commission, we indicated some of the reasons <sup>we believed that</sup> why a compulsory system would run contrary to the tradition of an autonomous synagogue and an independent rabbinate. Since that time <sup>with the plan</sup> the element of sanctions for non-conforming has been eliminated ~~from the plan~~, but the plan is still to ~~a~~ a serious degree restrictive and peremptory. It is this obligatory and, might I say, monopolistic feature of the plan which is objectionable and, in my judgment, unnecessary to the success of the plan.

I base myself upon the past experience of our Union and our Rabbinical Conference. The Union never in the past attempted to impose mandatory regulations upon its constituent members. What it has achieved by way of guiding and uniting our congregations for common action has been through voluntary methods, <sup>through</sup> ~~by~~ making available to them services which readily commended themselves ~~to them~~ because of their intrinsic worth and helpfulness.



Thus, for example, the Union together with the Conference established some years ago a Commission on Jewish Education to develop a curriculum for our religious schools and to publish textbooks and other educational material for our schools. This is certainly a very vital and important activity of liberal Judaism. The kind of education we give to our children will determine the kind of liberal Judaism we ~~shall~~<sup>will</sup> have in ~~the~~<sup>the future</sup> ~~United States~~. And yet, the Union never ~~legislated~~<sup>directed</sup> that its constituent congregations ~~must~~<sup>that they</sup> use the textbooks and the curriculum which its Commission published. Nevertheless, in spite of the absence of any ~~manor~~<sup>sort</sup> of compulsion, these textbooks have been ~~pretty universally~~<sup>quite generally</sup> adopted by our congregations ~~in their religious schools~~ simply because they were found in the main to be good, serviceable, and desirable.

Whenever the services of the Commission <sup>Education</sup> have been inadequate, our congregations and Rabbis <sup>have</sup> turned elsewhere.

Similarly, through the joint action of the Union and the Conference, a Rabbinical Pension Plan has been established - a great and ~~vital~~<sup>beneficial</sup> service to our Rabbis and congregations. This important insurance plan, which gives our men a source of protection in their old age, was ~~liberally~~<sup>also</sup> founded upon a purely voluntary basis, and it has remained so to this day. Nevertheless, such has been its proven worth both to rabbis and ~~to~~ congregations, that ~~some~~ 235 rabbis and congregations are now enrolled <sup>under</sup> ~~in~~ this pension plan.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis published the Union Prayer Book and other liturgical works, but no member of the Conference is compelled to use these books in worship, nor is any congregation. Nevertheless, they have recommended themselves ~~widely~~<sup>And</sup> because of their inherent worth, they are almost universally used by our rabbis and congregations.

It is now proposed to call into being another important joint service on the part of the Union and the Conference. Most of us are agreed that such a service is desirable. Why ~~not~~<sup>do we hesitate to</sup> apply to this newest service the same approach of free choice and volition which ~~the same~~<sup>our past</sup> experience has shown us to be ~~workable and~~<sup>so universally</sup> successful?

How will ~~such~~ a Rabbinical Placement Bureau operate on a voluntary basis? First



of all, the announcement of the establishment of such a bureau will be publicized among our member congregations. We have never had such a bureau. We shall now have one. Our congregations will be apprised of the representative men, designated by the Union, the College and the Conference who will compose the bureau, as well as the name of its director. The men <sup>will</sup> ~~should~~ be of such standing in the American Jewish community as to command the respect and the confidence both of congregations and rabbis. When a pulpit vacancy occurs ~~in any congregation~~, <sup>of the present</sup> this bureau will at once write to the congregation stating that it has been informed <sup>itself as</sup> ~~that such a vacancy exists~~, calling <sup>itself as</sup> ~~the~~ attention to <sup>the fact that</sup> ~~the fact that~~ the bureau which has been established by the Union and the Conference <sup>as far back as</sup> ~~to assist~~ <sup>congregation</sup> in the selection of a Rabbi, <sup>this bureau</sup> ~~exists~~ exists and is prepared to be of service. ~~The names of the men who make up this bureau will be conveyed to the congregation.~~ Would the congregation wish the Bureau to recommend to it the name of a rabbi or of several rabbis? <sup>WRHS</sup> Would the congregation wish to indicate <sup>to H. R.</sup> the kind of a rabbi which it believes best qualified to fill its pulpit and describe the qualifications which it has in mind? <sup>or man.</sup> ~~The Bureau will endeavor to find such a man.~~

Is it conceivable that any responsible congregational board will reject out of hand such a service? Is it not more reasonable to assume that congregations will come to welcome such a service and that in <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ course <sup>of time</sup> ~~of time~~, as the bureau gains in prestige on the basis of <sup>a record of</sup> fair and impartial service to congregations ~~and rabbis~~, it will become the accepted practice among congregations and Rabbis to use this service? Why the insistence that congregations must use the services of this placement bureau exclusively? Why should not congregations be free to <sup>with</sup> ~~consult~~ also others <sup>contacts</sup> if they so desire? Why should moral stigma be attached to a congregation which wishes to exercise its right as a free association of men and women to do whatever in its judgment seems best for the good and welfare of the congregation?



In the same way rabbis who will watch closely the operations of <sup>such a</sup> the bureau <sup>once</sup> when they become convinced <sup>while</sup> ~~in due course~~ of its eminent fairness and impartiality, they, too, <sup>will</sup> turn to it more and more, when ~~they will~~ seek an opportunity to improve their position in the profession. Why should they be compelled by mandatory commitments to re-  
strict their quest for self-advancement ~~at all times~~ to such a bureau? Why should they not have the right to make themselves available for pulpit consideration outside the framework of this bureau? Why deny to the young man in the ministry that which is not denied to any young man in any other profession in our country? Why should a rabbi be stigmatized for unethical conduct when he seeks to improve his position through methods which are not unethical, or <sup>why should a rabbi be stigmatized</sup> ~~a rabbi~~ who recommends a colleague for a pulpit. Is it wrong for a man in the rabbinate to have ambition, to try to advance in his profession, and as rapidly as he believes his ~~fi~~ gifts and talents entitle him to? May I remind you that the Code of Ethics which was adopted by the CCAR in 1940 did not regard it as unethical for a rabbi to seek a pulpit or to recommend a colleague to a pulpit.

Are we afraid that the recommendation of individuals will weigh more heavily with congregations than those of the Bureau? I am persuaded that in due time no single individual's recommendation will carry as much weight as the recommendation of a bureau which will be composed of the leading men in ~~our laity and in our rabbinate~~ our rabbinate and in our laity - a bureau which will have at its disposal comprehensive and authoritative information about every man in the ministry? In due time there will be few instances indeed where a rabbi will be elected to a pulpit without the congregation first eliciting the information and the advice of this placement bureau. But all this will be done voluntarily - no commitments - no excessive monopoly, no stigma for non-compliance, <sup>no penalties</sup>.

The very fact that the placement bureau will not have a monopoly on contacts will help to keep <sup>it functioning</sup> ~~us aware~~ on the highest level of efficiency and impartiality, and will also protect it in a large measure against the inevitable recriminations which ~~are~~ <sup>will</sup> ~~bound~~ to be directed against it on the part of those who will feel that they should have



been recommended <sup>instead of others.</sup> ~~for the pulpit which went to another Rabbi.~~ The bureau will be free to state that it has no monopoly on the situation. If the individual is not satisfied with the services which it renders, he is free to use other channels and make his own contacts.

I am deeply concerned, friends, <sup>at</sup> ~~with~~ the trend which is manifesting itself today in so many directions to convert our Rabbinical Conference, which is after all not an industrial union but ~~which is~~ a voluntary organization of independent rabbis, into a body exercising coercive powers over its members, and the Union, which by its constitution, is a free and voluntary association of independent congregations, into a controlling and directing organization which has the power even to dictate to congregations in what manner they should procure their spiritual leaders.

The psychological key to the new approach is revealed in the mounting system of sanctions and punitive measures which <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ originally a part and, in the minds of the framers of the plan - an essential and indispensable part of their plan; sanctions which ran the whole gamut from an official reprimand by the Conference against an offending Rabbi and by the Union against an offending congregation which has refused to cooperate all the way up to the final and extreme penalty, the expulsion of the Rabbi from the Conference and of the congregation from the Union. To what unaccustomed and unwarranted discipline in our free association is this new trend taking us! Fortunately soberer minds on the Commission asserted themselves and the sanctions were eliminated from the plan although the unreconciled sanctionists on the Commission yielded to the revised plan, <sup>only after they became</sup> convinced that the original plan could not be adopted and <sup>this</sup> ~~this~~ revised plan had a change of adoption and <sup>they still entertain the hope that it</sup> ~~it would then~~ "serve them as a beginning" .



We oppose the revised plan because it, too, is hostile to the ~~very~~ genius of the autonomous synagogue and the independent rabbi. It is still compulsory in that it compels all Rabbis not to make themselves available for pulpits except through the Placement Bureau. Any infringement/<sup>of</sup> that subjects a Rabbi not to scheduled sanctions, it is true, ~~but~~ to the stigma of unethical conduct and <sup>to the moral condemnation</sup> on the part of his colleagues and others, ~~moral condemnation~~, which is not less bitter and severe. ~~The same applies to congregations, although congregations being impersonal may weather such obloquy much more easily than an individual human being. We regard this plan as alien to the spirit of the free and autonomous synagogue.~~

The other evening some very vehement and contemptuous references were made to the autonomous synagogue. Mockery was heaped upon those who championed the so-called sovereignty of the synagogue at a time when even nations are asked to yield on their sovereignty. The impression which was sought to be conveyed was that those who advocated the free and independent synagogue were <sup>reactionary</sup> / who stood in the way of <sup>the</sup> greater security and justice to the Rabbis. Attention was drawn to the fact that some Christian denominations have placement bureaus which are possessed of authority and the right to impose sanctions. I make bold to disagree on every count. The autonomy of the synagogue is a precious matter. It has a long history, far older than the bitter struggle for congregational independence among Christian churches. While there are, to be sure, certain Christian denominations which have a centralized polity and a hierarchic administration, there are also great Christian denominations which centuries ago broke with that regimen and which endured persecution and suffering in order to establish their right to independency, as it was called - the right for each local church to be a completely self-governing body and the source of ecclesiastical government. This was <sup>the</sup> a noble tradition of all the Congregationalist churches of early America whose form of church polity came to be adopted by the great Baptist denomination of the United States, the Unitarians, the Disciples, the Adventists and certain Lutheran churches. When these congregationalist bodies found it desirable to



band themselves together into larger national units for mutual fellowship and cooperation, they did so without sacrificing any of their independence and without yielding to any central control or ~~any~~ restrictive direction. To an even greater extent this has been the history of the synagogue, especially in Ashkenazy communities, in Western and Eastern Europe and in the United States.

Professor Cohon in his excellent book, "Judaism - A Way of Life", has this to say about the synagogue: "The collective aspect of worship comes to full expression in the synagogue, the unique creation of the democratic spirit of Judaism. Each synagogue constitutes an independent institution formed and maintained by a voluntary association. Free from ecclesiastical domination, it is governed by its own members and officers. The rabbi functions purely as teacher and guide, and enjoys only such authority as the congregation vests in him. However, while autonomous in its government, each synagogue is united with the congregation of Israel by its dedication to the common heritage of faith and duty."

This surely has been the history of the liberal Jewish congregations in the United States. It is now proposed to solve a problem of real but

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It is now proposed to solve a problem of real but ~~limited~~ <sup>all</sup> scope by setting up a centralized authority within the Union which would dictate to congregations how they should go about engaging their spiritual leaders, and to rabbis, how they must yield to the dictates of a bureau ~~in seeking~~ <sup>when they seek</sup> a pulpit.

The analogy which was made here the other evening between the surrender of ~~the~~ <sup>with a number of members on the part of our community</sup> sovereignty on the part of nations in order to achieve peace in the world has no validity whatsoever. The only rights which the states ~~who have joined~~ <sup>which</sup> the United Nations ~~were~~ <sup>have</sup> been asked to sacrifice is the right of aggression and the right of employing the threat or use of force to obtain their ends. Not a single state ~~has been asked to~~ <sup>it</sup> submit the election of ~~their~~ <sup>its</sup> chief executive or president to a commission appointed by the United Nations. The Charter of the United Nations is very clear in ~~pointing~~ <sup>declaring</sup> out that "nothing contained in the present Charter ~~which~~ <sup>it</sup> authorizes the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state, or which requires the member to submit such matters to settlement under the present charter". <sup>"The section 7 of the Charter is definitely within the domestic jurisdiction of any and every Jewish congregation in the United States."</sup>

And ~~that~~ <sup>also</sup> I also suggest that we do not wrap up this problem of a rabbinical placement plan in the ~~generous~~ <sup>spacious</sup> folds of the American flag. It is neither helpful nor fair <sup>to do this</sup> to do this. What we are now considering is not a ~~resolution~~ <sup>the question of</sup> to protect our chaplains who will enlist in the armed forces of our country. Such a resolution has been introduced at this Convention and ~~I am confident that it will be passed.~~ <sup>with</sup> What we are asked to consider is the setting up of a bureau for rabbinical placement, not for the duration of any emergency, but permanently for the continuing service of ~~our membership~~ <sup>the entire</sup> ~~robustness as all our congregation~~ <sup>ship</sup>. It is from this point of view and from this point of view only that the problem should be ~~envisaged~~ <sup>discussed</sup>.

Professor Cohen in his excellent book, "Judaism - A Way of Life", has this to say about the synagogue: "The collective aspect of worship comes to full expression in the synagogue, the unique creation of the democratic spirit of Judaism. Each synagogue



constitutes an independent institution formed and maintained by a voluntary association. Free from ecclesiastical domination, it is governed by its own members and officers. The rabbi functions purely as teacher and guide, and enjoys only such authority as the congregation vests in him. However, while autonomous in its government, each synagogue is united with the congregation of Israel by its dedication to the common heritage of faith and duty."

And may I say one closing word to my colleagues. It is as a rabbi that I urge my fellow rabbis not to rush headlong into <sup>a</sup> scheme <sup>which is</sup> intended to solve certain evils which we all recognize, but which may result in greater and deeper hurt to our <sup>beloved and</sup> profession. I should like to remind you that the proposed plan is far more of a strait-jacket for rabbis than ~~it is~~ for congregations. A congregation may, in the last analysis, reject the recommendations of the placement <sup>bureau</sup> and insist upon its own choice. <sup>The</sup> <sup>2 found</sup> <sup>over to</sup> <sup>for all time not</sup> a rabbi will be morally committed <sup>at any stage</sup> <sup>entire</sup> <sup>a</sup> to have a colleague recommend him to any pulpit except through the placement bureau. Thus, the Bureau will have the complete control of the career of the rabbi. May I remind you that the Code of Ethics which was adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1940 does not deny a rabbi the right to seek a pulpit or to recommend a colleague to a pulpit.

I can only repeat what my colleague, Dr. Freehof, and I wrote in our letter to the Placement Commission some time ago. The proposed plan will inevitably tend to suppress the career of young and promising men. A commission such as is proposed is bound to give undue weight in its consideration to seniority and length of service. Younger men will be told to wait their turn. No such commission will have the courage to appoint a promising man out of turn without invoking the same widespread criticism which is invoked today when a congregation prefers a young man. A congregation acting independently may occasionally make a <sup>bold</sup> decision of this kind, but a commission cannot.

For the Corporation this is an escape down for the rabbis now at all.



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This will be stultifying to us, believe me. You will not gain any greater measure of security or assurance of any easier preferment in our troubled and distraught world. You have seen many people <sup>who were</sup> prepared to sacrifice their freedom and independence for an uncertain and, in the end, a sadly illusory security. Do not make the same mistake.

No profession would dream of constricting itself within the framework of a compulsory placement plan. No college or university or any professional school would look upon such a scheme, ~~would move upon such a scheme as~~ as anything but harmful to <sup>its</sup> progress. They jealously guard their freedom and independence. Recently our Cleveland Western Reserve University elected a president. In thinking <sup>about</sup> ~~through~~ our own placement proposal, I inquired of the authorities of Western Reserve University how they go about selecting a president or a professor or a teacher in any of their departments. Do they use the services of the Teachers' Placement Bureau? Yes, they do.

Exclusively?

Not at all. We scout around for our man. We inquire in <sup>many</sup> ~~may~~ places. Sometimes we canvass our alumni for suggestions.

Do you receive recommendations from sources outside of the university?

Yes, certainly, from all over the country.

Do you receive direct applications by men for the vacant positions?

Why, yes, and we are glad to receive them. <sup>They</sup> ~~They~~ give us a wider range of choice.

Is it regarded in University circles unethical or undignified for a man to apply directly for a position?

Not at all. Why should it?

I am sure that that system is not a perfect one and that some unfairness and injustices may result here and there. But a greater good is safeguarded. Freedom for men entitled to advance their own professional careers and ~~freedom for the educational institution who select~~



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freedom for the educational institution to select the man which it *regards*  
~~requires~~ as best suited <sup>to</sup> for its needs. Why is such a plan not adequate  
for our rabbinate and for our congregations?

By all means, let us establish a rabbinical placement bureau. Let  
us give it the finest personnel. Let us educate our people, lay and rabbinic  
alike, to turn to it and use it. Let us watch it grow and develop. Let us  
see how it functions. Perhaps most of the fears which have been expressed  
by the advocates of the proposed unamended scheme will be dissipated in time.  
Let us not set up the kind of an agency which *forces* commitments on  
congregations and rabbis which many of them are unwilling to make--which,  
in my judgment, they <sup>should</sup> ~~would~~ not make.

