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Council of Jewish Women, 1963.

Address delivered by Dr. Abba Hillel Silver
before the
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN
AT THE TEMPLE - Cleveland, Ohio
June 9, 1963

I have been asked to speak to you this evening on the central theme of your Conference. This is not a difficult subject to speak on, as you can readily understand -- especially for a Rabbi. It has been a dominant note in Jewish ethics throughout the ages.

But it is a theme which needs to be stressed in our day which has come to think more and more of man in the mass, and to regard the individual as a numeral in a statistic.

For the critical and challenging days which lie ahead, we will require some strong convictions to sustain us in the long, hard struggle to establish the good society which we all wish.

One of these strong convictions, I believe, is the importance of the individual.

To Judaism and the great religions of the Western world, a man has immense significance in the scheme of things. Man is very important to God in the unfoldment of His purposes -- each man, every man, rich or poor, wise or simple, black or white, saint or sinner.

"Every man has the right to say", declared an ancient teacher of Israel, "for my sake was the whole world created", and another teacher declared that "man is a co-worker of God in creation". These are tremendous concepts.

Judaism has endeavored to give man a sense of greatness in a universe in which he is physically very small. The world of the ancients was, of course, far smaller in scale than our world of expanding immensities -- "one hundred

thousand million galaxies in space and each galaxy containing on an average of one hundred thousand million stars", wherein man's racial history is less than a moment in geologic time. Yet, even in relation to their vastly smaller universe, man appeared pitifully puny, lost and unimportant. "When I look at Thy heaven", declared the Psalmist, "the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast established -- What is man that Thou art mindful of him and the son of man that Thou dost care for him?"

But no moral aspiration is possible and can be looked for in man as long as he regards himself as of little account. No moral aspiration ever springs from the soil of self-belittlement and disesteem. Hence, the Psalmist climaxes his hymn with an apostrophe to man's unique distinction and the assurance of his worth in the world which God created for him. "Yet hast Thou made him little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet."

In primitive society the individual counted for very little. But as life moved on, the despotism of the organized group was slowly attenuated. The individual began to discover his own private life. As against his heritage of mass tradition, he became aware of personal sources of judgment and sanction.

But man's hard-won victories against corporate authority are never permanently secure. We witnessed in our life-time the most massive and ruthless onslaught of "Gleichschaltung", of "Vermassung" and of totalitarianism

ever experienced by man within historic times. Fascism and Naziism scored terrifying victories before they were broken on the battlefield, but their ideologies are not dead. And Communist dictatorship is today established in a fourth of the globe.

Men are being handled in many parts of the world and in many departments of life impersonally in the mass. Increasingly they are becoming statistics in the hands of a predatory collectivism. They are shunted about like herds of cattle. They are coordinated and subjugated to the state until the last vestige of their freedom and their rights vanishes. Because the religious basis of our society has been denied, and materialistic theories of life and history have taken hold of the thoughts and actions of many men and governments, the stature of the individual, and with it, his rights and inherent dignity have suffered tragic abatement and diminution in our day. Every precinct of his life is invaded and violated. Having denied man the image of God, he has been given the mask of the robot.

Now, my dear friends: The faith that will serve us best, as free men in this great age, is faith in the worth and significance of the individual, and his inalienable rights. Without ;such faith which was wri tten as a dogma into the heart of the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution --

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights" -- man's stature will be progressively reduced, the free domains of his mind and spirit

will speedily come under iron-clad controls, and man's dignity will be dragged into the dust. With such a faith, we will be strong enough to accept all necessary social controls and still remain a free society. It will help us to set our course by a dependable compass.

One of the evil forces at work in the world today which tend to undermine the individual and destroy his intellectual integrity is the force of organized propaganda whose objective is to stampede men to think uncritically and emotionally in the way some special interest wants them to think. Through slogans, catch-words, cliches and cleverly **coined** half-truths, it drives men or panics them into attitudes and actions which men would not take if they were given accurate facts and information upon which to base judgments and attitudes. Propaganda in our day has been developed into a dangerous pseudo-science. Through the readily available mass media of communication, it can undo overnight, as it were, generations of slow, patient, and pains-taking work of education. Our great danger today is not illiteracy. The overwhelming majority of our people knows how to read and write. The great danger of our day is propaganda, whose aim is to confound and to confuse and by misinformation to misdirect our literate population.

But, while Judaism stressed the importance of the individual, it maintained a balance between the individual and society. It aimed to give the individual a sense of spiritual security and dignity in his personal life, and at the same time, give society an ordered way of justice, peace, and progress. It granted no complete autonomy to the individual, but neither did it consent to his total submergence.

More than any other religion of ancient times, Judaism stressed the idea of community. Most religions concerned themselves with the individual's private fate, both here and hereafter. Judaism's accent was on the organized social body, the people, which it regarded as the matrix of the individual's personal life and destiny. The personal relationship of man to his maker and his private duties and responsibilities are, of course, never overlooked, but preponderately it is the people -- its history, its relation to God and to the world, its collective mission and responsibility -- which figures so prominently in the Bible: "Hear, O Israel!"

However important the individual is in the eyes of Judaism, he is not all-important.

Along with the individual's inalienable rights, which are assured to him by virtue of his relationship to God, there are the obligations which spring from his relationship to his fellow-men, in the fulfillment of which lies the key to his self-fulfillment. Self-realization comes through social cooperation.

The individual is called upon to seek the good life through active participation in the responsibilities of community life. The community, as such, was required to set up such political and social institutions of justice and equity as would assist the individual in his quest for freedom and the good life. Thus Judaism maintained a reasonable balance between individual and society.

The individual is important -- as important as a whole world.

But, it is not good for man to be alone. The family is important, and whatever tends to disrupt the family hurts the community. The community is important, and whatever evils are tolerated in the community -- poverty, injustice, discrimination, racial and religious intolerance, tend to undermine its peace and stability.

For us Jews, the community of Israel is important -- its mission, its faith, its unity.

Whatever strengthens its faith, enlarges its mission, heightenes its unity, contributes to its service to humanity and to its own survival. There are forces of disintegration at work among our people -- those who build walls instead of bridges, who are anti-this or anti-that -- they are not the true servants of Israel. They are the unconscious victims of their own vanities, their fears, their prejudices. They are not concerned with the well-being of the whole House of Israel. They are fragmentary Jews. On the other hand, there are others who help in every constructive enterprise of our people, and work for all of Israel.

The Council of Jewish Women is to be congratulated that through the years and through its manifold activities it has served both the individual, the family and the community -- the whole House of Israel. It served the needy man, woman and child in a spirit of compassion and understanding; it served the Jewish community in a broad spirit of brotherhood and group solidarity. It is now serving the people of the State of Israel in the same spirit of Jewish pride and loyalty.

Welcome, C. 1 C - ~~transcript~~

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on the central theme of your Conference: ע"פ נ"ח ל"ב

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But it is a ~~very~~ theme which needs to
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For the critical and challenging days which
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One of these strong convictions, I believe, is
the importance, the individual.

Judaism

To the great religions of the Western world, man has immense significance in the scheme of things. Man is very important to God in the unfoldment of His purposes - each man, every man, rich or poor, wise or simple, black or white, saint or sinner. ~~Sin is voluntary abandonment of status, self-degradation, descent into unworthiness and the lower life from which Man has emerged. Religion challenges Man to live and act always as if his life were tremendously significant and endlessly ascendant.~~

~~Religion demands much of man in terms of duty and sacrifice, but it also gives much to him in terms of high and independent status, dignity and inherent rights.~~ "Every man has the right to say," declared an ancient teacher of Israel, "for my sake was the whole world created," and another teacher declared that "man is a co-worker of God in creation." *These are tremendous concepts.*

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~~Religion~~ ^{is} has endeavored to give man a sense of greatness in a universe in which he physically ~~is~~ very small. The world of the ancients was, of course, far smaller in scale than our world of expanding immensities - "one hundred thousand million galaxies in space and each galaxy containing on an average of on hundred thousand million stars," wherein man's racial history is less than a moment in geologic time. Yet, even in relation to their vastly smaller universe, man appeared pitifully puny, lost and unimportant. "When I look at Thy heavens," declared the Psalmist, "the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast established - What is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou dost care for him?"

But no moral aspiration is possible and can be looked for in man as long as he regards himself as of little account. No moral aspiration ever springs from the soil of ^{self-}belittlement and disesteem. Hence, the Psalmist climaxes his hymn with an apostrophe to man's unique distinction and the assurance of his worth in the world which God created for him. "Yet hast Thou

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made him little ~~less than God~~, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet." Man's high and noble estate imposes upon him the obligations of aspiration. "Be ye holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy!"

In primitive society the individual counted for very little. But as life moved on, the despotism of the organized group was slowly attenuated. The individual began to discover his own private life. As against his heritage of mass tradition, he became aware of personal sources of judgment and sanction.

But man's hard-won victories against corporate authority are never permanently secure. ~~We~~ witnessed in our life-time the most massive and ruthless onslaught of "Gleichschaltung", of "Vermassung" and of totalitarianism every experienced by man within historic times. Fascism and Naziism scored terrifying victories before they were broken on the battlefield, but their ideologies are not dead. And Communist dictatorship is today established in a fourth of the globe.

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One of the evil forces at work in the world today which tend to undermine the individual and destroy his intellectual integrity is the force of organized propaganda whose objective is to stampede men to think uncritically and emotionally in the way some special interest wants them to think. Through slogans, catch-words, cliches and cleverly coined half-truths, it drives men or panics them into attitudes and actions which men would not take if they were given accurate facts and information upon which to base judgments and attitudes. Propaganda in our day has been developed into a dangerous pseudo-science. Through the readily available mass media of communication, it can undo overnight, as it were, generations of slow, patient, and pains-taking work of education. Our great danger today is not illiteracy. The overwhelming majority of our people knows how to read and write. The great danger of our day is propaganda, whose aim is to confound and to confuse and by misinformation to misdirect our literate population.

5.
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~~JUDAISM~~ MAINTAINED A BALANCE BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY. IT AIMED TO GIVE ~~MAN~~ ^{the individual} A SENSE OF SPIRITUAL SECURITY AND DIGNITY IN HIS PERSONAL LIFE, AND ^{at the same time give} SOCIETY AN ORDERED WAY OF JUSTICE, PEACE, AND PROGRESS. IT GRANTED NO COMPLETE AUTONOMY TO THE INDIVIDUAL, ~~EVEN IN HIS QUEST FOR HOLINESS~~, BUT NEITHER DID IT CONSENT TO HIS TOTAL SUBMERGENCE, ~~EVEN TO ACHIEVE THE MOST EFFICIENT SOCIETY.~~

MORE THAN ANY OTHER RELIGION OF ANCIENT TIMES, JUDAISM STRESSED THE IDEA OF COMMUNITY. MOST RELIGIONS CONCERNED THEMSELVES WITH THE INDIVIDUAL'S PRIVATE FATE, BOTH HERE AND HEREAFTER. JUDAISM'S ACCENT WAS ON THE ORGANIZED SOCIAL BODY, THE PEOPLE, WHICH IT REGARDED AS THE MATRIX OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S PERSONAL LIFE AND DESTINY. THE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP OF MAN TO HIS MAKER AND HIS PRIVATE DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES ARE, OF COURSE, NEVER OVER-LOOKED. BUT PREPONDERATELY IT IS THE PEOPLE -- ITS HISTORY, ITS RELATION TO GOD AND TO THE WORLD, ITS COLLECTIVE MISSION AND RESPONSIBILITY -- WHICH FIGURES SO PROMINENTLY IN THE BIBLE. "HEAR, O ISRAEL!"

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ALONG WITH THE INDIVIDUAL'S INALIENABLE RIGHTS, ^{which are} ASSURED TO HIM BY VIRTUE OF HIS ~~CATEGORICAL~~ RELATIONSHIP TO GOD, THERE ARE th ~~HIS~~ OBLIGATIONS WHICH SPRING FROM HIS ~~INEXTRICABLE~~ RELATIONSHIP TO ^{his fellow-men} ~~SOCIETY~~, IN THE FULFILLMENT OF WHICH LIES THE KEY TO HIS SELF-FULFILLMENT. SELF-RELIZATION COMES THROUGH SOCIAL COOPERATION.

THE INDIVIDUAL ^{is} ~~WAS~~ CALLED UPON TO SEEK THE GOOD LIFE THROUGH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMUNITY LIFE. THE COMMUNITY, AS SUCH, WAS REQUIRED TO SET UP SUCH POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS OF JUSTICE AND EQUITY AS WOULD ASSIST THE INDIVIDUAL IN HIS QUEST FOR FREEDOM AND THE GOOD LIFE. THUS JUDAISM MAINTAINED A REASONABLE BALANCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY.

The individual is important - as important as a ^{whole} world. But it is not good for man to be alone. The family is important, and whatever tends to disrupt the family hurts the community. The community is important, and whatever evils are tolerated in the community - poverty, injustice, discrimination ~~among men~~, racial and religious intolerance, tend to undermine its peace and stability.

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Whatever strengthens its faith - enlarges its mission, heightens its unity, ~~it~~ contributes to its service to humanity and to its ^{own} survival.

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~~servants~~ ^{run} servants of Israel. They are the ^{unconscious} victims of their
vanities, their fears, their prejudices. They are
not concerned with the well being of the whole
house of Israel. ^{they are fragmentary Jews on the other hand} There are others who help
in every constructive enterprise of our people -
and work for Exod. 56.

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