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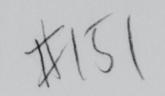
#### MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated. Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

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# The Last Ten Years and the Next: Reflections on a Decade of Preaching, 1965.

Western Reserve Historical Society 10825 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106 (216) 721-5722 wrhs.org



#### TEN YEARS OF PREACHING

The Temple Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

October 24, 1965

I was first privileged to speak from this saored pulpit ten years ago last week. Ten years represents a full act in a man's adult life. To continue the image, a tenth anniversary properly becomes intermission, an occasion to mingle with good friends, and to be critical and analytical about the first act. Was the action purposive or aimless? Has the conversation been vapid or pointed? These, I presume, are the thoughts all of us share when we pass some such anniversary. Have we taken hold of life and made something of it or simply reacted, existed? A rabbi must make still another judgement. Has the Judaism which he has been teaching, been relevant and useful? Is the old faith up to date or has it only an antiquarian interest?

It is to this last question that I propose to address myself this morning. Chance had it that these last ten years bridged two ages in the history of man. Ten years ago the Sputnik One had not yet orbited the earth. The first laser beam had not penetrated the dim recesses of outer space. Man was still earth-bound. He had not yet broken the shackles of gravity. The space age has hardly begun, but one fact is preeminently clear and the evidence seems conclusive: There is no God up there. There is no God <u>out</u> there. Our astronauts, our radar, our telemetric photography have scanned the heavens and reported on energy and on radiation, on the planets and on the stars and without exception they report no physical evidence of the presence of God. Some have assumed that since there was

no God up there or out there, there is no God and that space age science

has finally laid to rest one of the most persistent and lingering of all human illusions.

This much is true. Many popular notions of God have to be discarded. We can no longer hug to ourselves the welcome thought of a cosmic grandfather, benign and helpful, who watches over our destinies from some place beyond the stars. This is the God who appears to us from the golden background of those medieval altar pieces, the royal God, crowned and throned, seated above the stars, who judges the angels and man, who receives their petitions. This God never was, never had been. Whence came this rather physical image of God? In all honesty we must say it came into Western faith when our stepdaughter religion, Christianity, compromised the second commandment. The Bible insisted that God was wholly other, purely spirit, holy. "Thou shalt not make unto theee any graven image nor any manner of likeness of anything that is in the heavens above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them." Eager to appeal to the pagen world, Christianity allowed the icon and the idol and the image in stained glass to be brought into the sanctuary. Despite a more correct theology, her actions lent crediality to those who believed in a physical God. After all, they saw about them at worship, his physical presence.

Such is the pressure of our environment, that I have heard my people, our Jews, echo and parrot the denials of a disabused generation. 'There is

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no God up there.' 'Therefore there is no God.' I am moved to ask when anyone taught them that there was a God up there? Was this the teaching of Moses? Was this the teaching of Hillel? Was this the teaching of Akiba

or of Miamonides or of any modern rabbi? One of the grand and glorious facts

of our history is that our faith never compromised with a Biblical understanding of God, an imageless God, a God beyond attributions, a God beyond description, a holy other God. "I am that which I am." "Thou canst not see my face." Stubbornly, consistently, Judaism insisted that God cannot be defined or described. When the psalmists said: 'lift up your eyes on high,' he was not pointing to the place of God rather he was indicating the reflection of God etched in the wonders and marvels of creation. "Lift up your head on high and see who has created these." God is not creation but Creator. God is reflected in the sparkle, in the miracle of creation, but he has no place some place out there. God is not <u>up</u> there but everywhere. God is not someplace but everyplace. No understanding Jew ever believed that one day there would appear on a radar screen, the blips, which would indicate the physical presence of God in the universe.

Has the space age banished God from the realm of sensible discourse? There are many, I know, who believe that God is simply a convenient explanation of that which science has yet to explain. As science leaps forward, God is in hot retreat. As science advances the scope of God's possibility and power diminishes, we have become accustomed, you and I, to the attitude that science undercuts religion. We believe it almost axiomatic that to have faith man must take a blind leap into the unreasonable. Not so. I put before you one of the unexpected paradoxes of modern science. In recent times, science has lent confirmation, substantiation

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to some very old statements of our faith. No one expected it to be so.

Science and religion had been at each other's neck lo these many centuries

Somehow science has rounded a corner and, amazingly, its new understanding

of the universe lends encouragement to the old image.

Recall for me and with me, if you will, the science, the physics that you learned in your classrooms. Remember the old iron law of cause and effect? The world was described to you as a vast and intricate mechanism, a self-winding watch if you will, but infinitely complex. There was only apparent change and there was complete predictability. All of energy, all of matter follows out certain iron unbreakable paths and laws. There was no chance. Everything was determined and predetermined. Oh yes, we were told, if you want to believe in God as the first cause, go ahead and believe it. But, you are using a word which has no meaningful reference: The first cause is not the God of faith. Faith assumes that God directs human destiny and that God listens to human prayer or that God performs wondrously. Many of us still carry about the remnants and the relics of this teaching and we have not recognized that this 'scientific' model of the universe has been consigned to the scrap heap. A new model has emerged. The universe is no longer a mechanism but an organism. The universe is no longer simply a predetermined acting out, following laws of energy, but an emerging, vital, alive cosmos thrusting forward, full of change, full of the unexpected. A universe which responds to an imprinted wisdom. There are in this new universe, sudden leaps of energy. There is in this universe biologic mutation. There is in this universe change. There is in this universe an upward thrust from the simple to the complex, from gas to matter, from the

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inorganic to organic, from the inanimate to the animate, from the simplest

forms of organism to man. There seems to be imprinted upon this new

universe, not a law of predictability, not the iron chains of cause and

effect, but the loose silken chains of probabilities. There is change and

there seems to be not only motion but direction, emergence of the handiwork

of God. The scientists and the men of faith unite today in reverence, in

awe, of the imprinted wisdom of creation. Again we can say with the ancient psalmist: "The heaven's declare the glory of God, and the earth reveals His handiwork." Now, this is not to say that science proves God. God is clothed in wonder and in mystery. God is as far beyond the laboratories as ever, but this new model that science has presented to us of our world--the model of a world in motion, moving towards, surging upward, moving out, emerging--surely this image of the world speaks of imprinted creative wisdom, bespeaks the hand and the wisdom of God.

We have spoken of God. Let us speak for a moment of man. There are some who believe that religion is simply the affirmation of God. Judaism, at least, is equally the affirmation of man. Over the long centuries, Judaism has stubbornly insisted that man is capable of great and grand things. Despite all the evidence of human cruelty and violence Judaism has insisted on human capacity, on the possibility, on the dignity, on the possible divinity within you. You are not a slightly civilized beast but created in the image of God. If you have the will and the courage and the understanding you can become but little lower than the angels. Now again, until very recent times both experience and science argued against this radical affirmation of man. A dyspeptic could always find ready evidence of human cruelty, human violence and human pathology. Nineteenth century science found that we were tied biologically to the lower beasts. On the basis of biological evolution some thinkers

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constructed a determinist psychology which insisted that man cannot shake his nature anymore than a leopard can change his spots: Therefore we are creatures of impulse and of instinct and we cannot discipline these instincts. Our passions, our appetites, our lusts, our ambitions are forever part of us. Man remains beast beyond dignity and beyond saintliness. The world will always remain a dog eat dog jungle. And, of course, this view of man seemed to receive dramatic and shocking confirmation in Dachau and Auschwitz and at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Unexpectedly the space age developed a striking confirmation to Judaism's ancient truth. Though we have evidenced the depths of human depravity, a new model of man has emerged in the laboratories of our civilization. True, man is tied biologically to the lower forms, but evolution is not a steady inching forward. Evolution progresses by sudden jumps and unexpected mutations rather than linearly. Man was not a slightly transformed ape. Man is the first animal who can control his environment. Man is the first animal who can conceptualize and pass on his learning from generation to generation. Man is the first animal who has the latent capacity to control himself and who has devised a society which permits childhood, tender loving years, adolescence, learning, the emergency of the human being from the animal instincts. We are told that man is, indeed, made of rare stock, that we have the capacity to love, to outfrow our baser impulses, to outfrow our violent compulsions, to become respected, respectable, dignified, decent. Biblical man is no longer a pipe dream. And our new science is teaching us how the environmental forces of cultural deprivation, the slum, inadequate education, the broken home, lack of love, lack of opportunity - all can and do conspire to keep most men from realizing their human potential. The animal child grew into an animal man, because he had no opportunity to be human. The prophets call for justice and righteousness in one with the sociologists who call for a welfare state where the opportunity to grow sound and whole

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and able is offered equally to all.

Ideas forged by our ancestors way back in the Iron Age are receiving striking confirmation. Ten years ago when a rabbi spoke of God as having created man after his own image, there were many who smiled indulgently at this poetic exaggeration. Today, the scientist and the rabbi share a common understanding of man. The biblical philosophy stands vindicated, but modern man has yet to meet the test. The Bible is not only a faith, a set of principles, a philosophy but a mandate. a challenge, a responsibility. We have yet to show that we can abide the biblical responsibility. "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless plea for the widow." The biblical philosophy stands confirmed. The biblical psychology is creditable. But, take this to heart. Biblical history is also creditable. The prophets taught these truths to a generation which would not listen. They were at ease and preferred to follow after the stubborness of their hearts. Israel preferred to be politically ambitious and domestically passive. Ultimately the clash of rich and poor created a maelstrom of social turmoil which sealed the nation's doom.

Whenever I talked of the Prophets over the past ten years, men thrilled to their exhalted moral vision, but they balked at the impending sense of doom written large in so many lines of prophecy. "The Lord God doth roar from the heavens." We do not like to think nightmarish thoughts.

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## Yet, do not our planes roar aloft every hour of the day bearing in their

bellies the weapons of ultimate destruction? Are not atomic-headed missiles

capable of destroying our earth buried into the earth and placed into sub-

marines under the sea? Does not the Lord again roar from the heavens? The

hour is late. We can read today the sentence of doom and the statement of urgency with a new sense of its appropriateness. We talk about it, don't we, endlessly. And yet, you and I continue by and large to live as if we were any other place but at the brink of disaster. The mind has an infinite capacity to block unwanted thoughts. We are in a plane. The pilot announces a serious malfunction of an engine. We worry for a moment or two and then we find ourselves in idle and aimless talk with our neighbor. On the plane we are helpless. There is no destiny save the destiny which we ourselves make. On earth we pilot and direct our lives.

Would you have peace? Your hands and your heart and your action can create it. Would you have prosperity? Together we can establish it. There is no awful fate etched for us someplace up there in the skies. We create our destiny, we and all who share this earth with us. We face a future of unparalleled promise. Our science here again comes to our aid. It has broken the ancient yoke of poverty which broke men's spirit and destroyed opportunity and kept most men hapless beasts of burden. We have immunized ourselves and our children against most of the crippling and of the devastating diseases and we can look forward to four-score years of life. Our bins are full, no stomach need be empty, no man's vigor need be unnecessarily sapped. We have found resources of energy which promise warmth and transport long after the crude resources within the

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earth have been exhausted. The promised land. It is just beyond the

horizon. The Prophetic image of the time of peace and of sunshine, when

every man can sit under his vine and under his fig tree and none will make

him afraid, is more than poetic enthusiasm. Today, government can be

busy legislating the great society. It is achievable. It can be ours. Thrice blessed our way and blessed again. No mother need fear childbirth. No child need lack for education. No man need break his health to earn a living. Thrice-blessed are we and blessed again. There is no disease which we may not ultimately conquer. Thrice-blessed are we and blessed again but thrice burdened are we and burdened again. The need is for a heroic moral courage. The ancient standard, live and let live, mind your own business and I'll mind mine, is the surest way to contort our promise and to convert it into a curse. The time is short. Population uncontrolled will gobble up our abundance and return the majority of men to the cruel yoke of poverty. Those prejudices which we cherish are ready weapons in the hands of those who seek to protect their privileges and powers. Prejudiced men become ready pawns for those who dream fanatic dreams. That golden future which lies out there just behind the horizon can be distorted, brutalized. Play on the fears of the generation which lacks adequate education and they will quickly become the minions of some tyrant. It will be hard to loose his boot from off the neck of man. There is great promise. There is great danger. The Lord doth roar from the heavens, and man needs to roar in response his commitment to the good, to the necessary, to the urgent, to services, to his community, to responsibility, to peace, to a life beyond that of his daily routines.

The ancient truths, my dear friends, have proven out. Man is yet

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to prove himself. We have it in our power to construct a grand and glorious society but there is no assurance that we will do so. Most of us are half still timid saints. We are/hearted in our virtues even as we are half-

hearted in our vices. I'm afraid that the new age requires fart morevofuus

than a rear guard action against social change. I'm afraid the new age requires our protest, not only that of our children. I'm afraid the new age requires us to give up privilege and to share only in the privilege of citizenship. I'm afraid the new age requires a radical new understanding of policy. We simply cannot build the instrumentalities of peace by building the instruments of war. I'm afraid the new age requires a radical transformation of our attitudes towards our neighbors, towards men of other races, towards those of other classes, those of other nations. We must accept a world of change, a violent world, and lend to that world, our understanding and our vision.

You and I have an especially sacred mission. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the time when ten men shall come unto every Jew and shall say, 'the Lord is with you, teach us His way.' We, who have been blessed with this ancient truth; we, who understand fundamentally its dimensions, we, who know what it means to believe in God and to believe in man, we, who understand the fundamental moral mandate of citizenship and selflessness, we'must find for ourselves disciples and we must lead by noble example. It is not enough to live, and to let live. It is not enough to do our business, to raise our family, to give to the various appeals of our community - it is good, but it is not enough. This is an age in crises. Time is late. God is urgent. God demands a service of the whole man - heart and soul. I pledge this to you - that in the

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## next decade I will use every skill I possess in this service and I ask

that you join with me in testifying to God before man. In testifying

to the ancient truths before our generation. Amen.

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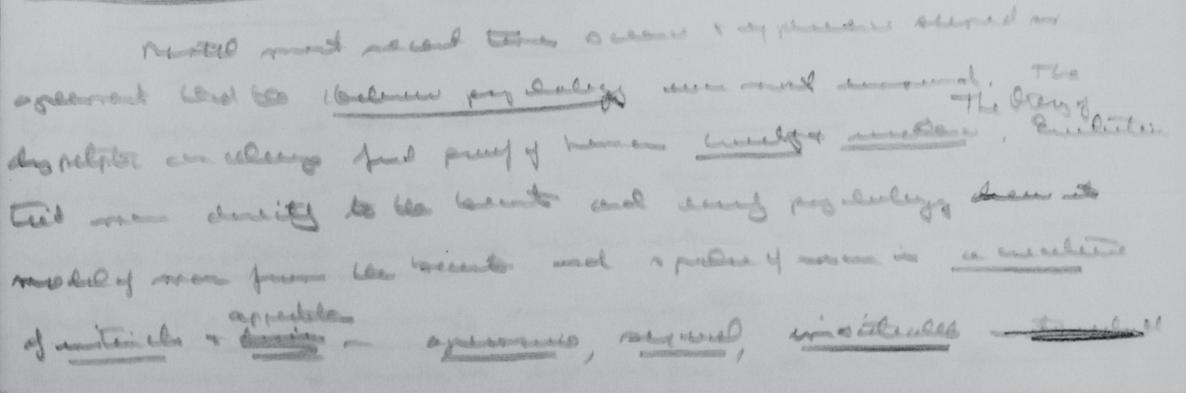
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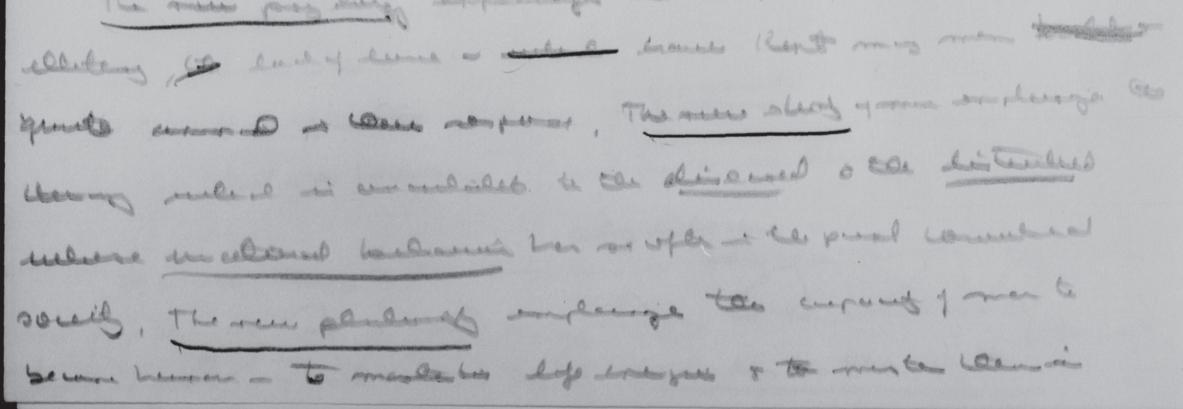
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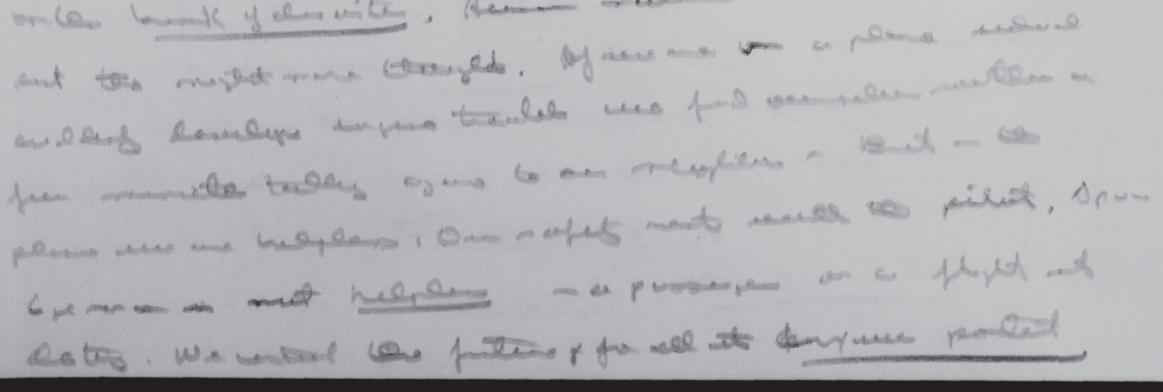
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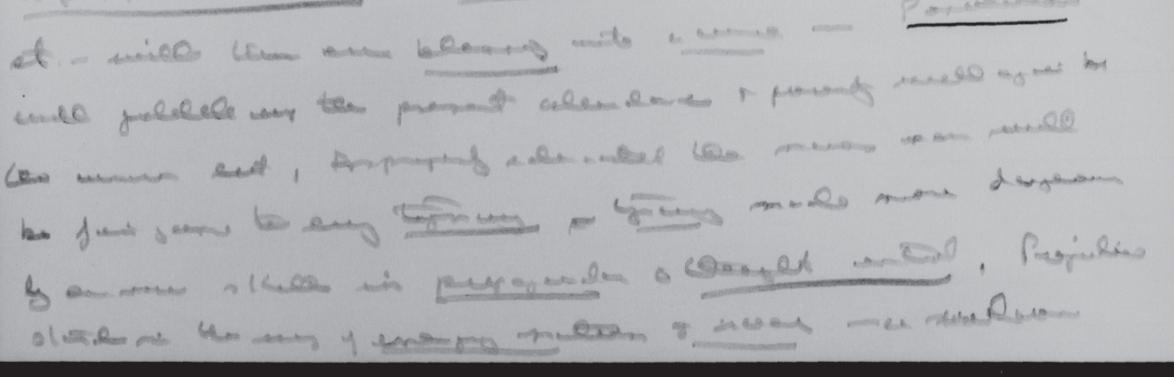
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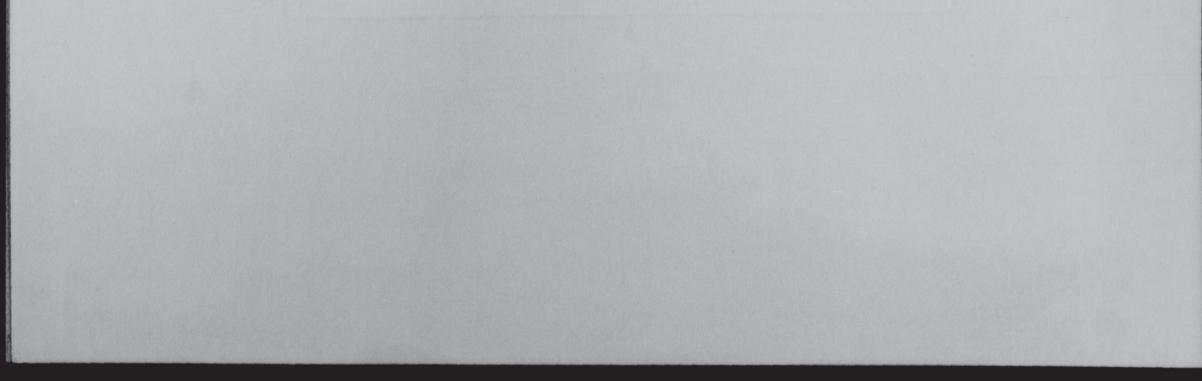
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#### Friday Octor Kaddish Sunday Those who passed away this week LOUIS J. SHLESINGER JOSEPH H. TYROLER ahrzeits DR. ISADORE B.SILBER EDITH CLARA WEINKLE SADIE HARRIS MAX HOLLANDER ARTHUR FRIEDMAN JOSEPH KOBLITZ LINDA BAER JENNIE WODICKA MERTZEL CELIA JANOWITZ FREEDMAN SOL H. SCHACHTEL EMANUEL ROSENFELD BENJAMIN F.KLEIN AUGUSTA MINTZ SARAH BENSON HARRIS MAX GREENHUT HELEN K. WULIGER SIDNEY M. SCHOEN ISAAC E.SPERLING ARNOLD NATHANSON JENNIE REITER KLEIN

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