



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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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 Flames of Dissent: Reflection on the Current Political Protest,  
1965.



The Flames Of Dissent  
Reflection on the  
Current Political  
Protest  
Daniel Jeremy Silver  
November 21, 1965

A goddess stands straight on her pedestal. She is blindfolded. She holds a simple hand scale in her hand and at the base there is chiseled the inscription which is the fundamental principle of our justice, equality before the law. Her tag proclaims the goddess to be Greek. Her motto proclaims our concept of justice to be Hebraic for it is drawn directly out of and rooted in Scripture. Let there be one law for yourselves, for the stranger that dwells among you. It comes as something of a surprise to those of us who enjoy the security and happiness of a happy America, recognize that this fundamental principle of our justice is often honored only in the breach. Most of our communities still require a bail bond of a man who has been charged with a crime. Now, bail is a nuisance to the rich; costly but available to the man of moderate means; but the destitute man finds that bail is beyond him and he must languish in prison though he is technically innocent, not having as yet been adjudged guilty by a jury of his peers. Let a slum child pilfer a few dollars and he will be summarily charged, peremptorily judged and found guilty, sent immediately to jail. Let a corporate executive pilfer many millions of dollars from the public by conspiring to rig prices on government contracts and he could avoid the awful day of sentence for many years by appeal and legal quibble. Such is the temper of our times that, if sentenced, he will in all likelihood simply be slapped on the wrist, nominally fined and return to the very position in the corporation which he held before.

Most of the inequity which is built into our American way of life has been erased from our law books but it flourishes in the unwritten law of our community. Oh yes, there are public schools for all. Certainly, we have struck down the concept of separate but equal facilities, but is there anyone here who really believes that the education and the overcrowded, understaffed, under-financed schools of



our center cities is the equal of the education that our children are receiving? And oh yes, there is police protection available to all, but do any of us really believe that those who inhabit the apartment warens of Hough and of the central areas of Cleveland receive the same courtesy and the same patience from the safety officers that is our lot? And of course, there are public libraries open to all, but where a child from a home which lives on food stamps and on public welfare find the money to pay a fine if he defaces or loses the book?

You know, our civil rights struggle this last dozen years has moved ahead on two fronts. One has been visible. It has been in the headlines. It has resulted in legal remedy and job opportunity and the like. The other has been silent and it has taken place within our hearts as little by little we have recognized that it was not enough to counsel, go to the courts, be patient, get half a loaf in legislation this year, come back to the legislature next year for more. In the beginning we went to fair housing meetings and we said, have patience, be satisfied and we returned home to our fine apartments and to our suburban domiciles puzzled at the insistence of the civil rights leaders that they go to the streets, that they protest and placard, that they kneel in and lie in and sit in and even engage in civil disobedience. But little by little, as new laws have come on to the book and as the old bad laws have been erased, we have recognized that we have not begun to do away with that web of disability and of disadvantage in housing and employment and promotion and union membership and the like which faces the negro. We understand now how when he went home from those early meetings to his gray ghetto why he was dissatisfied with our counsel of patience. There is an old rabbinic motto to the effect, judge not the opinions and judgments of another until you stand in his place, until you can look at life with his perspective, until you can understand why he has certain priorities and certain urgencies which may not be yours and how these color his life and affect his decisions.

What I should like to do this morning is to seek to find this new under-



standing, this new awareness of another area of dissent in our national life. In recent months there has mounted in our large urban centers and our large university campuses a rather strident and vocal opposition to our foreign policies, especially to our policies in Vietnam. This opposition has taken the form of protest marches on Washington, of the publication of any number of protest magazines and newsletters. It has taken the form of slightly veiled student strikes wherein the youngsters are encouraged to leave their scheduled classes to attend study-ins conducted by professors highly critical of our national policy. Some few young people have laid down in front of the troop trains carrying the army to its embarkation point and a few have burned their draft cards and at least two doused their garments in gasoline and made themselves the living torches in protest against this war.

Now, most of us, as we have read of these marches, of these speeches, of these burnings, have been shocked, saddened, puzzled, confused. We have not known what to make of it. Our government, at the same time, has, of course, mounted a massive and effective public relations attack designed to convince other nations that the majority, the overwhelming majority, all but a few of the American people approve of our action in Vietnam, to convince the American people that this student and adult protest is scandalous if it is not in fact near treason. We have seen in our public press and our Cleveland papers have been full of this also, how hysteria has led to greater hysteria, how there have been carefully suggested letters sent home by our troops in Vietnam mouthing and writing of the confusion and the perplexity and of the puzzlement of our veterans there as to these actions, how these letters are placed carefully next to the heart rendering story of mothers and wives who have lost the men who were more precious to them than life itself. And most of us have tried to keep our distance, our critical faculties during this period of high emotion and profound confusion. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves we must admit that our reaction to this movement of dissent has been fretful and worried and largely negative.

We first attempted to dismiss it out of hand. We said it was nothing more



than petulance and pique by a group of disgruntled adolescents. Or we said that these were simply the disturbed, the neurotic, the paranoid among the young and not so young who were attracted to excitement as a moth is attracted to the flame. Or else we said, well, in every generation there are a few who are muddle-headed and soft-headed and they're simply being manipulated, these few, by crafty and cunning Communist organizers.

We have played what I like to call the labeling game. It's an easy game. It's a game most of us, all of us, indulge at one time or another. The rules are quite simple. Find somebody you don't like. Find somebody whose views you mightily disapprove of and label him paranoid, Communist, Bircher, neurotic and you have in a sense ticked him off from the human family. You have said I don't have to consider him as a human being, I don't have to consider his views and make a judgment on them. All I need to do is to keep him at arm's length, keep him under surveillance and remove his security clearance. Hitler was a past master at the game. Whatever Hitler feared in the German political life, German literature, German thought, whatever was a threat in Germany to his dictatorship, he labeled Jewish, hence decadent, hence cancerous, hence he encouraged the throngs at Neurenberg, cut it out, excise it from the body politic. And the ideologues of the left and the right delight to play this game. McCarthy had his pinkos; the Communists had their bourgeois dedeciansists; the Birchers had their dupes; the cult of dissent, of protest on the college campus has its squares. We are all squares, you and I, for even though we are lumped together as members of an establishment, as square, as people who are passe, outmoded, let's make an attempt this morning to get behind the labels, to get behind our instinctive fear and anxiety and worry at this challenge to the American commitment in Vietnam, to see what these young people are saying at its best and at its most serious, to ask ourselves, is there anything here that we ought to listen to. Behind all the shrill, of cacaphony, the shoutings, the excessive passions, the convulsions, is there anything that we ought to listen to? Is there anything that we ought to do about it?



First, I think this ought to be said. There are among the protesting groups highly disturbed individuals. May I remind you that the young sixteen-year old who pulled the trigger on a gun in the face of a space agency official Wednesday last on a plane above Mexico, he did not shout the slogans of the Left, but that Washington was too soft on Mr. Castro. Eroticism, paranoia are not the monopoly of left or right or peace group or hawk. This, too, must be said. There are among those who are active in this peace movement, men and women, young men and women, older men and women, who are convinced that there ought to be radical reorganization of our American way of life. They have no love of democracy.

When I was in San Francisco this past week one of the young girls who had been a leader in the free speech movement in Berkeley announced to the papers that she had been for some years now a member of the Communist Party. But, again, I must remind you that the Welch's and the Billy Jo Hargeses of our nation are as determined that there be a radical reorganization of our democracy and they have no love of our system of government. Right or left, there are those who are not satisfied with that system which satisfies us.

Finally, let this be said. Many of the young people who are attracted to this movement of dissent have no great knowledge of or, really, no great interest in matters of foreign policy. This is a movement which is exciting. It is a movement <sup>not</sup> without power. It is a movement that makes the headlines. It is a movement which has a uniform albeit it be a dissheveled one. It is a movement which gives them an identity. And having said this is this really so different than the madras jacket and button down shirt fraternity cult? The excess of the Saturday? The identity of being a big wheel on the campus? That is how the other side gets its kicks, its identity, its place in the sun. In other words, let us not see these young people at their worst. Treat them as sociological statistics, psychological studies. Let us ask for them what we ask ourselves when a visitor comes to our shore. See the middle-class decencies as well as the common vulgarities. See what I am at my



best, not what I am at my worst.

Now, I've tried to search my soul and I believe that if I were on a campus today I would not be a member of one of these dissident groups. I know that I would not have thrown myself down in front of a troop train and I know that I would not have burned my draft card. As a Jew I am committed to work for the improvement of my society within the society. As a Jew I cannot share that radical disenchantment with marriage and family and community and country which seems to be the basic operative philosophy of these protest groups. As a Jew I cherish citizenship, not alienation; freedom to serve and not the freedom to walk away; the prophet and not the rebel; but I know this, that I would not have arrived at this decision without heartache and anguish because I, too, am attracted and respond to the urgency of peace.

What is it that separates the comfortable American and the dissident American? We are both committed to peace. We differ from each other largely in our judgment of the integrity of our national policy. We believe that the American government means what it says when it speaks of our commitment to world order, to the United Nations, to disarmament, to arms control, to the test ban treaty and the like. A dissident doubts this.

We know the record of the United States from the Marshal Plan, through Point Four and the Peace Corps how practically alone among the great nations of the world we have had policies which went far beyond the narrow and selfish national interest and sought simply human welfare at its most basic international level. And here I make a value judgment. The blind spot of these dissident groups is that they refuse to see this other side of the coin. The blind spot also is that they continue to believe that peace can somehow be established unilaterally. Peace, unfortunately or fortunately, is like marriage, it requires the determined effort of both parties. Israel wants peace but there can be no peace in the Middle East as long as Mr. Nasser is convinced that he will some day drive the Israeli into



the sea. Peace is like a family. It requires the determined and concerted effort and involvement of every single member state, and as long as there are the ambitious and the megalomaniac dictators and the demagogues, the expansionist ideologies, as long as there are those who sacrifice means to ends and who think largely of the aggrandizement of their economy and of their territory and not of the common good, the best intentions of the American nation or of any other nation will be frustrating because peace is a cooperative and necessarily combined effort.

But having said this, let's examine the challenge of these dissident groups. They wonder at the sincerity of our administrative policies and decisions. They say, yes, you can talk of the AID program but is not this a mass, a masquerade a pious front created by the government so that the Macchavelian international activities of the CIA or other international espionage groups can go on unfettered. They speak of the Alliance for Progress as a pompous economic fraud, that our real intentions in Latin America are revealed by the machinations of our agencies in Santo Domingo where we tried to sponsor a right wing coups. One by one they tick off the support given by the United States to military huntas and to dictatorships in Latin and South America and elsewhere in the world. And they remind us how the overflight of the U-2 broke the spirit of Camp David and shattered the hopes of the Paris . And their proof text is the war in Vietnam. They ask a fundamental question: why are we in Vietnam in the first place? And they answer that from the very beginning Vietnam was a domestic war, civil war, between a dictatorship in Saigon, an old flying feudal dictatorship and a disenfranchised and a dispossessed, the under-privileged and the unprivileged who for centuries have been abused by their government and by their feudal lords. And they say that it was not until the United States began to intervene on the side of the privileged and the few, began to turn the war against those who demanded their place in the sun, it was not until that time that Hanoi began to respond that we are the aggressors and not the Communist world.

And they ask why is it that we have committed a quarter of a million men



to this far corner of the world. What do we hope to accomplish there? And they answer, we hope to gain another sphere of economic interest, we hope to protect the tin mines and the rich mineral deposits of Indonesia and of Southeast Asia. We have no great concern with the liberty and the freedom of the Vietnamese people or any other people in this part of the world. We are simply playing the gam of real politik, seeking to preserve that which preserves our strength. And they are fundamentally opposed to this form of policy and this cold-eyed, realistic, militaristic, belligerent policy as they see it.

Are we that belligerent? I wish that we could give a categorical denial to their charges, but I'm afraid we cannot. Such a knowledgeable and informed American as William Fulbright, Chairman of our Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has challenged seriously our position in South Vietnam. Many of us have been from the beginning confused, all of us have been troubled. The actions of our government and stated policy do not jibe. We have escalated a war even as we demanded negotiation. And then this last week we had testily and tardily to admit that a year ago we spurned the offer of negotiations. We would negotiate only from strength. But when are you ever strong enough to gain all that you want from negotiation. Negotiation implies a give and take.

The record of our involvement these past ten years in Southeast Asia, especially in South Vietnam, is a shabby one and though our efforts have been confused and though some have claimed that they have not been direct enough it would seem to me that from the beginning we have not been honest with ourselves as to their purpose. We have spoken of the freedom of the Vietnamese people even as we have imposed the authority of those the Vietnamese hate. And if we are waging a war for military aggrandizement, for tin and for other boxite and for other minerals, then surely our government has not been honest with its citizens for this is not what we have been told. It is this, the belligerency, military priority, which has infected our Vietnam policy these last years which disturbs these



young people. Let us see this dissent at its best.

Two young men turn themselves into living torches who were not beatniks. They did not preach free love. They did not wear their hair long. They did not wear beards. They did not take drugs. They were both deeply religious men. One was the leader of a Quaker meeting. The other was an erstwhile Catholic seminarian. They knew the bitterness of an Isaiah who had lived also in a generation which spoke peace, peace, but there was no peace. These men have been sickened and saddened and tortured by report of our troops cindering South Vietnamese villages and bombing with napon bombs other hamlets and towns. They have been saddened as you and I have been saddened by the photographs in our paper of South Vietnamese army troops torturing the Viet Cong to gain information and they've proved their dissent with their lives. Now, why did they commit suicide? Many have invented any number of psychological explanations, but if you play the psychology game you can sully every decency in all of civilization. It's a fool's game. I think there's a simpler solution. These were little people. These were men without an audience. They had fundamental deep-burning convictions but no one would listen. What makes a neighbor listen? What makes a nation listen? An evidence of courage, a symbolic act, and they went alone to that to which they had recourse, to their courage. They gave their life that they might be heard.

And I cannot help but think of another simple man, another ordinary man, another profoundly religious man, who was willing to sacrifice his life if need be to be heard. He also lived in the time of confused policy. His nation, too, was caught between its high commitment to God and to peace, between its immediate ambitions to play in the maelstrom of international politics to national advantage. And he spoke sweet reason and no one would listen. And he put forth his policy and he was not given an audience. Finally, one day, he appeared in the capital of his city, his hands and his neck bound in a wooden yoke, chained as a captive is chained, who is led away after the capture of his city. And now he was listened to. Every-



body buzzed about his action. This was out of the ordinary. He had been seen. His message was clear. This is the way that you will be led away shortly into exile if you continue your present policies. This man's name was Jeremiah. And if we who are the heirs of Biblical tradition, of the prophetic tradition, are truly its heirs we must understand the passion which leads the little men of our society, the men without power, to take these symbolic acts, to signal a truth that they cannot otherwise impose on us. Otherwise we do not listen. These men, Norman Morrison and Roger Laporte, were determined that we would listen. What is it that they were saying? I believe this is what they had in mind if they could have framed their thoughts.

We live in a convulsive age. Now, it's true in a world where there is madness abroad you cannot bow the head, turn in your arms and trust in God. There must be a certain amount of preparation. There must be certain thoughts to self-preservation. But there is always the danger in such an age that a nation, bound as our nation is, to a high destiny, committed to be the harbinger and messenger of peace in the council of nations, there is always the danger that we will forget our primary responsibility and concentrate on military tactics and political priorities, on the short ends of the moment. And I believe that this is what has happened to us in the last year or two. We have played the game of war. We have sought to achieve our ends in militaristic fashion. We have used all of the agencies, and skillfully, used by all other nations to gain their objective that we have forgotten that which is our most powerful tool, our commitment to decency, our devotion to principle, our willingness to gamble to achieve peace in this world.

The Psalmist told his people and our people, seek ye peace and pursue it. And Americans have, by and large, been willing to pursue peace, to gamble for peace. Recently, we have not gambled. Recently we have dealt in escalation, in military commitments and foreign advisers and CIA personnel and plots. We have played the game as all other nations play it. For the United States this is not the way.

Do we really want to live in a nation where a year from now we will receive



the same revelation we received this past week, that our government summarily dismissed an attempt by France and by the United Nations and by Canada to mediate peace between Hanoi and this nation? Are we really willing to live in a nation which seems to be concerned only with winning the tactical battles in Vietnam and not the larger struggle for peace?

There is nothing to be gained, in my humble opinion, by escalating a war. The more we escalate the more the other side will commit itself. There is everything to be gained by escalating the peace, by being willing to sit down wherever any nation is willing to sit down with us on any terms for conversation, for communication, for interchange, hopefully for treaty, hopefully for peace.

It is time that the American eagle stopped screeching so loudly and began to speak the voice which has been traditionally the best and truest voice of this nation. And though we will not be trampled on, though we will not give up our liberties, we will also not elbow our way out into the globe and demand rights and privilege there that no nation has the right to demand of any other, that our fundamental commitment is that which binds all people to hope, healing, learning, God and peace.

The dissident movement which flourishes on our campuses and out cities is a movement sometimes of excessive passion, often of excessive words. Sometimes its deeds seem self-defeating, but alone so far in this nation it has raised a protest to the increasing belligerency of our national policies. For this it must be blessed. From the excess of this movement, we who are more moderate and more in the mainstream of our national life, must we not renew our energy and our commitment and begin to bring pressure in Washington, such pressure as we possess, to mean what it says and to say what it means, to negotiate, to set the priority of peace above the priority of battle, to set the world and its order above the orders of the Pentagon and the orders of our military staff? No one knows the solution to the Vietnamese problem. From the President to the humblest citizen I believe that we are convinced



that a solution must be a peaceful one, and if this be so then I am convinced that we need to effect and political and diplomatic interchange, that which we say and know in our hearts to be true, and I believe that a major reorientation or priority within the Administration must take place. Let's let the generals play the game of tanks, bayonets, battles and bombs, but let's remind them this is only a minor part of the whole. We are seeking not victory but negotiation. We are seeking not national ends, selfish national ends, but international peace and concord among nations.









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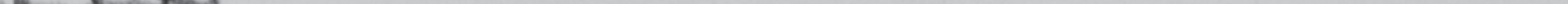
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