

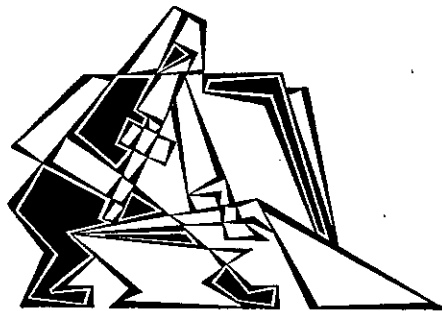
# JUSTICE

# and *JUDAISM*

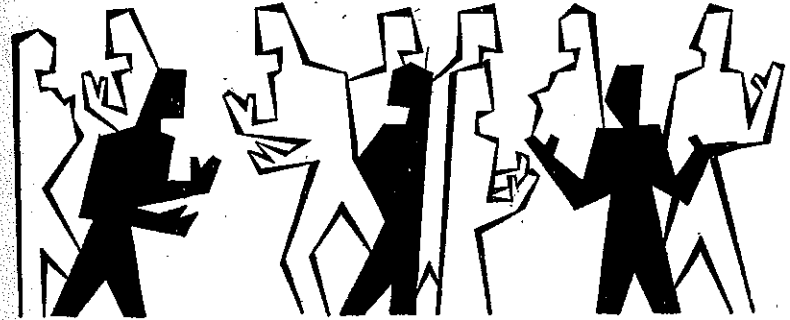
THE WORK OF SOCIAL ACTION

Albert Vorspan  
and  
Eugene J. Lipman

*Illustrated by*  
Russell Roman



UNION OF AMERICAN  
HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
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## PROLOGUE

IT WAS AFTER 11:00 P.M. and the monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees was apparently over. The long agenda had been disposed of, with no more than the usual amount of pyrotechnics, and some of the members were already rising from their seats, looking at their watches, when the president said, "Just one more item, if you don't mind. It won't take long."

He then read a circular letter which had been sent to the temple and to all the synagogues associated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, by the president of the Union. The letter described the work of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism in helping congregations apply "the ethical insights of Judaism to the specific social problems of our generation." The letter concluded with a request to each congregation to establish its own Social Action Committee to study the moral and ethical problems involved in major social issues nationally and in our

own communities and "to bring the principles of Judaism to bear upon these problems."

There was a long moment of silence. Then everybody seemed to speak at once.

"I don't get it," said one. "What is this social action?"

"Politics, politics!" exclaimed Mr. Robinson. "They want us to get mixed up in politics!"

"Not so fast," pleaded the president. "I read some of the material the Social Action Commission has put out. I don't know if I go along all the way, but I certainly think that Judaism has something to say about modern-day problems. Take equal rights, for example. Do you mean to say that Judaism has nothing to say about civil rights or—"

"No, it doesn't!" shouted another. "There's no such thing as a Jewish attitude toward civil rights, or peace, or housing. We're for civil rights as *Americans*, not as Jews. There's no such thing as a Jewish vote. We don't live in a ghetto. We're free Americans like everybody else and I resent this kind of minority thinking."

"Who said anything about a Jewish vote or living in a ghetto?" put in the secretary, despairing of taking notes on the discussion. "Let's be more specific. Last week I was in a restaurant—took the kids in for dinner. A Negro couple came in and sat down. The kids and I were waited on, got our food, and finished our meal. Nobody waited on the Negro couple. Finally, they got up and left. I know how I feel about that kind of thing. You mean to say that's not against our religion? Then what's this brotherhood we pray about in the temple?"

"That's a good example," said the president.

"I think it's a terrible example," blurted the man who had warned about the ghetto. "If you didn't like it, you should have done something about it as an American citizen. Talk to the manager. Write your Congressman. Write a letter to the *Times*. What do you want from the temple?"

"Answer my question, please," persisted the secretary. "What about our prayers about social justice, love thy neighbor, and all that? What is that—just talk? What does it mean?"

"Prayer is one thing, social *action* is another. Let the rabbi preach about these things, that's okay with me. But I will apply them for myself as I choose to do as an American citizen."

"That's right," echoed another. "Keep the church and the synagogue out of politics, that's what I always say. I'm for separation of church and state right down the line."

"I think we're going off in all directions at once," said the president. "As I understand this letter, Rabbi Eisendrath is saying that the synagogue has no right to cloister itself and evade responsibility for the problems of the community. I agree with him. We have a terrible slum in this town—isn't that our business?"

"Well, the rabbi is working on that as a member of the Human Rights Committee—"

"I don't mean only the rabbi. How about us?"

"What about us?" demanded his opponent. "Many of us are active in civic causes. That's the American way—as individuals. Not as a synagogue!"

"I have been listening to this discussion," said another, "and I want to ask a question. This Board meets every month. We discuss the budget, the cantor's salary, the plaster falling in the classrooms, membership. Fine. But when do we ever discuss what Judaism has to say about the great issues of our community, our country, and the world? It's just a question."

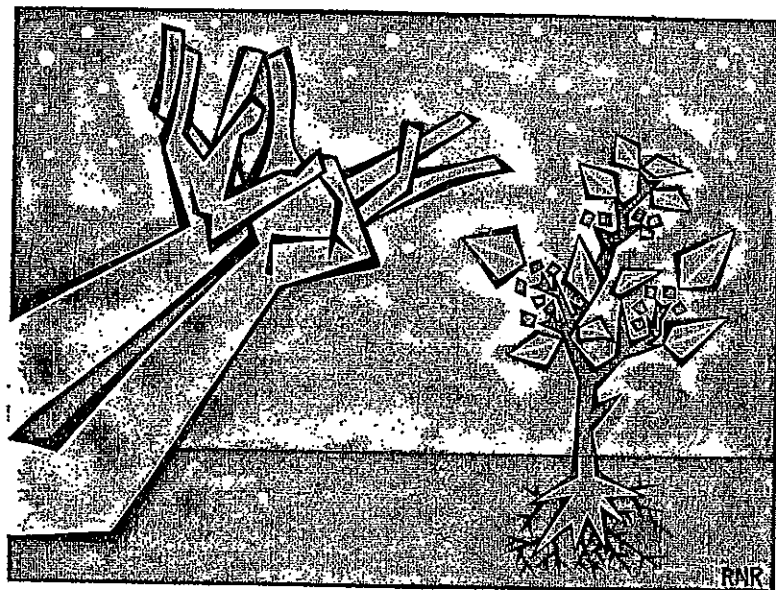
"I'm warning you," said another. "Start up with these outside issues and you'll split the congregation. I say let's stick to religion."

"Yes, sure," said the secretary, "but what is religion? What is Judaism? Is Judaism concerned with the falling plaster or the Negro couple in the restaurant? It seems to me . . ."

\* \* \* \*

At one A.M., the bone-weary Board adjourned. They had agreed on one thing which was—naturally—the appointment of a committee to look into the matter and to examine the questions which had been raised in the discussion.

This book is written for that committee, for all committees, and for individual Jews everywhere—Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox—who, similarly, seek answers to questions about the relationship of Judaism to modern social problems. It is written for Jews and Christians everywhere who feel impelled by their religious heritage to give of themselves for the betterment of their communities so that mankind may move a step closer to the Kingdom of God on earth.



## FOUNDATIONS

**A** PASSIONATE belief in and concern for justice for all men is inherent in Judaism. It stems, not alone from the immortal utterances of the Biblical prophets, but from the fundamental nature of the Jewish faith. It stems first and foremost from the Jewish concepts of God, His universe, and His greatest creation, man.

The watchword of Judaism is: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." This is more than a denial of many gods, more even than an affirmation of monotheism. It is a fundamental insight which, when enunciated 3,000 years ago, revolutionized the thinking of man about the whole universe and his role in it. Were all mankind to take it seriously today, the implications of those eleven short words could still transform human society from a jungle of fear and hate into a literal Kingdom of God on earth.

For the Jewish belief in one God has inevitable corollaries. The creative, creating God of Judaism is the power behind a physical

universe characterized by absolute harmony, precision, and unity. Increasingly, as man learns more about the laws governing the natural universe, it becomes apparent that our universe is not a mechanistic, accidental mass of phenomena, but a purposeful oneness, guided by a Divine Power Who is perfection and Who has created perfectly.

It has followed inevitably in the thinking of Jewish sages through the centuries that man as an integral part of God's universe must also be governed by immutable laws. It has followed further that man, created by God, must be good by nature. For how could a good God create evil men? Man, like all God's creatures, is good, was created that way, and has a noble purpose to serve on God's earth.

But man *is* different from all of God's creatures, and the differences between man and the animal, plant, and other organic kingdoms are fundamental. These differences center in the free will granted by God to man alone among His creatures. Only man can, by his own whim or will, disobey God's laws. Man can, if he wishes, trample upon the Divine commands to live justly, to love his fellow, to practice love and not hate, and instead can express in his life evil and not the goodness which is his natural potential. Man has the right to choose. "See," said God, "I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed; to love the Lord thy God, to hear His voice, and to cleave unto Him." (*Deut. 30:19-20*)

This power to choose between good and evil is, in Jewish teaching, part of man's nature. As man's creator, God is the ultimate source of moral law and moral power. He is, in Matthew Arnold's words, "the Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." Man, created in His image, should strive to emulate God: "Ye shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." (*Lev. 19:2*) Maxwell Silver, in *The Ethics of Judaism from the Aspect of Duty*, explains: "One's motive, in accordance with this principle, is to strive after holiness in character, in imitation or emulation of God's holiness—the desire of the copy to be like the Pattern." The nerve-center of this striving within man's soul we designate as his conscience. This concept of man as a mirror of the Divine, committed by his nature to strive toward personal holiness, with personal holiness attainable only through social morality and justice, was revolutionary in and of itself. But, in a development unique in the history of human thought, the concept became socialized, became

the heritage, the duty, the mission of a whole people: Israel. Israel could fulfill its covenant with God, made at Mt. Sinai, only by living the moral laws of God and by teaching them to all mankind. To quote Dr. Silver:

"Israel, through its historic Sinaitic covenant, established a special moral relationship to God. Through this covenant, Israel voluntarily covenanted itself, obligated itself, assumed as its unique national duty for all time, to be a 'holy people' unto God, a people just and humane, loving God and following His law, without regard to the conduct of other nations. From this 'peculiar' historic relationship to God, then, flows Israel's chief national duty—to be this holy people unto God, and its supreme motive—to be faithful and loyal 'with all thy heart and all thy soul' to its 'appointment' or its historic role as a holy people."

Thus, and only thus, can the concept of "the chosen people" be understood.

Judaism conceives as its function and its mission the teaching of mankind to obey God's moral law, committing man to a way of life consistent with God's will, impelling him to dedicate his life to the bringing about on earth the kind of perfection in human affairs which is implicit in the universe.

### Prophetic Heritage

The noblest expression of this mission is to be found in the writings of the literary prophets of the Bible. Beginning with Amos in the eighth century before the Common Era, these God-driven men attacked every evil of their society, every violation of God's moral law. Because of the visionary greatness of the prophetic minds and spirits, the ethical ideals of which they reminded their people 2,500 years ago have remained the peaks of human insight into man's relationship with man and the ultimate destiny of mankind in its search for God and godliness.

For all time, the ancient prophets proclaimed God as the root of human morality:

"I am the Lord thy God  
Who teaches thee what is of avail  
Who leads thee the way to follow." (*Isaiah 48:17*)

They then proclaimed in ringing and incontrovertible terms what God taught and where His way led:

"Seek the Lord that ye may live  
Seek good and not evil, that ye may live;  
And that the Lord, the God of hosts, may be truly with  
you  
As ye think he is.  
Hate evil and love good  
And establish justice in the gates of the land." (*Amos 5:4, 14-15*)

"If one practices justice and righteousness  
If one champions the cause of the poor,  
Then it is well with one—  
This indeed is to know Me, says God." (*Jeremiah 22:15-16*)

"He has told thee, O man, what is good;  
And what doth the Lord require of thee,  
But to do justice and to love mercy  
And to walk humbly with thy God." (*Micah 6:8*)

But let it not be thought for a moment that the prophets of Israel were content with generalizations or dreams of the peaceful world which would come "in the end of days." Forthrightly and simply, they reacted to real-life situations as they saw them and demanded that God's justice reign in the affairs of man. Throughout this volume, their imperishable words will serve to remind us once again, not only of God's will, but also of man's moral freedom—freedom used too frequently to thwart His will and too seldom to fulfill it. A noted scholar thus described the debt mankind owes to the prophets:

"It is to the prophetic tradition more than to any other source that Western civilization owes its noblest concept of the moral and social obligations of the individual human being. Even if the prophets preached only to their fellow Israelites and saw justice only in the terms of their covenant with their God, their ringing words have carried from age to age their belief that justice was for the weak as well as for the strong; that its fulfillment was as much the spirit as the letter of the law; that one could not serve God at the same time that he mistreated his fellow men; that to love God was to love justice and that the love of justice placed within the conscience of each human being the ultimate inescapable obligation to denounce evil where he saw it, to defy a ruler who commanded him to break the covenant,

and to live in the law and the love of God no matter what the cost." (*Ancient Israel* by Harry M. Orlinsky)

The *goy kadosh*, the holy people, appointed to try to live and to teach God's will, truly became, as Deutero-Isaiah had prophesied, the suffering servant of the Lord.

With its lofty insights into the nature of universal law and the existence of equally immutable moral laws, it was inevitable that Judaism should develop into a religion based on law. All the principles and practices of Judaism, as they evolved through the centuries, expressed themselves in *mitzvos*: positive and negative religious commandments, Divinely-sanctioned because through their fulfillment man could fulfill his moral purpose in living. Ritual and ethical commandments alike became systematized as *mitzvos*.

Early in the evolution of rabbinic Judaism it became crystal-clear to the great sages of Israel that only through institutions could the noble humanitarian and ethical *mitzvos* of Judaism find fulfillment in the life of the individual Jew and of the Jewish people. Since the synagogue already existed as the core institution in Jewish life after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (70 C.E.), it was natural for Jewish institutional life to center around the synagogue. To the synagogue came the poor to receive, not charity, but *tse'dakah* their righteous due. To the synagogue came the lame and the sick, to be cared for in community hospices. To the synagogue came the sinned-against to cry out against injustice, and to receive justice. From the burial of the dead to the redemption of the captive, a whole network of institutions developed through and around the synagogue in which the individual Jew and the *am segulah*, the holy people with a mission, could obey the will and law of God.

As Rabbi Jacob Schwarz put it: "When the synagogue was at the height of its strength it was coextensive with Jewish life. No avenue of Jewish thought or interest was closed to it and no concern of Jews was beyond its purview. It was the embodiment of the history, doctrines, ideas, and achievements of the Jewish people. The synagogue and Jewish life were inseparable." (*The Synagogue in Modern Jewish Life*, p. 1)

The institution of the synagogue sought to make the Jew ever-aware of the nature of his religion: a way of life which offers no escape from the problems of life. Judaism rejects the device of passing all responsibility for social problems to God. In Jewish tra-

dition man is called the co-worker or partner of God in the creation of a better world. Judaism has always insisted that every Jew must bring the ethical insights of the Jewish heritage to bear on the specific social problems of our generation, just as we do to the personal and individual problems of our lives. Jewish tradition has never constricted Judaism solely to the relation between man and God. The relations between man and man were actually placed on an even higher pedestal than those between man and God. Transgressions committed by man against God are atoned for on the Day of Atonement, but transgressions committed by man against man can be forgiven only when the injustice is rectified. Significant is the declaration attributed to God in the Midrash: "Would that they had forsaken me but kept my Commandments." (*Midrash, Echah Rabati*, Introduction)

## Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages, the *mitzvah* of study assumed ever-greater importance in Jewish life. Study for the sake of study became a major preoccupation. To be sure, Jews had ever before them the dictum of the rabbi, who, when asked which was more important, study or action, replied: The most important thing is study which leads to action. Gradually, however, the need for individual and group action to right wrongs, to secure justice and peace for all men, became submerged in a Jewish society understandably preoccupied with the problems of physical survival in a milieu of hate and repression. As Jews became increasingly isolated by this repression from the world about them, the ethical ideals of Judaism tended to turn inward, too. Theoretically they applied to all men; in function, they were applied in the only society most Jews knew, their internal, synagogue-centered society.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the fog of mysticism descended, the worldliness inherent in Judaism was threatened by an other-worldly concern for the *olam ha'ba*, the world to come, with this life becoming increasingly considered only an ante-room leading to the *real* life, life after death. Superstition became rampant, evil spirits were everywhere, mischievously at work to cause man to sin so frequently that eternal damnation would be his post-mortal lot.

Increasingly, *mitzvos* came to mean ceremonial commandments, ritual details, requirements of daily religious routine. The

*mitzvos* between man and God dominated completely; the *mitzvos* between man and his fellow man became less and less the conscious preoccupation of the Jew. Even the institutions surrounding the synagogue which had the task of fulfilling communal responsibility in matters of health, social welfare, death and burial, became more concerned with the pin-point details of *how* than they were with the ethical principles of *why* which undergirded their mission.

This uncharacteristic and unhealthy situation could not continue indefinitely, and it did not. As ghetto walls began to crumble under the impact of the ideas and ideals which produced the American and French revolutions, as Jews emerged into the sunlight and grabbed eagerly at freedom, secular education, civil and political rights, new economic opportunities, the ever-present rumblings of discontent with other-worldly Judaism grew quickly into a thunder-clap of revolt from which emerged the beginnings of Reform Judaism.

Possibly the greatest achievement of Reform Judaism was the re-establishment of prophetic ethical idealism as the purpose and goal of Jewish faith and living. In Reform, God's moral law became the absolute good; all other traditional laws, practices, and customs of Judaism became acceptable only insofar as they could be made relevant to the moral law and to its fulfillment. They took seriously the admonition of Isaiah:

"I am full of the burnt-offerings of ram,  
And the fat of fed beasts;  
And I delight not in the blood  
of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.  
When ye come to appear before Me,  
Who had required this at your hand,  
To trample my courts?  
Bring no more vain oblations;  
It is an offering of abomination unto Me;  
New moon and sabbath, the holding of convocations—  
I cannot endure iniquity along with the solemn  
assembly . . .  
And when ye spread forth your hands,  
I will hide Mine eyes from you;  
Yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear;  
Your hands are full of blood.  
Wash you, make you clean,  
Put away the evil of your doings  
From before Mine eyes,  
Cease to do evil;

Learn to do well;  
Seek justice, relieve the oppressed,  
Judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

(Isaiah 1:11 ff)

At precisely this juncture in the history of Judaism, as the new Reformers were molding their justice-centered faith and Orthodoxy was condemning Reform for its violations of the ritual fabric of Jewish observance, two other related events occurred which were vitally to affect the course of Jewish life.

First, the center of gravity of the Jewish population began to shift from Central and Eastern Europe to the United States. And, second, the synagogue gave up its position of centrality in the Jewish community.

### The Synagogue Defaults

As tens of thousands of immigrants made their way from Central Europe to the American continent, the synagogues of America by and large were either unable or unwilling to assume the massive burdens of accepting them, caring for them, helping them to settle. Occasionally, synagogues did undertake the social welfare functions traditionally associated with them. The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York led in the movement to establish Mt. Sinai Hospital, the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, and other agencies now entirely separated from synagogue influences. In 1885, Temple Emanu-El of the City of New York established its Sisterhood of Personal Services to help the Jews beginning to flock into America from pogrom-ridden Russia. But these, and a few similar programs, were exceptions to the general situation, which found the synagogue defaulting to secular leadership. The reasons for this failure are many and complex, and are still the source of disagreement among students of Jewish history. Indisputable, however, is the fact that secular agencies were organized, for the first time in Jewish history, to take over welfare, hospital, and other functions hitherto reserved to the synagogue. It is surprising, perhaps, to note that synagogue leadership, rabbinic and lay alike, apparently made little effort to prevent these incursions into their prerogatives. Gradually, a whole new pattern of institutional relationships developed. The synagogue remained the center of Jewish worship and, to an extent, of Jewish education. All other

expressions of Jewish belief, concern, and need found their outlet in specialized, secularly-sponsored Jewish agencies.

For a time, the defense of the civil rights of Jews in the United States and abroad did remain in religious hands. The Board of Delegates of American Israelites was founded in 1859. It became part of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1878. For many years, the Board of Delegates was the only instrumentality in America active in preventing encroachments upon the rights of Jews and in aiding in their relief from unjust discrimination and oppression. By 1925, however, even this field had been so completely taken over by secular agencies that the Board of Delegates was relinquished.

For nearly a century, then, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform synagogues, as religious institutions, generally did not relate themselves directly to the problems of contemporary society. Their rabbis, however, continued to be active in every field of endeavor.

Individual and collective rabbinic activity in behalf of social justice can be found in every specific area which is the concern of this volume. Many are cited herein. From the early days of organized American Jewish life to the present, Jewish spiritual leaders have fought courageously for justice.

The UAHHC, since its formation in 1873, has consistently spoken out for civil rights and world peace. From its inception (1889), the Central Conference of American Rabbis has been in the vanguard of liberal religious thought and action in America. Its Social Justice platforms of 1918 and 1928 were landmarks of social thought, were widely distributed, and played a role in shaping opinion throughout the country. (See Appendices E and F) The annual statements of the Commission on Justice and Peace of the CCAR, and the periodic proclamations of its Institutes on Justice and Peace have set high standards of insight into the processes of democracy.

During the twenties and thirties, the CCAR, in particular, was active not only in the formulation of public statements, but in function as well. A number of incidents are related in this volume in which the Conference as a body became involved in labor situations together with representative Catholic and Protestant leaders. Joint statements and activities of all three faiths were not uncommon. The Conservative rabbinate, too, through the Rabbinical Assembly of America, has interpreted the teachings of Judaism courageously in every area of contemporary life. The Social Action Commission of Conservative Judaism continues this tradition.

## Individual Rabbinic Activity

Individual rabbis through the years accepted in their own communities the challenge of their faith. Rabbi David Einhorn, of Baltimore, in 1861, attacked the institution of slavery and its defenders. Such boldness was perilous, and the rabbi was forced to flee to Philadelphia after his life had been threatened.

In 1928, a serious general strike broke out in the coal fields of Pennsylvania. Rabbi Samuel H. Goldenson of Pittsburgh was invited to tour the mining area. Upon his return, despite the presence in his congregation of leading coal producers, he said from his pulpit:

"If ethics does not enter into the question as to a man's claim to share in the fruits of his own labor, then, where in the world of practical experience do questions of right arise and become controlling and imperative? There are some that may not see the imperativeness of the morals involved because they are inclined to confuse the right to have with the right to share. By sharing I do not mean mere having, irrespective of any claim, but securing a part of the total output that one may rightfully claim as the result of his own labors. That, I submit, is the very essence of ethical thinking.

"Has the clergyman, then, the right to talk about these things? My answer is that no man in the entire world has as much right, and there is no man upon whom the responsibility to speak about such questions is so great as upon the one who raises his voice in the name of ethics and religion.

". . . If we are really in earnest in our desire to lift the burdens from the backs of those heavily tried, we should be willing to bear some of the burden ourselves. The higher pay for the miners' labors comes in the end from the public, and not from the employers themselves. If the public wishes to have a more righteous world, it must be willing to pay the cost of it." (*Am I My Brother's Keeper?* A sermon by Rabbi Samuel H. Goldenson preached before Congregation Rodef Shalom, Pittsburgh, Pa., Feb. 5, 1928.)

In Toronto, during the "Red scare" of the early 30's, the police denied the right of liberal groups to use Queens Park, the Canadian counterpart of Union Square, New York, or Hyde Park, London. Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, spiritual leader of Holy Blossom Temple, initiated a petition which was signed by sixty-eight religious leaders, resulting in restoration of traditional civil liberties in Toronto.



In 1947, Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn served as a member of President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights, which produced the trail-blazing report entitled "To Secure These Rights."

No righteous cause was foreign to the active interest of the American rabbinate. They joined with humanitarians of all faiths in demanding laws limiting child labor and hours required of adult laborers. They helped working men to gain better working conditions and a fair wage for their labor. Rabbis worked for prison reform, for better housing for the poor, for social security, for international peace, for the establishment of the League of Nations and later the United Nations.

The rabbis who devoted themselves to social idealism did not expect their congregations to support them at all times, and sometimes the laymen did not. Not infrequently was there vocal opposition expressed both to the views and actions of the rabbis.

In his second year as leader of Congregation Bene Israel, Cincinnati, Rabbi David Philipson fought against Boss Cox and his political gang, frequently called "a perfect machine even excelling Tammany." He attacked municipal corruption from his pulpit. At a congregational meeting, one of the lay leaders of the congregation, who was also a leader of the Cox group, called for the censuring of the rabbi for daring to discuss controversial subjects in the pulpit. Though, as we shall see, this was not always the case, this congregation supported their rabbi.

#### THOU ART THE MAN!

Rabbi Sidney E. Goldstein, in his *The Synagogue and Social Welfare*, recounts this incident from his own experience:

"I was in Sinai Temple the Sunday Dr. Hirsch preached one of his most prophetic sermons. That morning the newspapers of Chicago had spread across the front page the words, 'The Packers Are Stealing the Water of the City.' Hirsch arose in the pulpit, stern and grim: 'I have been announced to speak on such and such a theme but I have decided to change my topic to 'Thou Shalt Not Steal.' He not only exposed and denounced the packers of Chicago for robbing the city, but condemned them for the shame they had brought upon the community and upon themselves. Then in the midst of one of his passionate passages, he turned to Nelson Morris, who was then a member of his congregation, and thundered, 'Thou art the man!' The congregation was startled and aghast. Nelson Morris, of course, resigned, and so did a num-

ber of his friends. The next Sunday Hirsch arose and said with a wry smile, 'I have this week received notice that a number of our members have resigned. I have always known that the Jews possessed at least one virtue—the virtue of resignation. But let me state that while the members are free to resign, the rabbi is also free to resign.' The resignations stopped."

Rabbi Ephraim Frisch, Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Beth El, San Antonio, Texas, tells of a similar experience (*Hebrew Union College Monthly*, Nov. 1942):

"In 1925 I had a dramatic experience bearing on the freedom of my pulpit. I preached that Friday night on 'The Rising Tide of Illiberalism' in answer to the hostility to immigrants, to the native population of the U. S. colonies, and like sentiments, voiced that week by a forum speaker, and, among other things, criticized strongly our own imperialism in the Philippines and called for their independence. A member of the congregation of exceptional prominence and authority—a former president—rushed up to the pulpit at the end of the service just as I lowered my hand at the close of the benediction and, before a congregation of Jews and non-Jews, pointed his finger at me and exclaimed, 'That man is using the pulpit for political propaganda; what does the rabbi know about the Philippines? I have just come back from a visit to the Philippines as a part of my trip around the world.' I knew that there was a crucial question at stake for me—the question of a free or a subservient pulpit with the almost certain loss of my position as the price of my freedom in this unequal public test of strength between one of the most powerful laymen in the state and myself, a newcomer who had not yet had time to win the abiding confidence of his people. I made my decision on the spot—that I would be a free man; requested the congregation to remain, and announced that I would have a statement to make in a moment but that I desired first to ask my challenger a few leading questions concerning certain bad conditions in the Philippines for which our American imperialism was responsible. I described the evils, and proved to the satisfaction of the congregation that I did know what I was talking about in my sermon, and received unexpected support from a Christian gentleman in the audience who was personally well acquainted with conditions in the Philippines. I then did something for effect that I have never resorted to before or since: I pounded the pulpit and declared: 'This pulpit

must be free or else I will not serve as your rabbi. If the congregation by a vote should declare that it is not free, I'll resign immediately.' To my gratification the audience broke forth in wild applause, happy to see their appointed religious leader stand up for his independence."

### Pressure on Rabbis

A number of rabbis have been ousted from or have resigned under pressure from their congregations because of their advocacy of unpopular social causes. In 1919, Rabbi Abraham Cronbach, who later became Professor of Social Studies at the Hebrew Union College, resigned as the leader of Temple Israel, Akron, Ohio, after his pulpit utterances had been strongly challenged, and his right to speak freely officially questioned by his Board of Trustees.

Rabbi Cronbach was not alone in this kind of decision. On June 4, 1932, Congregation Sherith Israel of San Francisco heard a farewell address from Rabbi Jacob J. Weinstein, in the course of which he said:

"... in the face of such conditions as we have had in the last three years, this prophetic tradition, this wild insistence on true justice, this demand that sinning by syndicate can be remedied only by social action seems to be so perfectly geared to the crying needs of our time that a rabbi who failed to preach them was simply derelict in his duty. In failing to win you over to this belief in the saving power of the prophetic teachings of Judaism, I suffered the keenest failure in my ministry among you."

Rabbi Weinstein proceeded to analyze the reasons for this "failure": his youth, the conflict between materialist leadership of the temple and the changes demanded by the rabbi, and concluded:

"Had I been content to point out the evils of our present social system and assume a sort of academic unwillingness to cast judgment as to the responsibility for them, my pathway would have been much smoother, but I insisted on giving concrete suggestions and pointing out definite ways in which the people of this very congregation could do their share in putting an end to the savage conditions about us. This definiteness was most unwelcome to many of you."

The rabbi told his congregants that he was reminded of the minister who visited a small, rural church and preached on the commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Steal." The congregation was so impressed by his sermon that they urged him to preach again the next Sunday. The preacher on that occasion announced to the congregation that he was so pleased with their reaction to his previous sermon that he was going to preach on the same commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Steal," only this time he was going to add specifically, "Thou Shalt Not Steal Chickens." Whereupon, "the congregation escorted the preacher to the town limits and bade him a hasty farewell."

### Religion and Society

What should be the proper relationship between religion and social issues? This is an old debate, and one which flares up everywhere. A typical incident took place in March, 1954, when Congressman A. L. Miller (Rep., Nebraska) took the floor of the House to condemn Washington clergymen who, he complained, "took off their ecclesiastical robes and put on their political robes" when they criticized Congress for failing to clean up slums and crime in the nation's capital. Retorted Dr. Albert P. Shirkey of the Mount Vernon Place Methodist Church of Washington:

"Christianity is not here to lull the minds and souls of men to sleep, but rather is the bugle call to action against every wrong to any life anywhere. God pity America when the pulpits no longer speak out against such ingrained wrongs."

Dr. Edward Hughes Pruden, pastor of Washington's famed First Baptist Church, said that the congressman's "antiquated conception of the area of religious concern is almost as deplorable as the existence of the slums themselves . . ."

In 1955, when Roman Catholic Archbishop Rommel of Louisiana, urged the state legislature to defeat a "right to work" bill, sixty-six Catholic businessmen in New Orleans published an ad in the newspaper taking issue with the prelate.

It would be false, however, to give the impression that laymen have always opposed social justice crusades. The record is replete with the activities of many laymen, Jews and Christians alike, who have given of themselves in good causes in America's evolution toward full democracy. But we are primarily concerned in this volume with the synagogue as such. Has the synagogue as the or-

ganized expression of Judaism played a direct and active role in social action? Or has activity perforce been limited to individuals, rabbis and laymen?

### Synagogue Social Action

These questions have been asked frequently in the councils of all the national Jewish religious institutions. One of the most heated and stirring of such debates took place at the Biennial Assembly of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in February, 1929, at San Francisco. It was touched off by a prominent Reform layman, Mr. Roscoe Nelson, who said:

*“. . . the truth is that this Union has never conceded that any subject is more vitally Jewish than that of Social Justice. . . . Our privilege and our duty in this behalf is not discharged by the most gracious of permits to the Central Conference of American Rabbis to adopt a program of Social Justice. It would be a strange voice in Israel which suggested that gropings for Social Justice must be vicariously conducted through a Hierarchy of Rabbis or a House of Bishops. I have grossly misinterpreted the history, philosophy, and tradition of our people, if passivity and impersonality in connection with the most profound interests of humanity suffices for spiritual identification with the sources of Jewish inspiration.”*

In a real sense, Mr. Nelson's remarks and the discussions which followed them can be called the beginning of the *synagogue* social action movement in twentieth century America. He insisted that rabbis have no monopoly on social justice—that the laymen must discharge their responsibility. It took many years before the call was heeded. Resolutions were passed, speeches were made, debates provided clarification and heat—but there was still no organized social action movement in the synagogue. After a strong call for action by Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath at the 1946 Biennial Assembly of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, a Joint Commission on Social Action was finally organized in 1949. Its charter was approved both by the UAHC and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. (See Appendix C) The Commission met three times, sponsored an institute on Judaism and Public Health, drafted ambitious plans, then became quiescent for more than three years.

In 1953, the Joint Commission on Social Action was reor-

ganized, and undertook a simple-sounding task: the organization of Social Action or Community Affairs committees in every Reform temple in America. By early 1955, a virtual ground-swell of opinion had developed in Reform temples; so had some opposition. The issue came to a climax at the Forty-Third Biennial Assembly of the UAHC in Los Angeles in February, 1955. Rabbi Eisendrath led off the controversy in his presidential address:

*“A guide for Reform Judaism do we desire? Indeed we do. But not for ritual and rites alone—but for righteous conduct and decent behavior between man and man; not merely for the forms of services but for the service of God in the affairs of men; not merely a minimum code for liturgical worship but a minimal code of moral conduct incumbent upon anyone who calls himself a Reform Jew presuming to be the heir of Hebrew prophet and sage. Even the prophet prefaced his command to ‘walk humbly’ with the demand to do justly and to love mercy.’ The resemblance between the noble name we bear and our bearing toward our neighbor must be more than coincidental. It must be fundamental. It must translate our preachment into practice, our dogmas and doctrines into deed, our creed into conduct, our prayers into programs of moral righteousness and social justice, our invoking of God's name—too frequently in vain—into the establishment of His Kingdom on earth.”*

Rabbi Eisendrath called for nation-wide support of the program of the Commission on Social Action, which had enlarged its scope to include the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, and National Federation of Temple Youth. He appealed to every temple to develop a social justice program to apply realistically the ideals of Judaism in solving the problems of contemporary society.

After a spirited, frequently moving, debate, the Assembly overwhelmingly approved the program of the Commission on Social Action. This approval, coupled with positive action on a number of specific topics of major concern, touched off a ferment of activity in temples throughout the country.

A large number of Reform synagogues have set up Social Action or Community Affairs Committees. The typical committee is a standing committee of the congregation, similar to the Education or Building Committee. Usually, it includes representatives of the various affiliated groups of the synagogue, including the men's

club, the sisterhood, and the youth group. It works in close cooperation with the rabbi who serves as informal adviser to the group.

#### THE LOCAL COMMITTEE

The initial task of the committee is to analyze its own community and to select those social problems locally, as well as one or two of national or international character, which require study and action. Many committees, as the subsequent chapters will indicate, have turned their attention to problems of discrimination and segregation. Others have looked into local housing problems and slum conditions. A number have been concerned with problems of religion in the public schools and their effect upon the principle of separation of church and state. Securing recreational facilities, stimulating mental hygiene programs for the community, protecting civil liberties from groups bent on censorship, building support for the United Nations—these, and many similar issues, have won the attention of synagogue social action groups. The whole gamut of national issues—from American immigration policy to implementation of the United States Supreme Court desegregation order—has come under study by these committees. The role of the national commission is to make materials and guidance available to local committees. It functions in an advisory capacity and issues no “directives” to local groups.

Having selected those issues which require attention, the synagogue committee makes its own study of these problems from the standpoint of the moral principles of Judaism. When its study is completed, the committee then undertakes its basic task: educating and sensitizing the members of the congregation to the moral implications of the issue. This is done in many ways, including distribution of literature, use of the congregational bulletin, special forums after services, the rabbi’s sermon, and similar media. At this point, the committee will decide, depending upon the authority given it by the Board, whether to proceed from the task of education to needed community action in concert with like-minded community groups. Some committees are limited by their boards to the program of education, leaving it to the members of the congregation to take such action as individuals as they may feel impelled to take. Other committees are empowered to take public action upon approval of the Board. (See Appendix A, nos. 9, 17) Usually such action is taken in concert with local Jewish Community Councils where they exist.

Fortunately, the growth of local synagogue social action has not been limited to the Reform movement. In October, 1954, a Joint Commission on Social Action was organized by the institutions of Conservative Judaism in America: the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of America. This commission, too, has set itself the task of organizing local study and action groups. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations has a Communal Affairs Committee, and there is growing interest in this activity within the Orthodox community.

All three national congregational groups are now affiliated with the National Community Relations Advisory Council (usually referred to as NCRAC), coordinating body for national and local Jewish organizations engaged in community relations or social action. They play their full role in the councils of the NCRAC and have particular responsibility for that facet of the community relations program known as interreligious activities, which involves continuing communication and cooperation with Christian religious groups, local and national. That the synagogue should be recognized as the opposite number of the church on the local scene, and that national Jewish religious organizations should serve as the counterpart of the national Christian institutions, may seem axiomatic to most readers, but this principle was established in the American Jewish community only recently and as a result of bitter struggle. Nor is it acknowledged even now by all Jewish organizations.

Without doubt, Christian denominations have set the pace in the direction of organized programs of social action for many years. The Roman Catholic Church and virtually all Protestant denominations have social action programs functioning nationally and in many local parishes. The Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, and the Division of Christian Life and Work of the National Council of the Churches of Christ serve as the coordinating bodies of the major Christian branches. The denominations, such as the Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and Friends, maintain wide-ranging programs, with substantial budgets and staffs, to educate their laymen to the social responsibilities of their faith.

#### The Essence of Judaism

Social action is not politics or sociology or economics, though it involves all of them. It is of the essence of religion, certainly of the

Jewish religion. It involves not only stirring sermons from the rabbis but effective grassroots action by the men and women who make up the congregation. Far from being an extraneous area of synagogue life, social action is an integral and essential part of synagogue activity. A synagogue which isolates itself from the fundamental issues of social justice confronting the community and the nation is false to the deepest traditions and values of the Jewish heritage. By working through synagogues for the advancement of social justice, we bridge the gap between confessional and commitment, between word and deed; we bring a sense of greater reality to our faith; and we fulfill ourselves as Jews. In this way we put living flesh on the words of our prayerbook: "O may all created in Thine image recognize that they are brethren, so that, one in spirit and one in fellowship, they may be forever united before Thee. Then shall Thy Kingdom be established on earth and the word of Thine ancient seer be fulfilled: The Lord will reign forever and ever."

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