

Temple Israel
7023 CASS STREET
OMAHA 32, NEBRASKA

SIDNEY H. BROOKS, M.H.L., RABBI

S E R M O N D E L I V E R E D

to

C O N G R E G A T I O N O F T E M P L E I S R A E L

by

R A B B I S I D N E Y H. B R O O K S

March 10, 1961

"T I M E T O T H I N K - A N D D I S S E N T"

We are all indebted to many teachers and many wise and loving counselors for making us what we are. Most of us earn our livings, enjoy the beauties and wonders of the world, remain healthy and happy because of what we have learned from others.

But the wisest teacher of all is he who can help us to learn from our own experiences and to deduce lessons from what we see and feel.

In the last few days I have thought quite deeply and often of some of the men and influences who have helped to shape our own particular thinking and philosophy of life. Not the least of these are both the sages of Judaism and the faithful interpreters of the American way of life.

My communication to you is a personal experience and my interpretation of it is based upon what I believe as a Jew and as an American. But, therein lies, I think, a vital and critical lesson for us all.

It is fortunate that the incident I must relate to you was not shared by everyone. It was not a pleasant experience. It was a harrowing and trying one.

And simple though it may sound in the telling, the experience itself was for me freighted with anxiety. I feared not for myself but for the society of which we are all a part. And I was primarily concerned lest all we know of decency and

March 10, 1961

truth and honor might crumble and fall in a heap.

I was one of a group of business and professional men -- some 300 of them -- among whom are those to be counted our personal friends as well as those whom all of us would surely regard as this community's outstanding leaders.

Together we listened to an address entitled simply "Communism" by Mr. Fred C. Koch of Wichita, Kansas. Mr. Koch is a crusader against Communism. Only later did I learn he is a member of The John Birch Society which takes as one of its ostensible goals the protection of our country from the evils of Communism.

Mr. Koch spoke to tell us how great is the danger to which our country exposes itself by not being vigilant enough against communist infiltration.

Thus far such a theme is hardly one which would excite fear or distrust or suspicion. No dedicated American would argue with the principle that the communist way of life is in direct antithesis to what we believe of democracy as an affirmation of the dignity and freedom of man.

But Mr. Koch in his zeal for eradication of Communism, turns his back on those very truths which have made America great. In his very long and intense speech we listen to him as an American denounce quite a number of great American personalities and institutions and government agencies for their communist sympathy or for being actively supportive of communist aims.

Wendell Wilkie, Harry Truman, Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower and Chief Justice Warren were among those names....together with names less luminary such as Alger Hiss and Whitaker Chambers. The public schools, the Supreme Court, the United Nations, and particularly UNESCO, the Ivy League Colleges, the pulpit, the radio and TV media, Hollywood, and the great educational funds such as the Carnegie Foundation -- again specifically mentioned -- all were suspect as witting and unwitting tools of the Kremlin. And so on for 45 minutes with examples so extreme and charges so wild that the accusations should have been unacceptable to anyone who bothered to think.

March 10, 1961

I was shocked not only because I disagree in principle and respect the office of the American Presidency, our institutions of government and the right of the American people to freedom of expression. I was sickened because I heard again the voice of Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and, in lesser tone, the hysteria of Joe MacCarthy. Here again was the method and madness of every Fascist who had ever used the fear of Communism to dismember democracy and to further the tyranny of absolute dictatorship of the mind, the spirit and the body politic. I am not unaware of the Communist threat. But I believe without reservation in ^{the power of} the democratic American process of law and government to combat it.

The worst fear came from the quick and ready acceptance of the group to whom this man spoke. People listened with rapt attention. The applause at the finish was real. And the Chairman -- a man whose courtesy at that moment properly exceeded his good judgment -- thanked the speaker for doing a great work for America!

No one bothered to ask "What America?" For, really, what is America without the integrity of its Presidency, its Supreme Court, its State Department, its place in the United Nations, its concern for the peace of the world, and its freedom of speech and the pursuit of learning? What "America" is this?

A table partner was shocked when I did not reflect his own enthusiasm. Others turned from me in dismay when I did not register the general level of approval.

When I returned to my office a call awaited me from a cherished Christian colleague who called to tell me how sickened he too had been more by the gullibility of the audience than by what the speaker had said.

The lesson could simply not be more important. The same persuasion, the same skill at demagoguery, the same extremes of attack used by this speaker were the techniques which fooled and misled and damned the self-regarded good people of Germany and Italy under like-minded Fascists.

The unmerited prestige, the false and phony influence attributed to this

March 10, 1961

speaker, his half-truths and deliberate lies intermingled with the full-truths of the communist threat which we fear most, all combine to sweep crowds into a shocked incredulity that stifles sober reflection into a deadly acceptance.

I am absolutely convinced that 99% of that audience knew better than to approve such wild statements. But each followed his neighbor. Each was afraid his own loyalty might be questioned. Each said to himself that the speaker must be right or he would not dare to say what he did. Each man who applauded surrendered his own right of moral judgment and his own spiritual condition when he refused to search out the real truth.

And the real truth is indeed shocking. Behind the apparent respectability of Mr. Koch lies the point of view of Robert Welch, founder of The John Birch Society who is reported to have said: "The men who join the John Birch Society...are going to be doing so primarily because they believe in me and what I am doing and are willing to accept my leadership anyway....We are not going to have factions developing on the two-sides-to-every question theme. Those members who cease to feel the necessary degree of loyalty can either resign or will be put out."
(Milwaukee Journal - 7/31/60)

In his book "The Politician" Mr. Welch charged that "In my own opinion, the Communists have one of their own actually in the presidency. (Emphasis mine) For this third man, Eisenhower, there is only one possible word to describe his purposes and actions. That word is treason."

And, again in The Blue Book of The John Birch Society, Mr. Welch says: "And democracy, of course, in government or organization, as the Greeks and Romans both found out....is merely a deceptive phrase, a weapon of demagoguery, and a perennial fraud."

A fine friend of America indeed!

I tell you this story because in our Judaism as indeed in every moral and ethical faith we should know each of us is the sole custodian of his own moral

March 10, 1961

- 4 -

speaker, his half-truths and deliberate lies intermingled with the half-truths of the communist threat which we fear most, all combine to sweep crowds into a shock-ed incredulity that stifles sober reflection into a heady acceptance.

I am absolutely convinced that 99% of that audience knew better than to approve such wild statements. But each followed his neighbor. Each was afraid his own loyalty might be questioned. Each said to himself that the speaker must be right or he would not dare to say what he did. Each man who applauded surrendered his own right of moral judgment and his own spiritual conviction when he refused to search out the real truth.

And the real truth is indeed shocking. Behind the apparent respectability of Mr. Koch lies the point of view of Robert Welch, founder of The John Birch Society who is reported to have said: "The men who join the John Birch Society...are going to be going so primarily because they believe in me and what I am doing and are willing to accept my leadership anyway....We are not going to have factions developing on the two-sides-to-every question theme. Those members who cease to feel the necessary degree of loyalty can either resign or will be put out."

(Milwaukee Journal - 7/31/60)

In his book "The Politician" Mr. Welch charged that "in my own opinion, the Communists have one of their own actually in the presidency." (Emphasis mine) For this third man, Eisenhower, there is only one possible word to describe his motives and actions. That word is treason. And, again in The Book of The John Birch Society, Mr. Welch says: "And democracy, of course, in government or organization, as the Greeks and Romans both found out....is merely a deceptive phrase, a weapon of demagoguery, and a perennial fraud."

A fine friend of America indeed! I tell you this story because in our Judgment as indeed in every moral and ethical faith we should know each of us is the sole custodian of his own moral

March 10, 1961

condition. The mitzvah - God's Commandment - is a personal commandment to each of us. Response is a personal response to God. There is no protection or excuse in a crowd that pursues evil.

Much is and will be in the news in coming months concerning judgment of the German people and their guilt during the Nazi era. Eichman is an incarnation of that evil. But men -- men like our men -- carried out his will. Men listened to speakers such as we heard and applauded and yelled and affirmed and went along.

A few days ago Justice Hugo Black dissented from two Supreme Court decisions to strengthen the investigating powers of the House Un-American Activities Committee and, in effect, limiting the rights of Americans as guaranteed by First Amendment to the Constitution.

The majority of the court held that it is proper to limit freedom in the effort to protect America from its enemies.

But Justice Black stated a far more traditional point of view, I think, in these magnificent words: "This country was not built by men who were afraid and cannot be preserved by such men....I deny that this nation's ability to preserve itself depends upon suppression of the freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition...Only by a dedicated preservation of the freedoms of the First Amendment can we hope to preserve our nation and its traditional way of life."

These are fearfully critical and changeable times. But in our perplexities let us not surrender our values. And in our fears let us not surrender our devotion to truth. And in the face of crowds let us not lose our individual souls. Let us think. And let us strive. And let us each remain faithful to what we know perfectly well is decent and good and the will of God.

RABBI SIDNEY H. BROOKS

SHB:wr

March 10, 1961

- 2 -

condition. The mitzvah - God's Commandment - is a personal commitment to each of us. Response is a personal response to God. There is no protection or excuse in a crowd that pursues evil.

Much is and will be in the news in coming months concerning judgment of the German people and their guilt during the Nazi era. Eichman is an incarnation of that evil. But men -- men like our men -- carried out his will. Men listened to speakers such as we heard and applauded and yelled and affirmed and went along. A few days ago Justice Hugo Black dissented from two Supreme Court decisions

to strengthen the investigating powers of the House Un-American Activities Committee and, in effect, limiting the rights of Americans as guaranteed by First Amendment to the Constitution.

The majority of the court held that it is proper to limit freedom in the effort to protect America from its enemies.

But Justice Black stated a far more traditional point of view, I think, in these magnificent words: "This country was not built by men who were afraid and cannot be preserved by such men.... I deny that this nation's ability to preserve itself depends upon suppression of the freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition.... Only by a dedicated preservation of the freedoms of the First Amendment can we hope to preserve our nation and its traditional way of life." These are fearfully critical and challenging times, but in our perplexities

let us not surrender our values. And in our fears let us not surrender our devotion to truth. And in the face of crowds let us not lose our individual souls. Let us think. And let us strive. And let us remain faithful to what we know perfectly well is decent and good and the will of God.

RABBI SIDNEY H. BROTH

SHB:wr