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MS-53: Moses J. Gries Papers, 1850-1934 (bulk 1890-1930).

Series D: Sermons and Addresses, 1893-1917, undated.

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“A Judaism for Free America,” 1910 October 3.

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Paragraphs from
" A Judaism for Free America "

The thought that tonight begins the New Year of the world is not of Biblical origin, but is the child of the rabbinical imagination.

Geology interprets the record, written in the earth, and proclaims the world is older than 5671.

Truer to the longing of the human heart is the quaint rabbinical conception, that at this season God writes the decree in the Book of Life, who shall live and who shall die. Sincere is the greeting to them we love - "Be you written for a good year in the Book of Life". No wish is dearer than, for life.

Earnest is the desire to live - man rejoices to be alive. Therefore, mankind welcomes the worldly new year with revelries and feasting and midnight orgies. Nobler far is our Jewish conception, interpreting with solemnity the passing of time and of life.

All important seems the life of the individual. It is a mere bauble in the life of a nation, in the destiny of a race, in the fate of a religion. We welcome the new year of life for the world, and a new year for Israel.

Israel rejoices to be alive - living when so many nations of antiquity have been buried in the oblivion of history. Noble is its life record of 4000 years. Wonderful is it that the Jew lives, in spite of persecutions centuries old and oppressions world-wide. Let us discover why the Jew lives - to what purpose his life has been preserved - and of what he is representative in the history of mankind.

The world voices the challenge - let the Jew explain his presence among the nations. The world explains simply and easily enough - it is the curse and punishment of God, because of Jewish blindness to a

revelation of the truth. It is the power and persistence of a tenacious race. It is a grim Hebrew obstinacy, refusing surrender to the crusader's sword and the fires of the inquisition.

Even sons of Israel question why are temples and synagogues necessary in this modern world of reality. They incline to believe the Jew is under the obsession of ancient follies and medieval superstitions.

There is but one explanation. The Jew lives because he is chosen as bearer of an historic truth - appointed to an historic work among the nations. The Jew still believes in the truth of the vision of his seers, and the ideals of his prophets, even though a small minority against the vast multitudes, even though protestant against a whole world.

Paradoxical though it seem - the enemies of Israel keep the Jew alive. The world's anti-Semitism is the only Jewishness of many sons and daughters of Israel.

Judaism is a noble religion, for Israel and for the world. We affirm truths the world does not yet believe, and we deny the world's interpretation of God and of history.

We want our Judaism to be a very part of our very lives.

The Jew believes in God - not as an abstraction, an infinite God of the Universe, but more the God in man, the inspiring power of life.

The Jew is insistent that life be righteous. He cannot live apparently acquiescent of the persistence of licentiousness and lawlessness in the heart of civilization. He must interpret life and society and all human relationships ethically, in the sight of God.

The Jew demands social justice - the betterment of social conditions - not in the antipodal regions, not in other states and cities, but here.

The affirmation of liberal Judaism, insisting upon harmony

between life and religion, is our strength. Our weakness is the failure to realize the unity of faith and conduct.

Judaism in America is free. It should be an honest, genuine religion. An end to all mockery and make-believe - to all sham and hypocrisy! Out of free America to the Jews of the world should sound the trumpet call to loyalty and faithfulness. The Jew under liberty should speak courage to Jews under oppression. The obligation rests upon the Jews of America. Judaism that survived the yoke of bondage and the sword of oppression should live triumphant in freedom. Our Judaism should be a religion of freedom, not a religion of the hunted and persecuted. Delivered from the ghetto walls, we should be emancipated from the ghetto spirit.

The Jews of the world look to free America for life and for liberty and for peace, and the Judaism of the world will turn to America to behold free, emancipated Judaism, that shall be a true world religion.

Let the Jews begin the New Year with a prayer for life for himself, for loved ones and also for the life of the Jew of history, representative of the ancient people of God - resolute in his determination that Israel shall live - distinguished and distinct among the peoples and religions by four thousand years of loyalty to the one true, the only God.