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THE
President's Address

TO THE
**Central Conference
of American Rabbis**

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES

AT THE

**TWENTY-SIXTH
CONVENTION**

CHARLEVOIX, MICH., JUNE 29, 1915

BY

Rabbi Moses J. Gries

OF

CLEVELAND, OHIO

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS
TO THE
CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS
TWENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL CONVENTION, AT CHARLEVOIX,
MICHIGAN, JUNE 29TH, 1915

Our Twenty-sixth Conference convenes in "peace and quietness," but over the entire East, thunders the noise and tumult of war. A crisis impends in the history of the world. The fate of nations and the destiny of empires are trembling in the balance. Is it the end of the old era, in the development of the human race? We are witness now to epoch-making events,—the war of nations and the conflict of races, involving one-half the entire earth's population, and destined to change the course of human history. It is the dawn of a new epoch.

The nineteenth century filled our hearts with rejoicing, in spite of its years of darkness. With enthusiasm we hailed the twentieth century—with its growing sense of humanity, its deepening consciousness of human brotherhood, its mighty protest against injustice, and its hope and dream of human freedom. And now we behold the rebirth of hate—nation arrayed against nation, and race against race.

Marvelous have been the achievements of the modern mind, and glorious the wonders of modern science. But is it glorious that the achievements of the mind and the wonders of science are being utilized as destructive weapons of death? Fierce passions and furious nationalism have swept aside all sense of justice and have overwhelmed the balance and the poise, not only of the mob in the street, but also of the thoughtful and the learned. The light which illumined the world

has been darkened. The great nations, the leaders of civilization, the torch bearers of mankind, have been bereft of reason and conscience.

The whole world is in turmoil. Thrones are tottering, empires are crumbling and millions of the masses are plunged into misery. An unshakeable sense of horror haunts us. The war "overshadows the world like an ominous cloud, black with death." Some catch a gleam of light even in the darkness of the cataclysm. They see compensation in the world wide patriotism of peoples, the spontaneous response of millions, the revelation of idealism, the marvelous human loyalty, the devoted offering of human lives, the superb spirit of sacrifice, testing the inmost fiber of men and women.

No patriotism, no sacrifice can gloss over the terrible truth and the fearful facts—the breakdown of civilization, the desecration of the sanctities of life and home, the abrogation of the moral law, and the brutalization of the human spirit.

A CRISIS FOR ISRAEL

A crisis impends for Israel. The fate of one-half the Jews of the world is trembling in the balance. The millions of Jews of Eastern Europe are buffeted from persecutor to oppressor. Is it the beginning of a new epoch in the Jewish history? The war of nations and the conflict of races will affect permanently the lives of the whole Jewish people everywhere.

All mankind has been made eye-witness to Belgium's misery and sorrow. Belgium's cry of affliction sounds in the ears of the world. Galicia and Poland suffer equal tragedy, but the world neither sees nor hears. Millions of Jews, always in want and in wretchedness, now experience cruelty intensified. Hundreds of thousands are sacrificing their lives for the flag of their country, yes, even for the flag of the oppressor—and no promise of freedom is clearly spoken. The loyal offering of life, in a nation's cause, should quench the fire of Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria, and kindle the light of freedom—with equal human rights—in Russia.

Not yet is there any abatement of Russian persecution, nor any change in the legal status, nor any removal of dis-

abilities. Again thousands of Jews have been compelled to take up the staff of the wanderer, expelled from their homes and native villages—the aged and the infirm, and mothers with unborn babes, facing starvation and the danger of death. The outrageous inhumanities have stirred even a George Brandes to the indictment of Poland, in the forum of nations, and Israel Zangwill proclaims, “Polish Jews are living through one of the greatest tragedies in history.” No country and no empire may drive out its people to become homeless wanderers upon the face of the earth. Inalienable are the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, in their own fatherland. Let no lesser interest weaken our insistent demand for the God-given rights, of all human beings. When will the intolerable injustice end? When Russia hears and heeds the counsel of her true statesmen, like Sergius Witte, and abolishes immediately the Jewish Pale of Settlement, and solves the Jewish question in the only possible way—by giving her Jews, equal rights, as citizens and as human beings.

JEW OF AMERICA, RELIEVE !

The misery and misfortune of the millions of non-combatants are the obligation of their own countries and governments. Each country and government has the imperative duty to care for its own citizens and people. The Jews of America have heard Israel's cry of affliction and have struggled to lift Israel's heavy yoke-burden, but in vain.

Again, in the face of world-wide misery, we discover ourselves unprepared and unorganized. To meet overwhelming disaster, we endeavor to create national and international agencies. We are never ready, though Jews are ever in distress and have not yet escaped the yoke of the world's cruelty, oppression and persecution.

Our duty is to send relief, and yet more relief, and it will not be enough. It saddens and shames us to know how inadequate has been our response; but in spite of all discouragement, we dare not abandon our efforts.

Is there one, in America, who would witness actual human suffering and refuse help? Is there one, among us all, who could

see babes perish and men and women die from hunger and exposure and refuse to hear the piteous cry? I am unwilling to believe that the Jews of America "don't care." Perhaps when they realize the facts they will do their full duty. America is the only Jewish community, in the world, able to send relief. American Jews heretofore, always, have answered Israel's appeal for help. Drive home with power, the magnitude of the misery, to compel sacrifice for our unfortunate brothers!

CREATE ONE COMMITTEE—PERMANENT, REPRESENTATIVE,
DULY AUTHORIZED

The hour has struck to end the confusion, the disorganization and the over-organization in American Israel. Shall every crisis find us unready and unprepared? It can no longer be a question of whose shall be the credit and the glory. Human need cries out for sympathy and help. The cause of long-suffering Israel is greater far than the interest of any society. The pride of individuals and the prestige of organizations count as naught against the fate of millions. The crisis condemns "division of counsel," and demands "unity of action." Let the multitude of committees and of leaders surrender their claims to priority and precedence. They must unite to create *one committee*, which shall be *permanent*—and *thoroughly representative*—and *duly authorized*, with the right and the power to speak and to act on behalf of all the Jews of America. The united heart of Israel will speak, with a voice powerful enough, to compel the hearing of the nations, to right the wrongs of the centuries.

The psychological hour for the Jew has come and united Israel should speak with one voice.

WAR'S BRUTALIZATION OF MANKIND

Fearful has been the cost of the war, in military expenditures, in the destruction of commerce and in the loss of human productivity. The cost is estimated at a sum so huge, as to stagger the imagination—more than twenty thousand millions of dollars. Still more fearful is the cost in human life, in human sorrow and woe, in the lessening of human efficiency in this

generation and in the impairment of the efficiency of the race, for generations to come. Unquestionably, it is the most gigantic blow ever struck at the advance of the human race.

Who has power to measure the full significance of the daily cost of the war—fifty millions of dollars? Fifty millions daily would transform human well-being, in every country of the world.

And mankind will not quickly recover from the cost in the brutalization of the race. And we have not heard the full story of brutality and outrage, of savagery and atrocity and of immoralities and indecencies unmentionable. Loud is the outcry against uncivilized warfare and its inhuman cruelties. "Civilized warfare" does not exist. "Humane war" is unthinkable. The whole world has been brutalized until it has grown callous to the daily butchery and slaughter. Who is there that is altogether free from some inner rejoicing when new disaster befalls the "enemy"? And *we are "neutral."* The war has brutalized mankind—with a brutalization of the spirit, until gentle women read with calm, the headlines of horror, and children rejoice in the terrible tales of destruction and death.

Jews, too, have been brutalized. Never before has the Jew heard the tragic story of suffering, untouched to pity and unquickened to relieve.

Teachers of the spirit, our labor will be long and hard to counteract this work of brutalization, to overthrow the dominance of the brute in man and, in the presence of brute force and brutal passions victorious, to re-enthroned the spiritual.

STOP THE WAR!

The war has flung the challenge to teachers of religion. Difficult and most perplexing are its ethical problems. What is the duty of the people of a neutral nation? Neutrality cannot spell indifference. Never has there been so keen an interest in the affairs of the world. Neutrality cannot compel the suspension of moral obligation and of ethical judgment. We deplore with sorrow every lapse toward brutality. We flame with indignation that human beings fight and kill like ferocious beasts. The pitying heart cries out, "Let not another life be

sacrificed. Any price we would pay and every sacrifice make to stop the war and the human holocaust."

What is our ethical duty? If two men be fighting and are at death-grips, do we question about neutrality or ethics? We stop the fight! We do *not* supply nourishment for strength, nor weapons for destruction! If nations are battling and are grappling unto death, what is our ethical duty? Humanity outweighs "neutrality." Humanity demands that we stop the fight and do not supply food to sustain the combatants, nor ammunition to continue.

The neutral nations seem pitifully powerless; but if the United States and the other neutral nations have not the power to suppress the world-disorder, they have the power to refrain from helping to prolong it. The warring nations have broken the laws of mankind—not one nation, but all the nations. All are outlaws against the human race. If we are sincere in the desire to stop the war, if we of America are willing to pay any price and to make every sacrifice, to save human life, let us not enrich ourselves by the blood of our fellow creatures and by the grim harvest of death. In the years to come it will be repulsive to the nobler American spirit that we rejoiced to make fortunes out of the misfortunes of our brother men and sister nations. *Stop all food supply and all war supplies and all money supplies to all the warring nations.* Let America unite with the neutral nations to stop the war, under the penalty of the severance of relations and the cessation of commerce with them all. Let America endeavor to lead the nations of the world to peace.

A WORLD TRIBUNAL

Let us vision the future and prepare for the coming era of Peace. Who dares, in the midst of war, to speak of Peace—never was there a time more unpropitious; and I answer, "Never a time, in the history of the world, more propitious. The curse of war is teaching mankind the blessing of Peace." Who so bold as to dream of Right and Justice—never did dream seem more absurd. Might makes right in the world; and I answer, "Never in all human history, has it seemed more reasonable that Right must make might in the world." Who so visionary

as to appeal for Humanity, Civilization and Law—individuals and nations recognize but one law, the *law of necessity*, the law of self-preservation; and I answer, "Never has the need for international law and international authority, in the interest of humanity and civilization, been seen so clearly". The present war is not alone the deadliest blow ever struck at human civilization. The present war is the most gigantic demonstration of international anarchy, of the lack of all government to enforce order, in the world. Nations like individuals have become lawless and are fighting it out to the death. Nations no more than individuals may be lawless. Nations, the most powerful as well as the weakest, must all be answerable before a world-tribunal. Mankind needs the recognition of the majesty and the supremacy of Law, that the world be ruled, not by force but by Justice.

The peace of the nations must be built upon the eternal rock of justice—justice to all men, all races, all nations, and all peoples—with no man slave, no nation subject, and no race under oppression. Men and nations must be free. The Hebrew Prophets were seers of Truth; "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." There can be no permanent peace until Righteousness is established, until Justice be enthroned.

We still believe in, and await the fulfillment of the Messianic Ideals of the Hebrew Prophets—the vision of Peace, when swords shall be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, and nations shall learn war no more—and the dream of human brotherhood as the final goal of the race.

THE CRISIS FOR AMERICA

These are days of crisis for America. Never, in all our history, has there been a situation so full of perilous possibilities. It is a time for soberness of speech and for restraint in discussion, lest America catch the contagion of the war madness, lest America be whirled into the maelstrom of war.

Mankind hates war. Departed are the glory and glamor and heroism of war. Of all the battling nations, not one is eager to claim distinction for its beginning. Every nation justifies itself, proclaiming that it is fighting in defense of its national

life. The best thought of America is interpreting war as a crime against the human race. How significant this revelation of the mind and heart of America—more than one hundred artists engaged in a competition for sculptures on "War." Less than one half dozen portrayed war as glory, heroism and sacrifice, and the one hundred interpreted war as horror and terror and tragedy, as misery and inhumanity, as despotism and desolation.

America desires not war, but Peace. May the President of these United States, inspired by patriotism, be guided by wisdom, to secure, maintain and establish Justice, along the pathway of Peace. The appeal sounds to every American, for an earnest, intelligent, high-minded and noble-souled patriotism. Let all true Americans unite to hold America to Peace. America, unselfish in purpose, noble in national ideal, loves Peace and pursues Justice.

The time calls for a united nation, with one mind and one heart; a nation undivided by allegiance to parties or by devotion to old fatherlands. The United States is one, with one united people. It is clear now, absolutely clear to all true Americans, that a man can belong and be loyal to but one nation, at any one time. We have but one flag—our beautiful stars and stripes—may it ever be to us and to all the world, the symbol of Freedom and Justice.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The wisdom of our plan of reorganization of the Church and State Committee has been made manifest. Urgent is the demand for better organization against the associations which menace religious liberty in America. Immediate is the need for more thorough preparedness against the false arguments offered in the interest of legislation, favoring the introduction of Bible Reading in the Public Schools. In the face of tremendous pressure, we triumphed, because of the inherent righteousness of our cause. The duty of leadership and the responsibility for initiative rest upon our State Chairmen, but all of us must study the problem and know the law and be eternally vigilant.

It is the mature judgment of students of American history that American political freedom would never have been won if simultaneously religious liberty had not been achieved. In the days of the Revolution, the leaders for political liberty were the advocates of religious liberty. "Church and state, separate and independent, is uniquely American," and constitutes "the most striking contribution of America to the science of government."

Organized forces threaten to invade the sanctity and to destroy the character of the American Public School. With all vigilance and with all might, we must safeguard its sanctity and maintain its character inviolate. The public school must be for all the children of the Republic, offering equal opportunity to all and equal, unreserved participation to all. The public school is *the* institution to unify and to Americanize the children of the nation. Religious Liberty is "the great gift of America to civilization and to the world."

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Progress and deepening interest in Religious Education have characterized this year. New state and interstate Teachers' Associations continue to be organized. Perhaps the time is near when the Conference with other national organizations, interested in Jewish Religious Education, should attempt a more definite union of the various State Associations. To train, to educate, and to inspire our body of teachers is a work of the highest necessity; but it is equally important that our congregations, individually and collectively, be convinced of the need for stronger city, state and national organization to reach our "unaffiliated" children.

Fully fifty percent of all the children of America are never enrolled in religious schools. Who can estimate how small is the percentage of those who complete all the years of instruction? Thousands are outside of the religious schools, untouched by religious instruction and inspiration. Imperative our duty to the child! Equally imperative our duty to Judaism!

Ours is the duty to awaken fathers and mothers to the necessity of religious education and to the importance of a

genuine religious life for themselves and their children. The manifest weakness in the religious life of all our communities exists because no teaching has power to stand against the overwhelming worldly influences, against the sneer and the scorn of the scoffer, and especially against the destructive example of our own men and women, non-religious in their own lives and homes.

Shall it not come to pass speedily, in our day, that somewhere, one city, or one state, will be so thoroughly organized that it may be said, with truth, that every Jewish child is offered the opportunity for Religious Education?

COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS

Your President refrains from reviewing the work of the Conference Committees, but deems it both privilege and duty to voice the appreciation of the Conference to the various committees for their distinguished labors and unselfish service.

The new Union Hymnal has been completed and published during the past year. It has been welcomed in America and abroad because of its literary excellence, the eminence of its musical compositions, and for its genuine Jewish character. The Committee on Revision of the Union Prayer Book has made an earnest beginning and the Committee on Ministers' Handbook, as the result of conscientious labor, is prepared to present a revised report, which, it is hoped, will prove satisfactory to all. The Conference looks forward expectantly to the results of the investigations of our Commissions on Jews of Other Lands, on Survey of Jewish Religious Conditions and on Social Justice.

CO-OPERATION

The Conference continues its wise policy of co-operation. The Conference is not only ready and willing, but eager to co-operate. We await with interest the report of our Joint Commissions with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations on "Superannuated Ministers' Fund" and on "Tracts." We renew our expression of satisfaction in the very helpful co-operation with the Department of Synagog and School

Extension, in the work of the Board of Editors, in the publication and distribution of the Holy Day Calendars and Holy Day notices, and in the furtherance of Summer Services.

NEW BIBLE TRANSLATION

The most striking illustration of our successful co-operation will reach its culmination during this year. The abandonment of the Conference plans for a revision of the English Bible and our co-operation with the Jewish Publication Society in the preparation of the new Bible Translation have been fully justified. Again we tender our sincere tribute of recognition to all the Editors, and particularly to our own faithful representatives, Rabbis Kaufman Kohler, David Philipson, and Samuel Schulman, for their service of scholarship, rendered to Judaism. The first edition, popular in price, is promised early in 1916. Let us welcome it with genuine enthusiasm and help to re-introduce the Bible into every Jewish home. May Israel again become worthy the name, "People of the Book."

IN MEMORIAM

We mourn the untimely death of Adolf Guttmacher and Abraham R. Levy, faithful friends, honored colleagues, and loyal workers in the vineyard of the Lord. May their consecrated service be an inspiration to us, to their congregations, and to their communities.

"The memory of the righteous is for blessing."

SERVICE AND APPRECIATION

To the Officers and to the Members of the Executive Board who have so loyally co-operated with me, and to the Chairmen and the Committee Members who have rendered such difficult and useful service, I tender my sincere personal gratitude. I value at the fullest their sacrifice of precious hours and of needed strength; and I believe the Conference appreciates their uncompensated and unselfish labors. Only such disinterested spirit and consecrated service have made possible the continued success and the increasing power of the Conference.

Would that every Rabbi of standing in America were not only member of the Conference, but active in its service, so that with united wisdom and continued strength, we might grapple with and adequately solve our perplexing problems. Rabbis are the chosen representatives of the people, and by virtue of high station, the appointed leaders of their communities. May we not only teach and preach, but also live the truths and principles we champion. May we be the exemplars of the consecrated life, in the presence of materialism unswerving in our devotion to idealism, holding high the banner of the spirit.

ISAAC MAYER WISE

In surrendering the burden of the distinguished office with which you have twice honored me, memory recalls the presence and the spirit of the great Founder, the master mind who conceived—the master force who created this Central Conference of American Rabbis. Only a few years more and the Jews of America will celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth. It is most fitting that his pupils and disciples shall lead in the plans for a noble commemoration. I, therefore, recommend that the Conference authorize its incoming Officers and Executive Board, to arrange in co-operation with other national organizations, for the one-hundredth anniversary celebration of the birth of our immortal teacher and friend, Isaac Mayer Wise.

"THE COLLAPSE OF RELIGION?"

The "collapse of Religion" has startled the pious, the reverent and the believing. Mankind has dishonored every great religion, Christianity, Judaism and Mohammedanism. The nations are blaspheming. They pray to God for more power to kill. They worship not God, but the war-gods of power. Religion has proven its powerlessness to prevent or to stop the hate and fury, the blindness and madness of men.

Not only Religion has failed; Education and Science have been as powerless. The insensate madness of war has overturned the minds and unbalanced the reason of the pious, the educated and the learned. Preachers of religion and philoso-

phers, poets and artists, the thinkers and the learned bombard one another with verbal cannonade of fury and hate. Christianity has failed among the "Christian nations;" but it signifies no triumph of Judaism, except for the revelation, in all its nakedness, of the futility of meekness and submission, of resignation and non-resistance. The teachings of religion are vanity of vanities. Vanity of vanities are Love and Gentleness, Mercy and Humaneness, Brotherhood and Justice. "This is the grand defeat of all of us Utopians."

LEADING THE FOUNDATIONS OF CIVILIZATION

Let us be driven not to despair, but to searching inquiry. What are the fundamentals of human society? Are there no ethical obligations of man to man, and nation to nation? Have the commandments been repealed? Shall a modern Moses, beholding the faithless nations serving the golden calf and the gods of war and force, hurl down the mountain-side and break to pieces the Tables of Stone because the faithless nations are unworthy to receive the Law? What is the goal of the human race? Is it power and world mastery, dominion and world-domination, or is it justice and freedom and human happiness for the millions of men?

Never has it been more clear that the world cannot be guided by the doctrine of might nor be ruled by the force of arms. Never has it been more clear that Love and not hate, Justice and not injustice, Humanity and not inhumanity, Human Brotherhood, and not the conflict of races and nations and religions are the foundation-stones of a true civilization.

THE MODERN CHALLENGE TO RELIGION

The modern world speaks bold challenge to Religion. Modern life does not proclaim that Religion has reality and power. The fearful death-grapple of nations and races has driven home the unreality and the non-acceptance of religious teachings and principles. Religion seems to have failed. It has not gripped human hearts and minds. Man has failed—he has not gripped the ideals and the spirit of religion. Religions historically have been the moral guides and teachers of mankind. All the more

startling their failure, after these many, many centuries. How manifest the moral shortcomings of the race! Are Business and Industry and Politics inspired and guided and ruled by religious ideals and principles? Do they not ignore Christianity, Judaism and all Religion? Love and Justice and Brotherhood have gripped the conscience of mankind. Behold poverty and war, crime and vice, immorality and inhumanity, in the heart of this civilized world.

We, the teachers and the champions of the ideal, dare not surrender faith nor lose courage, even in this hour, when the ideal is mocked in laughter and dragged through the mire and drenched with human blood. We believe in the reality of Religion. We shall not cease to labor to reunite Life with Religion that once again Religion may inspire and consecrate human feeling and thought and conduct.

America awaits consecrated leaders, and Israel inspires prophets. The "perfect ideal of Religion," the Religion of Justice, Mercy and Humility must be made real and be applied to the problems of our generation and country—to quicken consciences, to awaken moral passion and to kindle in men and women the holy enthusiasm to live nobly. Rabbis may teach and inspire, but Israel must activate the power and vitalize the life of the Temple.

Steadfast in our faith in the eternal truth of Judaism, conscious of the true nobility of Jewish life and of Jewish history, let us, with the resistless power of human hearts enkindled and of souls aflame with Truth, teach and preach our Judaism to the Jews of America and to the world.

May we be illumined with vision, to perceive with clarity the final goal, and endowed with wisdom, to choose with foresight the present path, and inspired with prophetic power, proclaim the truths, principles and ideals, which like the eternal stars have guided Israel, through the centuries.