

JUDAISM ISSUE IN HEATED DISPUTE

Rabbis Wolsey and Gries Take Opposite Sides Con- cerning Reform.

Head of Temple Says His Questions Are Not Not Answered.

A controversy that has arisen between Rabbi Moses J. Gries of The Temple and Rabbi Louis Wolsey of the Scovill-av. synagogue, regarding reform Judaism and the dropping of the ancient rites and customs of the Jewish religion, has attracted widespread attention.

Rabbi Wolsey has come out in favor of the restoration of a number of the old rites that have been abolished by many of the Jews in America, in a sermon on "The Failure of Reform Judaism."

Rabbi Gries has taken issue with Rabbi Wolsey, and a number of questions were asked by him in an open letter directed to Rabbi Wolsey and published in last week's Jewish weeklies. Because of the fact that both are rabbis of representative and prominent American congregations that have been identified with the Jewish reform movement, the debate has aroused general interest.

The Jewish Independent today will publish an answer from Rabbi Wolsey to Rabbi Gries' questions and in addition will publish a statement from Rabbi Gries based on the answer of Rabbi Wolsey.

In his second letter Rabbi Gries charges Rabbi Wolsey with being guilty of evasion and asks whether he obeys the dietary laws that he believes should be restored. Rabbi Wolsey in his answer had expressed the belief that reform destroys the Jew's uniqueness and that reform philosophy paves the way for the Jew's extinction. In part Rabbi Wolsey's letter as published in today's Jewish Independent is as follows:

I have read your open reply to me with great care, and while a controversy is as distasteful to me as it is to you, I welcome your questions most cordially, as they give me an opportunity to more clearly and extendedly defend my position. I would regret with you, any religious dispute begun in petulance, arrogance or in offended dignity, and continued in bitterness and passion. But there need be no such disputation between us. I feel sure that we can conduct such a debate in the best of feeling and with the heartiest respect for one another's opinions.

On the other hand, I could hardly conceive of any depth to our religious life, if it feared to dispute and to discuss vital issues. If Beth Hillel and Beth Shammai had not disagreed we might never have had a Talmud. Their disputations were carried on in the name of religious truth, and I see no reason why our own differing viewpoints might not be ventilated under the inspiration of a like love for the truth. For we are not debating a local issue. This is a matter of vital concern to all of American Judaism, for the interpretations which we are respectively assuming are merely straws which indicate the currents of thought in all of American Israel.

I agree with you very heartily when you say that "Nothing is easier than to make broad generalizations. It is very hard to establish them." If, however, you have introduced your argument with this truism as an explanation for your own failure to defend the reform movement with anything more than dogmatic generalizations, you have only proved that you have not justified the continued existence of the reform interpretation. "Not a single phrase is true. It is a misinterpretation of the spirit of reform." These are generalizations, dogmas which require something more than mere utterance to substantiate. If you have so premised your statement as to serve as an indictment of my sermon which was presented to the public only in the form of a synopsis, then I must recall the Talmudic aphorism: "One must not accuse another of a blemish which he possesses himself."

Rabbi Gries in his answer to this letter says among other things:

I asked you direct questions in order to point a path through the labyrinth of words—and to find a way out of the confusion of thought and of tongue. I desired to have you define your position more clearly. I

wanted less rhetoric and more logic—"less thunder and more light."

I have just finished reading your very lengthy reply. I regret to be compelled to say that you failed to answer the questions, in direct straightforward fashion. You are guilty of evasion—far more definitely than the conference which you denounced because of "evasion." You charged the conference with "a policy of proselytism," and you failed utterly to point out the phrases or words, as specifically requested, to substantiate your statement. You add further inaccuracy as concerns facts.

You contradict yourself absolutely. Having previously said most positively—"The Book of Reform Judaism is closed—its story is ended," etc., you yourself are attempting to continue the story. You distinctly deny that you are "originating a new movement in Judaism." I agree with you. You are not originating a new movement. You are compelled to acknowledge that many reform rabbis for some time have had a like constructive program and plan. Then your former sweeping indictment of the spirit of reform and of reform rabbis is evidently not true. Perhaps you said reformers and meant the "formidable radicals." And again you would be wrong—for the "revivals" you advocate have been most successfully reintroduced by leading radicals in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh—and elsewhere.

Your constructive program, you inform me, is contained in the synopsis of your sermon called "The Golden Mean." This constructive program is now and has always been a part of the work of reform Judaism and of reform rabbis. It contains nothing new—save the one amazing suggestion, viz.: Your appeal for "obedience to the dietary laws as they are ordained in the Bible," and to the distinction between the clean and unclean as outlined in the eleventh chapter of Leviticus.

Do you obey the dietary laws ordained in the Bible? In the eleventh chapter of Leviticus? If you do, it is news to me. And what about other dietary laws in the Bible, certainly of equal validity and authority?

Vaughan Glaser Must Share Play.

Vaughan Glaser, playing "St. Elmo" in New York, sought to prevent another man from producing a similar play. The decision of the court was that inasmuch as the copyright of the novel upon which the play is founded had expired, Glaser could not restrict the play.

Safety, service and reasonable
See what Olmsted says, last item, page 5.

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