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“Rabbi Gries and the Open Temple,” undated.

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RABBI GRIES AND THE OPEN TEMPLE

I have not the time and surely not the desire for newspaper controversy. Often, in the past ten years, I have been misquoted and misrepresented and the principles and policies of The Temple in Cleveland falsely judged. Our Jewish papers unfortunately take little or no pains to verify the reports upon which they base their criticisms, unjust and sometimes untruthful. They have sinned more than once in this regard. Their erroneous statements have been pointed out, and no honorable acknowledgment has been made.

In the present instance, The Israelite is at fault. Some time ago it published an announcement of a "Yom Kippur ball" to be given in Cleveland, and then made editorial comment to the effect that the prominent families of Cleveland were connected with its management, ending with the thought, "There is something radically wrong with Cleveland Judaism."

Now as to the truth--a ball for the benefit of the Jewish Hospital of Cleveland was given on the night following Yom Kippur. It was not under the auspices of prominent families of our Jewish community, and it does not in the least prove that "there is something radically wrong with Cleveland Judaism." The intent of this phrase, like unto others repeatedly published, was: "This is another fruit of radicalism--no Torah--no Sabbath--and the Open Temple."

I do not know what erroneous report and deductions Professor Gottheil has sent to The London Jewish Chronicle. My good friend, Dr. Heller, whom I personally esteem, has been

wofully misled. He says: "Perhaps it would be unjust to seek a connection between the secular~~ist~~ methods with which we are differing and this strange insensitiveness to religious delicacy; but can one altogether avoid association of the two under so strange a breach of religious propriety."

It would be unjust and illogical and untrue. As it happens, the Jewish Hospital Society was originally founded to establish a hospital that would be Jewish--kosher. Its interests are guided by those who are orthodox (?), genuinely (?) Jewish. As far as I know, its officers and its influential supporters are all too orthodox and too Jewish (?) for affiliation with The Temple. Thus much for the logic of Dr. Heller's conclusions.

To return to The Israelite's phrase, "There is something radically wrong with Cleveland Judaism." I have lived in Cincinnati and in Cleveland. I have had abundant opportunity to observe the religious life of both communities. I do not hesitate to declare that the interest in things religious, in Cleveland today, is as strong--I believe stronger --than in Cincinnati. An honest and unprejudiced investigation of the present religious life and spirit of both communities, will make this truth very plain. In Cleveland, more men--and especially young men--attend public worship and are actively engaged in work for our Jewish cause. I do not hesitate to challenge comparison with any large Jewish community in this country. Our congregational growth has been the largest! Does this mean nothing to those who have been^{and} are today crying aloud

about the problem of the unaffiliated--and why do not the young men join Jewish congregations? Our Sabbath School is the largest congregational sabbath school in the world, and children are not tempted by false attractions. They are eager to come. Few indeed the Jewish communities where children must not be compelled to go to Sabbath School. Our Confirmation Classes are larger than in other congregations. We hold our children and seek to hold them through manhood and womanhood.

Dr. Heller waives all this aside with the phrases, "subtle materialism, embodied positivism and ethical culture." Reverence and awe and the element of spirituality are all lacking." I shall not argue about these terms--least of all about that much abused phrase, spirituality. But I believe it far from the truth for anyone to say, reverence is lacking. Our men and women reveal a reverence as deep and as genuine as any other Jews whom it has been my fortune to know. I ask Dr. Heller to ~~ask~~ name ~~specifically~~ specifically one large community which is possessed of the reverence and awe and element of spirituality which Cleveland is said to lack. It would be interesting to study the life of its men and women and children.

A word as to the "Torah" question. I do not regret--I rejoice--that we have abolished the Torah reading. I am familiar ~~am~~ enough with the inspiring and impressive Torah reading in Jewish congregations. It is not inspiring and rarely listened to, and still more rarely understood. Our congregation does give attention to the Bible lesson, and may

understand--impossible with the Torah reading.

I do not shrink from a discussion of our Sabbath problem, but the time is not now. The ~~murder~~ desecration of the Sabbath in Cleveland and in New Orleans and in Cincinnati and in all our Jewish communities, has absolutely no relation, either as cause or effect, with the Open Temple.

To Dr. Heller and to others, we may seem unJewish. My conviction is firm, and the facts sustain it, that we are as Jewish in thought and feeling as any community known to me, either by observation or by report. We value non-essentials less and Jewish essentials more. What I said recently, at the close of my tenth year of service in Cleveland, explains our purposes:

"The report of our ten years' work is indeed a record of which we may be proud. We have achieved a success undreamed of by the most optimistic ten years ago. I do not measure our success by the growth of our congregation, and of our sabbath school, and of our other useful activities. Our real success is understood only when we compare and contrast the spirit of our community today with the spirit which ruled in our city ten years ago.....

"Our Temple worship is most important. Our service is strong when we compare it with the service in other congregations here and in other cities. It is weak, in that it falls short of our own ideal. I shall never be satisfied until every family affiliated with our congregation is represented at our service weekly throughout the year. You owe this to your Rabbi,

whom you have chosen to be your teacher and leader. You owe it to The Temple, which you have built for service to God and to men. You owe it to our Jewish cause, to which we are pledged and to further which we are banded together.....

I rejoice that ours is "the Open Temple." Its gates should stand ever open to all who would worship with us, to all who seek religious instruction and moral improvement. It must be to all of us a source of pride that our Temple has become the natural center of our Jewish activities.....

Ten years have I served you. Ten years have we worked honestly together. We have been successful--more successful than we dared to hope. But my ideal is still unrealized. I shall never rest content until in our community it may be said with truth that there is no Jewish child without a religious education, and no Jewish adult without religious worship and without religious life.

Our work is misunderstood, and our purposes are misinterpreted and misrepresented. I sincerely believe that we are on the right road. Our work proves it. The response of the men and the women and the children of our community is the answer to our critics here and everywhere."

I seek not to deceive myself or others. We of Cleveland are endeavoring honestly to meet our problem. Our Jews by birth we would hold loyal in heart and soul to our Jewish cause.

Few rabbis seem to understand the spirit and principles and methods of the Institutional Church of the Open

Temple. Judging by the sweeping condemnation which Dr. Heller has pronounced, I am confident that he has very little actual knowledge of any institutional or open churches and temples. His "philosophy of institutionalism" may be very good, but his facts are all wrong. My own position, Jewish, I believe, even though Dr. Heller says dogmatically, "This is not Judaism,"-- I have stated clearly and emphatically enough.

The Jew's historic life-purpose means more than the struggle for physical freedom and for right of conscience and liberty of worship. Moral and religious leadership belongs to the Jew. It is his historic heritage. Physical freedom won and right of conscience established and liberty of worship undenied, the true work of the Jew begins. *He* should lead and guide and inspire mankind morally and religiously. *He should* lead not in world conversion but by conversion of the Jews to loyalty, to Jewish truth and Jewish ideals. We have not lost our previous heritage but Israel treasures it not. Israel is free and prosperous, but not religious. We have no deep consciousness of a divine appointment. We are not possessed by enthusiasm for our cause.

We have palatial Temples and brilliant preachers and great scholars and flourishing congregations--successful according to the varying interpretation of that term. But where is the community in which the men are not regularly absent from worship or unaffiliated or untempled--where are the women, devout and religious--where do the young men give their enthusiasm and their energy to the congregation--where are the young men not drifting morally and religiously--and where is the

community in which children are not out of the religious school?

Where is there a synagogue or Temple doing its full work, reaching its men and women and children. O, the commercialism of our synagogues and temples, selling the privilege to worship and retailing religious instruction. How much does it cost to worship with you on the great holydays--how much that men and women may hear the voice and song of prayer and the message announced in the name of God--how much that children may receive the lessons of religion, and may renew the covenant made with all generations!

Thank God! a new spirit is widening the walls and purposes of narrow synagogues and temples. Schools have opened to the children; and temples must open to the men and women willing to worship God. Never again be the question necessary in portal of temple and house of learning--how much to worship God and to learn the teachings of Judaism. Religious school should be open to all. I believe in the "Open Temple." Where then is the temple which is doing its full duty to its community--which is open to all--and whose gates, men and women and children enter with thanksgiving? Of whom, may it with truth be said, "This is the generation of those that seek Thee."?

I do not wait to hear your protest--"Temple-going is not the all-important thing in Judaism--worship is not the all of Judaism."

I accept the thought, and I ask for more than times of worship and hours for religious instruction. Front the conditions as they exist. See the truth so plain. Neither orthodox synagogues nor reform temples are reaching our men and

women and children. Everywhere--a manifest tendency to a death-
~~cult~~ in our Jewish worship! The Kaddish must be said and not
 understood--service must be faithfully attended through the
 year of mourning and ^{on} the "Yahr Zeit." O magnificent and pious
 Kaddish and Yahrzeit Judaism, that has changed the day of
 delight into a Sabbath of sorrow! Too often have our men and
 women only a death relationship to the ~~Temple~~. Our Judaism
 whose message is joy and life has degenerated in practice into
 a religion of death and mourning. Welcome the movement and
 the inspiration which will bring back the healthy interests of
 life. Our temples are not to be monuments, beautiful and cost-
 ly, to satisfy our pride and vanity. Monuments they are to the
 living and to the dead. To the dead, erect if you will stones
 massive--impressive--and consecrate them. To the living--
 there must be more than consecrated stone. There must be
 spirit within the stone--and power to help living men and women
 and children--forming and building hearts and souls--purifying
 and uplifting conduct.

The ~~Temple~~ shall be primarily for worship, for the
 sorrowing and for the rejoicing--for instruction in the law and
 tradition of Israel--and for the application of these to the
 necessities of the age and generation. Of old, the synagogue
 was house of learning, devoted to the study of the Law. Today,
 it must continue to be house of learning and must be devoted
 to the study of life and of all its interests.

Judaism is concerned with the whole of life. It
 makes no false distinctions between the sacred and the secular.

It does not divide life and conduct into religious and ir-religious--religious for Temple and Sabbath and Holyday--ir-religious for the world and the days of the week and the year. If religion is, as we believe and teach, the vital factor in the whole of life, it must have force always--seven days in the week and everywhere. Every effort and activity of life--all work and pleasure--are within the province of religion.

Life is many-sided and life's interests are varied. Temple and Judaism should meet the needs of life. Our present day life grows more and more complex. Men and women are drawn more and more out of their homes to satisfy their desires and their necessities. Human interests have grown too large to find full satisfaction in the individual home. We are not sufficient unto ourselves. We are drawn out into the world to fill the larger desires of mind and heart. Together men and women will find and accomplish ~~what~~ what is impossible for the individual. The Temple shall be the larger home for the congregation--not a substitute for but a complement to the home. It is the natural center of all congregational and communal life. As the social settlement is the social center for the poor, the Temple should be the "social center" for the well-to-do. The life of the community should grow and develop naturally about the Temple. Within it, may be established rational work and sensible pleasure for men, women and children. The organizations and societies of men and women, especially of young men and women, which exist in most communities, ought to find a home in the Temple. Good will result to the community and

to the congregation. Such relation involves neither a surrender of their independence nor the least encroachment upon their freedom of self-government. The Temple by reason of its character and the cause for which it stands, will give a needed uplift to the works and the pleasures of these associations, and they--do not fear--will not make unholy the altar.

Why do we let our young men drift morally and religiously--why have our young men's movements failed again and again? Because they were not sustained by the power of a moral and religious purpose. Externally, they appeared like the Young Men's Christian Association, but within--the soul was absent.

Boys and girls will rally round the Temple. Teach children to turn naturally to the Temple for the satisfaction of the natural desires and needs of their boy and girl natures. Let the Temple answer, as answer it should, and you may be sure--boys and girls will be enthusiastically loyal to it.

Judaism should inspire, organize and direct Jewish life and activities. The congregation, rather than a social organization or a fraternal association or a charitable society, is and should be the center. There is power in such centralization: One heart and one soul will unify the life of a community. The present never-ending conflict between rival interests may cease. Amusements, now too often an opposing force, interfering with public worship and other congregational work, will be subordinated--and possibly pleasures which ennoble and educate will take the place of those which degrade and debase.

The synagogue will remain the sanctuary. There need be no less of desired sanctity--nor a decrease in the spirit of worship and reverence.

I believe that the Open Temple should do no work which home or individual or a society is doing better and can do better: at the same time, I am firmly convinced that the union of individual ^{id} strength and the centralization of scattered interest ^s almost always results in great good. The temple, instead of ever begging for support, becomes the supporting influence. It is the power--the soul--the life-center of the community. Let those that will, sneer at "side shows" or denounce the temple as "concert hall and theater." They solve nothing. Mankind has not been lifted up by sneering. I cherish the conviction that every effort whose influence is for good may have a proper place within the temple. Be assured, movements, activities, works and pleasures ^{good in themselves} are not made evil ^{by being} put within temple walls.

Get into right relation with the child, touch its life and keep on touching it until the end. Find both work and pleasure to interest children, and men and women, young and old. I doubt not, it is important to preserve the sacred Hebrew tongue, to guard the institutions and customs hallowed by age--and very important to proclaim the Law of Israel and the teachings of Judaism. I hold it most important to teach human hearts and to guide human minds and to ~~win~~ inspire human souls. If religion be the vital thing in life, it cannot without injury be ignored twelve months in the year--twelve months lacking one or two or three days. Judaism, if it be a religion

of life--with life--power in its teaching must end the formal allegiance, determined by birth and race. It may have blood but it has no soul behind it. Let Judaism make manifest its power by holding Jews loyal to their heritage and its vitality by the life it inspires and creates. The whole purpose of religion, Law and teaching, institutions and customs and language, is to make life worthy.

Why for~~ever~~ justify Judaism and its historic past? Why forever emphasize the need of historical vindication for Jewish denial and martyrdom. Before God and in the hearing of men, proclaim the truth concerning Jews and Judaism! Right the false judgments of the centuries and of the millions of mankind! Is this all? Judaism must be a ^{vital} religious force in the lives of Jews of this generation, alive this day and here--in the lives of men and women, young men and young women, and children. The work of Judaism is to develop the life and to build the character of Jews. Its power must reveal itself in the life of Jews, its supposed believers. Do temples and synagogues inspire the moral and religious lives of Jews? The temple and the synagogue should be the power for the upliftment of the individual, for the consecration of the family and the home, for the moral advancement of the city and the nation. All the interests of life are the interests of religion. Therefore the activities of the temple should be larger than worship and religious school, as life is larger than Sabbath and Sunday. I believe in the Open Temple--serving seven days in the week--"Thy gates shall stand open continually day and night, they shall not be closed."