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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

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

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

Box	Folder	Item
4	8	16

“The Jewish Reformation,” 1909 November 14.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the
American Jewish Archives website.

At The Free Synagogue, New York,
Stephen Wise, Rabbi,
November 14th, 1909.

Rabbi Moses J. Gries,
Cleveland, Ohio.

- THE JEWISH REFORMATION -

The one hundred years past have wrought upon the face of Judaism more change than all the previous centuries. It has been a century of wonderful world history. Remarkable has been the development in the thought and culture-life of the nations. A transformation has come in the life of the Jew, and in Judaism his religion, in the interpretation of its thought and in its presentation to the world. The one hundred years past have been the most revolutionary in the history of Jewish life and in the development of Jewish thought and Jewish worship since the destruction of the Temple and since Israel's dispersion among the nations.

We commemorate the epoch-making endeavor of brave pioneers, the historic work of the valiant spirits who had the courage to face the facts and to seek and to apply the remedy. They demanded that Judaism must harmonize with life and with practice. They dared to save the spirit of the law, even though the letter perish.

The future of Judaism and the future of religion for the Jew are dependent upon the reform movement. I know it is proclaimed that there are new tendencies in Israel, and that the reaction is at hand. Loudly is heralded "the weakening of Reform and the strengthening of Orthodoxy" - Orthodoxy said to be the dominant influence in American Israel. They see what they desire to see. It is not manifest in Jewish life, in Jewish congregations, and surely not in the life of individual Jews. Nowhere is the failure of Orthodoxy more clearly demonstrated than here in New York. Everywhere official Orthodoxy and everywhere the individuals irreligious. What was said of the Jews of Germany is true of America - officially pious "from" disregard every law of the legal code in their private lives.

The Jewish reformation was needed - it is needed in our generation. Needed is the pioneer's courage, the enthusiast's faith and the prophet's vision, to plan and to build for the future. The need is not to perpetuate and justify the past, but to vitalise the present and to safe-guard the future. A half century ago, before the Cultur Verein in Berlin, it was boldly proclaimed "We cannot look upon the disintegration and ruin of Judaism without ~~action~~; the ever-growing alienation from our faith

calls for action^s Then our own General Moritz Lazarus spoke sorrowfully of the decay of a religion. We have a duty to do in the face of the Jewish world growing more and more ^{non}observant, individuals disregarding all the traditions and the sanctities while maintaining a make-believe official orthodoxy and public piety.

Here in America how many thousands are unaffiliated, and of the affiliated who hold membership in congregations, how many thousands in life are irreligious. Who can state how many tens of thousands of Jewish children are without proper religious instruction. The ancient law has lost its authority, it wields no power. Thousands upon thousands live the irreligious life - home and family and children uninspired by religious influence. The noble spiritual element of our historic religion does not inspire the sons and daughters of Israel. Teach and emphasize the spirit of Judaism to satisfy the yearning heart and the questioning intellect.

The call sounds to the Jew today. Judaism must find expression in life through living Jews. Judaism was lived in life before ever it was written in literature. Our Judaism needs again a priest people. The Jew must live his religion. His religion must be a reality. Then will it have vital power for ourselves and through us to the world.