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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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“The Justification of the Radical,” 1893 December 17.

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## COMMENTS.

Hokey, Pokey, Winkey, Wan;  
Grover's having lots of fun;  
But he'll have more, before he's done,  
With the Queen of the Sandwich Islands.

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The choir of the First Presbyterian Church in Bucyrus, O., struck last Sunday on account of salaries long due. The choir evidently thought it had too long to wait for its reward in heaven.

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Chicago has boycotted the unemployed who do not belong to that city. The Mayor has issued an order instructing police officers to watch all incoming trains and all parts of the city limits and not allow any one to enter the city unless they can show they are able to take care of themselves. This mattered not three months ago.

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Elizabeth Stuart Phelps-Ward has just published a timely sermon in which she says: Be patient with the sad, happy people! Do not exact too much of the old and weak—you young and strong! Put yourselves in the sackcloth of the homeless—you who reign in the purple of home! When every one that is glad grows gladder and every heart that is sad turns saddest, there comes a sacred summons to the prosperous life, peculiar to itself and to the time. Then it is that those whom God hath blessed are called to understand, if they can, those whom He hath smitten.

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One of our most prominent educators says: The public school system is on the eve of a great revolution, or perhaps evolution would be a better word to express what will happen before long. The old humdrum, impractical methods of conning over lessons and books, spending years in learning to read, write, and cipher, geography, spelling, and grammar, must give way to more practical things. Geology, botany, chemistry, and the trades will constitute the primary studies and the old standards will be merely incidental. The boys are being driven out of the shops by the apprentice system of the trades unions. The public school as part of public education must open trade schools to the boys and girls and set them to work.

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Edward Martin, the New York millionaire and philanthropist died early in December, and the following was the opening clause of his will, dated in 1891: "It has been my desire in the past, is now, and I pray God that it will continue to be during my life, to help those persons and those enterprises that deserve encouragement. I believe it to be the duty of a man having property in excess of his own necessary wants to be the almoner of such surplus property; or in other words to be his own executor as far as possible, and thereby secure greater good to mankind than could reasonably be expected if he held his property to the end, and then leave it to be managed, or perhaps mismanaged, by executors named in his will." Edward Martin was evidently possessed of much common sense.

## THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE RADICAL.

EXTRACTS FROM A DISCOURSE DELIVERED BY RABBI  
M. J. GRIES AT THE HURON ST. TEMPLE,  
SUNDAY MORNING, DEC. 17, 1893.

Orthodox and radicals have been in conflict since the birth of human thought. The records of their wars make the darker and the brighter pages of the world's history. All the life of all the nations might be investigated and at the bottom of all change and progress, we would discover the external conflict going on. The orthodox is satisfied with what is. The radical is dissatisfied; he seeks what ought to be. The orthodox is content with the established order; because it is established, it is right. The radical is discontent; he seeks to establish an order which shall be right. He loves not the established "is," but he would establish the "ought to be."

The orthodox have hated not only radical thought and radical opinion but radical men. Religious history is full of the persecution and martyrdom, not of thought but of the men who dared to think. Radicals seem to merit persecution. They destroy the loved children of the orthodox heart—traditions and customs and ceremonies and laws. Why shall not the destroyer be destroyed? As long as religion had power the radical *was* destroyed. Now it has not power, what need then to speak of such conflict. The *spirit* of old is not dead. The preaching of love goes on and hate lives on in the religious heart. Radicals are persecuted today. Man has freedom. None has power to seize him; none has power to cast him into dark dungeon cells; none shackles his body with the hope of shackling his mind. His persecution now is not with instruments of torture for the body. Words, slanderous, venomous, poisonous are flung at him to torture the mind and the soul. There are those to-day who have the spirit, but thank God, they lack the power which made the Inquisition!

There must be a justification of the radical. What right has he to destroy, to tear down, to uproot? Why does he reject the faith and practice of the orthodox? How dare he turn his back upon centuries of tradition and generations of life and make declaration that such tradition and such life are not true religion? The fathers have believed; why does he refuse to believe? The fathers have practised; why does he refuse to practise? Let the radical justify himself and his platform. I do not hesitate to bear this burden of proof. The radical shall justify his religion. His faith must have evidence. Truth must rest upon reason. He dare not substitute new mysteries for the old ones to be rejected. The unexplainable and the not-to-be-proved cannot take the place of doctrine, cast out because it could not be explained and could not be proved. The radical must have a reasonable religion, free from mysteries, said to be supernatural, free from doctrines without evidence. We want truth manifest.

But the orthodox too must bear a burden of proof. He shall justify *his* religion. His faith must have evidence. His truth is not other in character. It must rest upon reason. He can-

not proclaim mysteries and insist upon the supernatural and teach the unexplainable. They ask for evidence. He who would change, must justify change. He who would destroy, must justify destruction. Likewise he who would preserve, must justify preservation. If doctrine be declared false, and law without authority, and custom without use, and ceremony without meaning, the orthodox must prove doctrine true, law and custom and ceremony possessed of authority and use and meaning. Such proof shall appeal to reason and be based upon evidence. Authority does not prove. No man's authority, no book's authority, no church's authority. The authorities themselves, man book and church are questioned. Prove *them* by reason.

What does the orthodox claim? Broadly speaking he believes that religion has been fixed; that religious doctrines have been divinely revealed; that particular worship has been divinely established; that Sabbath and festivals and holy days have been divinely ordered: that these are God's religion. God so commanded man. God wants these things to be done. God wants these things to be believed. The man who does not do and does not believe is not obedient to God's wishes. He is a sinner. He is not religious.

This is consistent orthodoxy. It is refreshing to come upon this genuine faith. This religion is not a half and half make-up. It is not orthodoxy symbolized or spiritualized or humanized. However untrue and unreasonable it may seem to us, at least it is genuine. Religion is from God. The law is from God. Institutions are from God. Obey God. This is consistent orthodoxy. What does the radical claim? He believes that religion is a development. Doctrine, worship, institutions, laws, all change and develop. They are not fixed. They have not been divinely revealed, divinely established, divinely ordered, divinely spoken. Religions are not divinely born. They are not from God. Religions are human. Their doctrines, worship, institutions, laws are human in origin and development. No law is obeyed, no institution is preserved, no worship is practised, no doctrine is believed because, in any supernatural sense, it is from God. Religion is from man, as it is for man. God wants nothing done and nothing believed. Man fixes the law and obeys it. Man orders an institution and preserves it. Man originates doctrine and believes it. *Man* wants things to be done. *Man* wants things to be believed. Religions are human. Here is revealed the vital distinction. Orthodoxy declares religion with its laws and worship and doctrines from God. Divine revelation must be truth, now and forever. It cannot be changed. Radicalism declares religion from man. Human conceptions may seem truth, but they may not be eternally true. Human mind—and soul—development may compel change. The Divine, man must obey. The human, man may refuse to obey. What man has made, man may change. What man has brought into being, man may destroy. What is from God must be eternal. It cannot be changed. Man has no power to destroy it.



I have endeavored to make this point very clear because conservatives, progressivists, reformers, join with the orthodox in attacking the radical; because the orthodox attack the radical and sometimes pardon and spare all the rest. I wish to make it clear, as it is clear to my mind, that all, save the genuine orthodox, aye, even many called orthodox, and the moderate reformers, and the milder and more cautious conservatives, with the most extreme radicals have recognized, granted and accepted the basic principle of radicalism. They have dared to change, to refuse to obey, to destroy, to cease to practise. The Divine, man must obey: It cannot be changed. It is truth eternally. They have recognized the human element in religions, in ours as in all others, that religion is man-born, man-made and man-developed. They may reserve a part for God. According to them God commanded this law, fixed this Sabbath and revealed this teaching. Others he did not. They grant the all-essential principle. Man decides, what is and what is not from God. Man sits in judgment upon the claims of religions and according to evidence and by human reasoning determines what ought or ought not be believed, what ought or ought not be practised. Then truth fully and plainly speaking, conservatism and liberalism and progressivism do not differ from radicalism in principle, only in degree. All grant the right of man to test truth, the right to investigate, to weigh evidence, to judge. I claim no more.

Now, believe what you will, and practise what you will, but be prepared to justify your faith and conduct. They must be reasonable. They must be supported by human judgment. Upon this ground, the radical stands ready to justify his faith and his conduct. He cannot and will not believe, he cannot and will not do the unreasonable. For all his faith, he needs evidence. For all his conduct he needs use. His religion is from man and for man.

I have no criticism to make of genuine consistent orthodoxy. I have nothing to say against any faith Jewish or otherwise. Nor will I spend my energy in rebuking and confuting the unfaiths of Jews and others. Let a man believe as he can. If he be honest in his belief or unbelief, I respect him. You may laugh at them who differ from you in faith and conduct and worship. With equal justice they may laugh at you. They may do a hundred things you consider foolish. You may do a hundred things they consider foolish. They may believe a thousand things you imagine still more foolish. You may believe a thousand things that they imagine still more foolish. They may be in error, misled, duped. They may seem ignorant and superstitious. Yet if they be honest in their faith, sincere in their conduct, I can and do respect them. Although I think orthodoxy unreasonable and untrue, I respect it whenever it is genuine. I despise and have full measure of scorn for the counterfeit presentment thereof. I hate the unreal and the false. I love the real and true. I have highest admiration for the religious soul, however deluded, if it be honest, consistent, genuine, not counterfeit. Though

I seem radical, I honor the true orthodox.

But I have little patience with the orthodox who never ceases to pray, who never ceases to perform religious ceremonies, but who never begins to live. All their religion is no religion. Religion is forever on their lips. It is forever in their hands. It never touches their hearts. Their religion is all prayer, all ceremony. It is dead. It is lifeless. It is spiritless. It is soulless. What is religion for? For what purpose do these countless churches fill the land? Do prayer and psalm-singing and bending and bowing and kneeling and much profession of believing lift the human race nearer to God and Godly life? Many people think religion something to be "kept up." Are churches built, are religions alive to "keep up" the things the fathers loved and used to do? Will the after generations have as their religion the "keeping up" of what we now are doing? We don't want to "keep up" anything! Not forever shall the dead ancestors deaden our lives? I honor the fathers in Israel. I am not so possessed by passion for the new that I have no love for the old. I love our ancient traditions. Our wonderful history thrills me as it must thrill every Jew and every true man or woman, though they be non-Jew. But not for tradition's nor for history's sake will I "keep up" a dead ancestral something. Our religion is from the ancestors. It ought not be for the ancestors. It is for us and for our children. We want to live our faith. It must help us live. Every form, every custom, every symbol had a meaning. Once they served a purpose. That purpose is not for us. That meaning we do not need. Every law, every doctrine, every institution was born of human want. Once they answered the demands of life. We want them not. They do not answer the demands of our life. All were man-created. Therefore man may destroy them all. They are not essential. They are not eternal. They are not from God.

To what are we looking forward? Do orthodox ministers or people hope that a time will come when mankind will believe and practice the religion they call orthodox. They may hope it—I can hardly believe any rational mind would treasure such hopes—You and I do not! Do the orthodox desire to keep Jews peculiar, distinct, Oriental, ancient? They may desire it. You and I do not.

I believe that the hour has come when the Jew ought to live and proclaim a pure faith, a religion freed from all the impure accumulations of the centuries. Why shall we hesitate to speak a plain word if the word have truth? We wish to believe in a religion which we and all can and will conscientiously live through. Not forever shall we "keep up" appearances, preserving a dead religion and protesting that it is full of life. The living need not argue that it is not dead. The living faith will show itself living.

We Jews are the inheritors of an ancient truth. We are its voice to mankind of today. We are the modern prophets to ancient Jewish faith. We stand for definite, fixed principles. We affirm and we deny. We have a positive

religion. It ought to be the law of our life. Do we believe it? Do we live it? Then are we Jews? Orthodoxy proclaims its teachings and its principles. Do you believe them? Do you live in accordance with them? Then are you orthodox! You must be either for or against. You cannot profess orthodox faith and live a radical life. That were hypocrisy. Either you believe or you do not believe. Either you are orthodox or you are not orthodox. Be honest and sincere and real in your religion. Do not with orthodox lip profess that God fixed a seventh day Sabbath for man and then with impious hand and irreligious heart disobey the law of God and desecrate the Sabbath. That is false orthodoxy. Your faith and your life ought to correspond. If your faith be such that your life cannot correspond then is your faith a hindrance to life. It is worthless to you. Where then do you belong? According to what religion can you live the best and truest and freest life? Let not custom make response. Let no dead ancestor rise up to set a bound to the freedom of your being. Let your convictions, earnest, thoughtful, your hearts' and your minds' convictions give reply.

I am content to be a Jew; a liberal, a radical. What's in a name? I find in Judaism the truest, purest, most reasonable faith, the noblest conception of God and man. I do not find the freest life, but I have hopes that life will soon be entirely unhindered. My religion permits it and would further it. I cannot be orthodox because it means slavery to authority and law and custom. It offers shackles and religious death. I would be radical because it means mind—and soul—emancipation, religious freedom and life.

#### STRAY SHOTS.

Germany is rejoicing over the outcome of its exhibition at the World's Fair. It proudly is displaying the one thousand nine hundred forty-six prizes received for its exhibits and boasting it has carried off the lion's share, which undoubtedly is true.

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The following story is told by a member of a well-known furniture house of this city. On Monday last a presumed newly married couple who hailed from Kipton, O., called at the store, desiring to look at some bedsteads and bedding. After a while the clerk pointing to a certain mattress, said: "There, ma'am, is the finest spring mattress in the house." "But we want to use it now, not in the spring." The clerk collapsed, but he made a sale.

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A word of encouragement at a critical moment in a life sometimes changes a whole career. One can never tell when the precise moment is at hand, and a stinging repartee or careless, unkind slur may turn a struggling soul back and ruin a brilliant future at the moment when a generous word would inspire confidence which might lead to fortune. Really it is the little words that discourage, the careless words, the words dropped without thought. One can never know the responsibility he or she has for the success or failure of a life through a single word.