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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 Place of the Jew in the Modern World,” 1911 September 21.

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Rabbi Moses J. Gries,
The Temple.

New Year's Eve.,
September 21, 1911.

The Place of the Jew in the Modern World.

We celebrate tonight the beginning of the year 5672, counting according to the Bible chronology. It is significant that our Jewish New Year dates, not from the birth of the founder of a religion, nor from any event in the life of a prophet of a new faith, nor is it associated with the builder of an empire, or the ruler of a new dynasty. It dates from the day of the creation of the world, and thereby betokens its universal character.

Would that I could make you, sons and daughters of Israel, fully conscious of the historic responsibility which rests upon Jews in our day - conscious of the place of the Jew in the modern world.

You are the descendants of a historic people. No aristocracy can claim a purer lineage. There is no family group among all the peoples, whose history gives record of more glorious achievement.

The glory of the nation Israel, and the noteworthy achievements of the Hebrew race are not the

striking personalities - born of Jewish ancestry but perhaps not Jewish in loyalty - who have made a name and won fame in the world of politics and letters and music and art and drama and science. Our real glory, our truest distinction, are that the Jew, an historic personality, has been the teacher and the inspirer of nations. His gift to the world - the Bible - is the spiritual treasury of mankind. His prophets taught the world the finest conception of God and the noblest interpretation of man.

We of The Temple are representative of Liberal Judaism. We hold distinctive principles. We do not lament the fall of Judaism. . We do not pray for the restoration of one holy temple. We do not expect the coming of one personal Messiah.

We protest by word and by life against every interpretation of Judaism which would lead the modern Jew back to Orientalism and the ghetto. There are nobler distinctions between the Jew and the non-Jew. We do not glorify the Hebrew race. We anticipate no supremacy of the nation Israel. As representative of a religion, we believe the Jew bears a message,

● a truth and a life to the world.

Liberal Judaism affirms the belief in one God and denies the materialistic interpretation of the universe. It affirms that men and life are divine in origin and divine in their destiny, and denies the materialistic and agnostic interpretation of man and his existence. Man is not like the beast of the field. He is fashioned in the image of God, with divine impulses and with godlike aspirations. Liberal Judaism is distinctive from Christianity. It does not accept the interpretation of one life divine, one perfect life, but believes that the divine element and the divine spark flame in every human breast.

We proclaim freedom of conscience - the right to worship God according to the promptings of the soul - the right to be Jew in the face of the whole world. Our Liberal Judaism is best and most truly expressed, not in forms and ceremonies of worship, but in life. It is revealed in individual character, in righteous endeavor and in social responsibility, the recognition of obligation to man as brother.

In a twentieth century world, breaking with ancient tradition and established authority, the Jew stands as the historic representative of moral ideals and moral truth and the moral law. Let him proclaim the moral law, the moral principles, ideals and prophecies which are the jewel of our faith - a jewel pure, flawless and undimmed in lustre through all the centuries. They are the essence of a real world religion.

The Jew still proclaims the one God idea - the magnificent conception of unity which has destroyed all idolatry and is destroying every form of polytheism. We believe in one God and in one humanity. God, not as an infinite abstraction, but the power that maketh for righteousness, which requireth of man justice and mercy.

The soul of the Jewish race, as Zangwill has expressed it, yearns for a righteous social order and an ultimate unification of mankind.

You belong to Israel, the people of religion, whose prophets were seers of God, whose life and

history have been inspired by faith in God, whose greatest glory is that it lifted the world out of idolatry and led to the worship of the one God.

Be not religionless. Be Jews worthy of so glorious a history - worthy to be the heirs to the spiritual concepts which have changed the civilization of mankind, and which still dominate the thought and inspire the imagination of the highest among men.

