

Moses J. Gries: A Conscience For The Congregation

Moses J. Gries, the son of Jacob and Katharina Frances Gries, was born in Newark, New Jersey, on January 25, 1868. Gries was orphaned at age seven and was placed in the Newark Hebrew Orphan Asylum. He was also cared for by Rabbis Joseph Leucht and Joseph Hahn of the same city. Gries applied to the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati (HUC) at the tender age of eleven, since he already was homeless with no ties elsewhere. He was refused admission until three years later because of his age. In 1882, Gries began his studies at Hebrew Union College in conjunction with classes at Hughes High School and McMicken College (now the University of Cincinnati).¹ Seven years later, Gries received a Bachelor of Letters degree from the University of Cincinnati and was ordained a rabbi at the Hebrew Union College. The nine graduates of the HUC Class of 1889 constituted, at that time, the largest group ever ordained by Dr. Isaac M. Wise.² Gries and his classmates were named charter members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the professional association of Rabbis founded by Wise in the same year.

¹ American Hebrew, October 6, 1916, p.793.

² In addition to Gries, the ordinees of the Class of 1889 included Heiman J. Elkin, William S. Friedman, Rudolph Grossman, Charles Levi, William Rosenau, Isaac L. Rypins, Max Wertheimer, and Adolph Guttmacher.

Gries began his rabbinical career as the first spiritual leader of Mizpah Congregation in Chattanooga, Tennessee.³ Soon after his arrival at Mizpah, it became evident that the facility built in 1882 was too small and inadequate to accommodate the increasing activities of the congregation's growing membership.⁴ Gries therefore undertook a twenty-thousand dollar fund-raising campaign for a new building, which was dedicated two years after he had left the congregation.⁵

During his ministry in Chattanooga, Gries won the love and esteem of Jews and non-Jews alike. He established good relations with his Christian colleagues and made it a custom at Yizkor services to read the names of deceased local and national Gentile leaders along with the names of deceased members of the Mizpah Congregation. In 1890, for instance, Gries offered a fervent prayer for Cardinal Manning, Rev. Chas. Spurgeon, Walt Whitman, and other prominent Gentiles, who helped humanity through their service and example:

"Ye friends of our beloved who lived and struggled for the salvation of mankind, who as messengers of Providence assisted humanity, you are as dear to our souls as dear you are to the God of humanity."⁶

³Gries's initial contract, found among his personal papers, called for the salary of "one thousand and eight hundred dollars per annum." Document, Box 2, File 6, Moses J. Gries Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁴An 1890 Chattanooga newspaper clipping reports that there were approximately five hundred Jews living in the city. B'nai Zion, a traditional synagogue, was also in existence, though its membership was much smaller than Gries' Mizpah Congregation. Box 4, File 1, Gries Papers.

⁵On September 14, 1894, Rabbi Gries and Dr. Isaac M. Wise returned to Chattanooga at the invitation of Mizpah's Rabbi Isidore Lewinthal to conduct the rededication exercises.

⁶*Ibid.*

In addition to his congregational work, Gries became identified with all of the larger charitable institutions of the city and served for a year as President of the Humane Society.⁷ Gries also came to the defense of German Jewish immigrants who were ostracized in the Chattanooga workplace. An 1890 article in the local newspaper records the story of a number of newly arrived German Jewish workers of the Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis Railroad Company. These men were subjected to such brutal treatment that guards had to be placed upon them at night to prevent them from running away. They managed to escape and report the abuse they had suffered to Rabbi Gries, who quickly took the matter in hand. Gries paid a personal visit to the company office, sent in a complaint, and vowed that he would take every precaution to prevent them from further outrages.⁸

In his Chattanooga sermons, Gries addressed a variety of Jewish concerns, including intermarriage, the Sunday Sabbath movement, and the persecution of Russian Jewry. He opposed intermarriage on the grounds of self-preservation and told his congregants that such unions constituted a "hollow mockery" of the sacred ordinances of Judaism. He also spoke out against attempts by some Reformers to transfer the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday.

"The Sunday Sabbath should not be accepted by the Jews. Let them observe truly the Sabbath of their fathers not by empty words but by actual practice in life. There can be no half way

⁷Newsclipping, 1892, Box 4, File 1, Gries Papers.

⁸Ibid.

in this vital matter--either the Sabbath is observed religiously or it is violated."⁹

Gries's traditional stand on the Sabbath issue is noteworthy, especially in light of the outspoken support he would give the Sunday Sabbath Movement later in his career.

While the young Rabbi Gries impressed upon his Chattanooga congregation the importance of observing the traditional Sabbath, he did not believe in maintaining other customs and historical institutions which, in his opinion, served no useful purpose. In Gries's view, modern Judaism meant a primary concern with the moral law and no "turning back" to ancient authority and custom. In a sermon entitled, "A Modern Philosophy of Judaism," Gries emphasizes this point:

"...Those of Israel who today are crying: 'Turn Back,' who today emphasize most strongly traditions and historical institutions, fail truly to interpret the signs of the times; they misunderstand the spirit of this age and this generation. Not backwards to the past, but ever forward with eye and heart and soul to the future..."¹⁰

Gries's unbridled optimism was tempered by news of the persecution of Jews in Russia. It was difficult for Gries to comprehend how civilization could allow such an outrage in the "enlightened" nineteenth century. He berated politicians who sought to limit immigration to the United States, and he expressed great disappointment in the American people.

"We call this country the blessed land of liberty and yet we refuse shelter to a persecuted and tortured race, who vainly appeal to us for protection. There is room among us here for

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰"A Philosophy of Modern Judaism," n.d., Box 4, File 1, Gries Papers.

the persecuted ones...It is a glorious opportunity for the Christians to show their brotherly love and rise as one and say this disgrace to an enlightened civilization shall not exist.¹¹

On November 1, 1892, after three years at the Mizpah Congregation, Rabbi Gries submitted a letter of resignation to the Temple's Board of Directors. Gries had received a call from Cleveland's prestigious Tifereth Israel Congregation and found the offer irresistible. He could not turn down this grand opportunity to lead an influential congregation of significant size in a metropolitan community. In his letter of resignation to the Board, Gries expressed regret at the impending separation but stated that his heart had "long hoped for an appointment such as this."¹² After the Board granted him an honorable release, they praised him as a "learned divine, a man of purest principles, and an earnest and sincere worker in the cause of progressive Judaism."¹³ Gries's mixed emotions upon leaving Chattanooga are conveyed most touchingly in the following excerpt from his farewell address :

"...Somewhere I have seen a picture, or read a description, or perhaps it may have been but a dream. Anyway, in my mind's eye, I see a beautiful valley surrounded on all sides by precipitous hills. In this valley all is sunshine, happiness, and peace. On the outside of the hills is the fighting, impetuous, strong ambitious world. It is the custom of this people, living in what I will call 'Happy Valley,' upon a certain day in each year, to permit one of their members to cross over the hills and enter into the strife and turmoil of the outside world.

The one traveler leaves the home where he has known peace and happiness with a mixed feeling of sorrow and

¹¹Newsclipping, n.d., Box 4, File 1, Gries Papers.

¹²A newspaper clipping reported that Dr. Gries had turned down an offer earlier in the year from a Pittsburgh Temple to remain in Chattanooga. Ibid.

¹³Resolution, Mizpah Congregation Board of Directors to Moses J. Gries, November 8, 1892. Gries Papers.

pleasure. He feels that he will never know the same happiness he has experienced, but fueled by ambition, he is anxious to enter the great world without, and fight his way upward to be honored and to be a power in the great world. For the past three years, I have been a dweller in 'Happy Valley'-I feel that I will not again know the peace and happiness I have experienced here-but I am ambitious. I wish to enter the great world without and do my part in the restless world..."¹⁴

The Tifereth Israel Congregation in Cleveland was founded by German American Reformers who seceded in 1850 from the more traditional Israelitic Anshe Chesed Society.¹⁵ Dr. Isidor Kalisch, a liberal and scholarly rabbi, accepted the offer to be Tifereth Israel's spiritual leader, but only after the forty-seven charter members agreed to his condition that they always attend services on Friday evening and Saturday morning!¹⁶ Dr. Kalisch was released three years later for budgetary reasons and it was not until 1867 that Tifereth Israel found another rabbi, Dr. Jacob Mayer, of B'nai Jeshurun Congregation in Cincinnati. Rabbi Mayer preached in German and English and introduced many reforms, including the abolition of *aliyyot* and second-day festival observance, and the replacement of the shofar with the coronet.¹⁷ The wearing of hats was kept optional until 1875, when a resolution was unanimously passed requiring all worshippers to remove their hats in the temple. When Dr. Mayer resigned in 1874 to go to Baltimore's Har Sinai pulpit,¹⁸ he was succeeded by Dr. Aaron Hahn. Dr. Hahn led Tifereth

¹⁴"Farewell Address," Box 4, File 1, Gries Papers.

¹⁵Bing and Haas, The Temple: 1850-1950, pp.10-11.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁸Shortly after Mayer's arrival in Baltimore, Dr. Benjamin Szold, among others, revealed that Mayer had converted to Christianity and served as a missionary in London before coming to the United States. When the accusations could no longer be denied,

Israel for eighteen years before leaving the pulpit and the rabbinate for a second career in law.

In 1892, Rabbi Gries became the first graduate of the Hebrew Union College to occupy the pulpit of Cleveland's Tifereth Israel. Gries had very clear ideas about his role as rabbi. In his inaugural sermon at Tifereth Israel, he portrayed the modern rabbi as a prophet and not merely a lifecycle officiant:

"I do not believe the minister to be a mere functionary to pray, to preach and to make the blessings upon births, marriages and deaths. [The rabbi] stands in the place of the prophet of old. He is the leading, speaking, seeing, and judging conscience unto men. He is the living prophet of righteousness...His is the mission to fulfill human ideals, to lead man to God and to bring God into human lives."¹⁹

Gries was immediately accepted by his congregation and quickly overcame any sympathetic feelings prevalent among the membership for Dr. Hahn. Nine months into his ministry, Gries laid the cornerstone of the magnificent new Temple at East 55th and Central. His initial three-year contract was extended by five more at the 1894 annual meeting of the congregation, at which time the young rabbi received the following evaluation from Temple President Martin A. Marks:

"He has so closely attached himself to our hearts that I believe he has the support of every man woman and child connected with our Congregation. His purity of life and rectitude of

Mayer resigned in 1876, and was no longer heard from until his death in St. Louis in 1890. Lloyd P. Gartner, History of the Jews of Cleveland, p.148. See also Isaac M. Fein, The Making of an American Jewish Community, pp.111-112.

¹⁹"An Ideal Ministry," n.d., Box 4, File 6, Gries Papers.

conduct have endeared him to our people, as well as to the entire community. He needs no words of praise."²⁰

Rabbi Gries's popularity soared throughout the region, and due to the high demand for his services, a pay scale had to be introduced for non-members and non-residents.²¹ He was honored again by Tifereth Israel at its November 10, 1899 annual meeting, with the following laudatory proclamation:

"Within the last seven years, the membership of the Temple has nearly trebled in numbers; the enrollment in the Sabbath School has increased sevenfold. Stalking indifference has given way to an awakened religious sentiment. Jewish thought has been revived and Jewish life uplifted. To no one individual is the Jewish community more indebted for this improved moral, intellectual, and social condition than to our honored Rabbi Moses J. Gries."²²

The resolution concluded with a five-year contract at five thousand dollars per year. By 1907, it was calculated that over eighty percent of the Temple's membership had joined since Rabbi Gries took charge of affairs, with an annual average increase of forty members.²³

The 55th Street Temple edifice, which was dedicated during Gries's ministry, was described in the press as "probably the finest church building in Cleveland, and among the finest Jewish Temples in the country."²⁴ The seats were theater chairs, and high over the pulpit were the pipes of a magnificent organ and a loft from which a

²⁰Tifereth Israel Minutes, October 21, 1894.

²¹Ibid., March 6, 1899.

²²Ibid., November 10, 1899.

²³"President Lewenthal's Annual Address," in Tenth Annual of The Temple, 1907, pp.14-15.

²⁴Bing and Haas, The Temple: 1850-1950, p.26.

quartet sang. A Gentile visitor commented that, "to the eye there were but two distinctions between this place and the place of worship of any progressive Protestant congregation. One was the 'Hear, O Israel' motto engrossed on the arch. The other was the everlasting light, flickering redly from a great lamp over the rabbi's head."²⁵ The same Gentile observer left Gries's Sabbath Service with the conviction that if his home had been more conveniently located, he would have worshipped more often at the Temple!²⁶

Gries served as rabbi during a period of peace, when confidence in human progress, and enthusiasm for universalism ran high. In order to make Judaism a true world religion, Gries felt it important for traditional liturgy to divest itself of "Orientalism" in form and language. Hebrew was therefore de-emphasized, and with the exception of the Kaddish doxology, the liturgy was read entirely in English.²⁷ The absence of Hebrew and uniquely Jewish symbols in the sanctuary were also in keeping with Gries's philosophy that American Jewish congregations remain Jewish in spirit, and American in form and purpose. Orderliness and passivity among the laity were additional characteristics of the Temple service. President Martin A. Marks praised the "excellent deportment within

²⁵"Little Journeys to Cleveland Churches," n.d., Box 4, File 5 , Gries Papers.

²⁶ibid.

²⁷The Union Prayerbook was first introduced during the 1894 high holiday services. The ritual committee chairman considered it to be a great improvement over any previous ritual used by The Temple with the following caveat: "...When there is added to it the choral portion, so that the responses by the choir will be in English in place of Hebrew, I am satisfied it will give great pleasure to our worshippers." Tifereth Israel Minutes, October 21, 1894. Hebrew language instruction was later dropped from the Sabbath School curriculum one year after the move to the new building, as the money was deemed better spent on Bible History classes. See Tifereth Israel Minutes, October 4, 1895.

[The] Temple in marked contrast to the noisy and disorderly conduct in some of our sister congregations."²⁸ Worship at the Temple was also "rabbinocentric," with the focus always on the eloquent and inspiring preaching of Rabbi Gries.²⁹ One writer in attendance at services had the following to say about Gries's preaching:

"It wasn't so much a sermon as an oration. Ready of gesture and rejoicing in a strong, flexible voice, his eloquence is irrepressible. His pulpit mannerisms are few. His habitual attitude is peculiarly erect. Much of the time he speaks with his earnest countenance upturned, his eyes half closed. He refers frequently to his manuscript, though apparently without need and entirely without interruption of his flowing sentences..."³⁰

Although the service centered around the rabbi and choir, it still had a powerful and magnetic effect on the laity. Even the children looked forward to Gries's service as reflected in the following letter from a former Sabbath School student:

"The influence you had on me when I was a mere child is still with me. When I was particularly bad, my chief punishment was not to be allowed to attend Sunday Services and Sabbath School. This is indicative of the influence you unconsciously exerted over thousands."³¹

For Gries, the temple had to be more than a place of worship and religious instruction. He envisioned the temple as a complement to the home, a center of social and cultural, as well as spiritual activity. By serving as the life-center and supporting influence of

²⁸Tifereth Israel Minutes, October 14, 1895.

²⁹Gries was well known for his fervent oratory and was a featured speaker on the Lyceum Bureau of Jewish Lectures.

³⁰"Little Journeys to Cleveland Churches," n.d., Box 4, File 5, Gries Papers.

³¹Letter, E.J. Peefer to Rabbi Moses J. Gries, October 24, 1916. Gries Papers. Mr. Peefer was the son-in-law of Rabbi Henry Berkowitz.

the community, Gries hoped that Tifereth Israel could serve a leading role in the moral advancement of home and city life:

"The living Temple must be open, open to every child that needs religious instruction, open for school, open as a social center, open to every influence that leads to the nobler development of life, open for the brotherhood of the rich and poor, open for the fellowship of Jew and non-Jew."³²

Gries's successful advocacy of the Open Temple established Tifereth Israel as the first institutional synagogue in the United States.³³

Central to the "Open Temple" was the idea that Judaism had to express itself in ways other than worship.³⁴ "The activities of the Temple should be larger than worship and religious school, as life is larger than Sabbath and Sunday."³⁵ Despite much criticism and skepticism from colleagues, Gries instituted a diverse and active program of clubs, forums, and other activities on Temple grounds. He insisted that these organizations would not desanctify the sanctuary. Gries suggested, to the contrary, that conflicts between amusements and public worship might even cease and result in an increased reverence for worship.³⁶

Gries found the practice of some Christian churches to open their Sabbath schools to the unaffiliated worthy of emulation.³⁷ He detested the commercialization of the synagogue, the selling of worship privileges, and the retailing of religious instruction. Gries sensed a widening spirit, which was at odds with the hierarchical

³²CCAR Yearbook, 21 (1911): 143.

³³Bing and Haas, The Temple: 1850-1950, p.24.

³⁴This point is emphasized in his Presidential Message, CCARY, 24 (1914): 179.

³⁵"Rabbi Gries and The Open Temple," Box 4, File 10, n.d., Gries Papers.

³⁶CCAR Yearbook, 11(1901): 146-47.

³⁷"The Sabbath School and the Unaffiliated," n.d., Box 4, File 10, Gries Papers.

system of most synagogues and temples, and he sought to democratize the congregation for rich and poor alike. He had a particular interest in children and devoted an inordinate amount of time to their welfare. His interest in Sabbath School education began with kindergarten and continued through post-Confirmation classes. He also formed a Temple Alumni Association for young adults.

Just as Gries's Sabbath School was opened to the children of those unable to afford dues, so too were Tifereth Israel's sanctuary doors open for everyone. In his inaugural speech on the Open Temple idea, Gries remarked:

"...Never again be the question necessary in portal of temple and house of learning--how much does it cost to worship with you on the great holidays and to learn the teachings of Judaism?"³⁸

The spirit of equality, inclusivity, and brotherhood, characteristic of Gries's Open Temple, in many ways anticipated the later establishment of the Free Synagogue Pulpit by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise in 1907. Both Gries and Wise sought to make sanctuary ritual subsidiary to an emphasis upon righteousness, or as Wise would later say, "not the rite but the right."³⁹ In a sermon entitled, "What is the Free Synagogue?," Wise explained the purpose of his enterprise in terms similar to Gries's Open Temple philosophy:

"What is essential to the Jewish Church, even if it be not differentiating? I answer-its ethical teachings, its impulse to moral conduct, its constraint to rightness of living.

³⁸"Rabbi Gries and the Open Temple," n.d., Box 4, File 10, Gries Papers.

³⁹Stephen S. Wise, "The Free Synagogue Pulpit," in Sermons and Addresses, 1 (1908): 1.

The inexorable moral imperative is the essential of the synagogue and this essential will be the core of the teaching of the Free Synagogue..."⁴⁰

The Open Temple was not without its elitist elements. In 1894, the Temple Society was formed for the cultured and well-educated. This group conducted popular lectures and extension courses on a variety of secular subjects and developed a twelve year tradition known as the Temple Course. In the 1907-1908 calendar, the Temple Course program featured violin and piano recitals, and lectures on such topics as "The Empire of Japan," "Shakespeare and His Plays," and "Education for the Art of Life."⁴¹ While non-sectarian, the Temple Society explained its relevance to the work of the Temple in the following way:

"Whatever enriches the mind and soul, whatever makes us have broader ideas and promotes general allegiance into which the genius of the age evokes us, will make us better men, better women, and better children-this is the work of the Temple Society. Every Jew that partakes of its works will benefit himself...every non-Jew who associates himself with the Temple Society becomes more liberal in his ideas and broader in his view of our people. I am glad to say that over one-half of the membership are non-Jews and represent the best elements in our community."⁴²

In addition to the Temple Society and Temple Course, Gries had organized a Temple Kindergarten, a Junior Temple Society for teenagers, a public library and reading room, and a gymnasium. The feedback Gries received from colleagues and friends about these activities was overwhelmingly negative. Rabbi Max Heller of Temple

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁴¹"Temple Course," in Tenth Annual of The Temple, 1907, p.55.

⁴²Tifereth Israel Minutes, October 14, 1895.

Sinai in New Orleans, a dear friend of Rabbi Gries, expressed his serious misgivings about the Temple's wide array of activities upon receiving the 1894 Open Temple brochure. His remarks are typical of many of the criticisms directed at Gries:

"...You Northern ministers are amazingly consistent in the effort to secularize your synagogues into literal 'temples'...you proceeded to put kitchens into the basement and now you are turning your pulpit into a 'platform stage' and your whole auditorium into a concert hall to resound with laughter, applause, perhaps to display dances-it will be hard to draw a limit...

I am far, my friend, from putting myself up as your mentor. But I cannot help pointing out what I consider a gross error against the religious sentiment which undermines reverence by depriving it of religious symbols first, and of the religious atmosphere last.

You strip your religious thoughts into bald philosophemes because your Unitarian colleague loves the dry mountain air of refined religious abstractions. But Judaism is a flesh-and-blood religion tied down to a living race, a race the most markedly typical and orientally intense that exists. It is this airy food of de-typified ideologies that makes our people hungry after mystic spiritualisms, occultism, Christian science, anything that has color, body, poetry, character."⁴³

Eventually, Heller's criticism of the so-called Open Temple became publicly adopted by the *American Hebrew*, a conservative weekly. In a blistering editorial, the *American Hebrew* attacked the reasoning behind the Open Temple idea. The editor essentially argued that while Judaism is concerned with life and all its interests, the synagogue cannot be all things to all people. It cannot, for example, manage a gymnasium on the grounds that a healthy body provides a healthy mind, which in turn, fosters a

⁴³Letter, Rabbi Max H. Heller to Rabbi M.J. Gries, September 30, 1895. Box 2, File 22, Maximilian H. Heller Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

religious spirit. While all the activities of humankind are interlaced and inseparable, the synagogue, according to Gries's detractors, had to remain a special institution for expressly religious purposes. *The American Hebrew* concluded its remarks with the following indictment of Gries:

"The trouble with Rabbi Gries is that he mistakes Esau for Jacob. So impressed is he with the work which is foreign to the synagogue that he sees about everything emanating from his temple a halo of sanctity and religion, whether it be a boxing match or in a debate of juveniles on the Monroe Doctrine."⁴⁴

Gries also had his supporters, and with the passage of time, won admiration from many colleagues for his bold efforts. Upon his retirement from the active ministry in 1917, Rabbi Leo Franklin paid Gries the following tribute:

"Among the material results of his works the institutional Temple stands preeminent. At a time when to do so invited ridicule and slander, when it brought to his door the charge of un-Jewishness and disloyalty to tradition, Rabbi Gries had the courage to start upon paths before untrodden and to build this Temple...He realized that if religion was to be more than an abstraction, it must touch life at all its angles..."⁴⁵

Under Gries's leadership, Tifereth Israel became known as "The Temple" and grew from a membership of 125 families in 1892 to over 700 in 1917, an increase of over five hundred percent.⁴⁶ During the same time span, the number of children enrolled in the Sabbath School rose from eighty to nearly nine hundred, making The Temple's

⁴⁴American Hebrew, January 23, 1903, p.327.

⁴⁵"Tribute by Rabbi Leo Franklin," June, 1917, Box 4, File 4, Gries Papers.

⁴⁶Letter, Moses J. Gries to the Executive Board and Members of The Temple, n.d., Box 4, File 9, Gries Papers.

Sabbath School the largest in the world.⁴⁷ In addition to the Open Temple, Gries introduced other radical innovations. Bowing to congregational pressure and a perceived need for change, Sunday Sabbath Services were instituted in 1893, and the Torah ceased being read in the sanctuary. Instead, a section of the weekly Torah portion was read in English translation. The congregation also became the first in America to invite women to attend congregational meetings and serve on its Board of Trustees.⁴⁸

Gries helped found and served as President of a number of local and state Jewish organizations, including the Cleveland Council of Jewish Women (1893-1896), the Jewish Religious Education Association of Ohio (1906-1908), the Ohio Rabbinical Association (1904), and the Cleveland Council Educational Alliance (1904). Gries was also a national leader in American Reform Judaism, serving as assistant secretary, treasurer, vice-president, and eventually president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1913 to 1915.

In his 1915 CCAR Presidential Address, Gries emphasized the importance of religious education:

"Progress and deepening interest in Religious Education have characterized this year. New state and interstate Teacher's Associations continue to be organized. Perhaps the time is near when the Conference with other national organizations interested in Jewish Religious Education should attempt a more definite union of the various State Associations. To train, to educate, and to inspire our body of teachers is a work

⁴⁷Bing and Haas, The Temple: 1850-1950, p.24. In 1901, Gries reported that one-half of the students in his Sabbath School were children of non-members (CCAR Yearbook, 11(1901): 5).

⁴⁸The Temple Annual (1912-1913), p.42.

of the highest necessity, but it is equally important that our congregations, individually and collectively, be convinced of the need for stronger city, state, and national organization to reach our unaffiliated children. Ours is the duty to awaken fathers and mothers to the necessity of religious education and to the importance of a genuine religious life for themselves and their children."⁴⁹

Prior to his election as CCAR President, Gries organized the Jewish Religious Teachers' Association of Ohio in 1908 to improve the quality and character of Sunday School instruction. He also chaired the CCAR Committee on Religious Education and advocated the free admittance of children of non-members into Temple religious schools.⁵⁰ Gries's unusual attention and sensitivity to the welfare and education of young children may have been explained by his own orphan experience. The Educational League of Cleveland, for instance, which Gries helped found, devoted a large sum of its funds to financial aid for the higher education of orphans. In a memorial tribute to Gries, the leader of the Educational League said of him: "He was always ready to help the fatherless and motherless boy and girl."⁵¹

Rabbi Gries's quarter century at The Temple coincided with the transformation of Cleveland from a small city of 262,000 to America's sixth largest city of more than 600,000.⁵² Gries not only witnessed Cleveland's remarkable growth, he was also among those

⁴⁹CCAR Yearbook, 25 (1915): 22.

⁵⁰CCAR Yearbook, 11 (1901): 73. Gries was also instrumental in the solicitation and acquisition of a fifty-thousand-dollar gift from Jacob Schiff for the establishment of a small Teacher's Institute at HUC in 1909.

⁵¹Tribute book from Cleveland Council of Educational Alliance, 1917, Box 3, File 2, Gries Papers. When Gries died, his widow Fannie contributed two hundred dollars to the Jewish Orphan Asylum in his memory. See Document, Box 2, File 6, Gries Papers.

⁵²"Remarkable Demonstrations," n.d., Box 3, File 4, Gries Papers.

who helped transform the city into a great metropolis. Municipal matters occupied a great deal of Gries's time outside The Temple. Newton D. Baker, who served as Mayor of Cleveland and later became the United States Secretary of War, had the following to say about Gries's importance to the city:

"When I first went to Cleveland, Rabbi Gries was in the full greatness of his universal powers. He was then an already established influence for good doing and high thinking in the city. I learned at first to admire him and then frankly to lean upon him in many kinds of problems which were presented to me in connection with city affairs. Surely the heart of Cleveland bears the marks of his having lived and worked in and for the city."⁵³

Gries served as a Trustee of the Cleveland School of Art and was a member of the Committee on Municipal Art and Architecture.⁵⁴ He also served on a select committee appointed by Mayor Newton Baker, which brought about the consolidation of the city's educational facilities into Cleveland State University.⁵⁵ As Chairman of the Cleveland Peace Society, Gries was also appointed to a commission that recommended a memorial site for fallen soldiers and sailors from the First World War.⁵⁶ Charles Olmery, a member of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, wrote that "few men saw more clearly the dangers that beset local, state, and

⁵³Letter, Newton D. Baker to Abba Hillel Silver, November 14, 1918, Box 2, File 2, Gries Papers.

⁵⁴Gries was an active member of the art board. Henry Turner Bailey, Dean of the Cleveland School of Art, remarked in his condolences that "in his [Gries'] death, the Art School has lost a staunch and potent friend." Letter, Henry Turner Bailey to the Gries Family, October 31, 1918, Box 2, File 2, Gries Papers.

⁵⁵Letter, Newton D. Baker to Moses J. Gries, March 17, 1914, Box 1, File 6, Gries Papers.

⁵⁶Letter, Harry L. Davis to Moses J. Gries, September 30, 1918, Box 1, File 6, Gries Papers.

national government [than Gries]."⁵⁷ Some of Gries's own congregants, as the following letter from Julius Kahn indicates, seemed to appreciate his contributions to the civic life of Cleveland as much, if not more, than his service to The Temple:

"Whenever I have had occasion, it has been a pride to me to point out that of all modern men in the pulpit, you were one of the most modern with a true understanding of the changing requirements in the twentieth century of a true leader of his people. Your participation in the civic life of your city and your state has conferred honor not only upon you but greater honor upon the people whom you represent, and this has ended in dispelling the centuries-old misunderstanding of our character, our aims, our purposes, and our mundane worth."⁵⁸

Gries developed close ties between The Temple and the larger community, was an active participant in the Chamber of Commerce, and was considered by many to be the leading spokesman for the Cleveland Jewish Community. He was an outstanding civic leader, and his counsel was frequently sought by mayors and other municipal leaders. In 1916, at the age of forty-eight, Gries shocked his congregation by announcing his plans to retire. Not only Cleveland, but the entire American Jewish ministry mourned his resignation from the rabbinical profession. There was widespread speculation that Gries's abrupt retirement was due to accumulated burnout. However, personal correspondence with Julian Morgenstern, a close friend and colleague of Gries, reveals that a more serious factor accounted for his decision:

"My retirement at the end of my twenty-five years' ministry with the Temple, though a complete surprise to almost

⁵⁷Letter, Charles F. Olmery to Moses J. Gries, May 9, 1899, Gries Papers.

⁵⁸Letter, Julius Kahn to Moses J. Gries, January 14, 1913, Gries Papers.

everyone in Cleveland, and to all my friends everywhere has been under very careful consideration for several years. For four years now, I have been compelled to carry my heavy burdens in spite of constant ill-health and intermittent intense suffering."⁵⁹

Gries delivered his final sermon at the Confirmation Service in June of 1917, and died less than a year and a half later, on October 31, 1918. He was survived by his wife of twenty years, Frances Hays Gries, and by his two sons, Robert and Lincoln. *The New York Times* named Gries "one of the strongest men in the Jewish ministry in America and one of Cleveland's most esteemed citizens."⁶⁰ Perhaps the most eloquent tribute came from the Cleveland Federation of Jewish Charities, which Gries helped found in 1902: "Rabbi Gries requires no memorial tablet. Progressive in outlook, broad in his sympathies, practical in wisdom, independent in thought, indomitable in will, energetic in action, an earnest Jew, an intense American, he enriched the life of his generation."⁶¹ He was, in every significant way, a spiritual giant in the formative stages of American Reform Judaism.

⁵⁹Letter, Moses J. Gries to Julian Morgenstern, November 23, 1916. Julian Morgenstern Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁶⁰Newspaper clipping, New York Times, November 2, 1898. Box 4, File 4, Gries Papers.

⁶¹Resolution on the Death of Rabbi Gries Adopted by Trustees of the Federation of Jewish Charities, Box 3, File 7, Gries Papers.