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

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

Box	Folder	Item
4	8	10

“Chanukah or Christmas,” 1906 December 23.

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Rabbi Moses J. Gries,
The Temple, Cleveland, O.

Pittsburg, Pa.,
December 23, 1906

- CHANUKAH OR CHRISTMAS -

When the Jew is persecuted, when our brothers are under the yoke, 'tis time to remember, 'tis time not to forget. Why should any Jew forget Chanukah, the Jewish Feast of Lights, and celebrate Christmas, the ~~Christian~~ Feast of Lights? For Jews, the modest taper lights of Israel have a far deeper meaning than the Christmas lights with all their splendor and beauty.

The Jewish Feast of Lights is an historical festival. Historical is the persecution ^{by} Antiochus and the desecration and defilement of the Temple - historical the story of the triumphant Maccabees and the solemn re-dedication of the Temple. The Christian Feast of Lights, commemorating the birth of Jesus, whom the world calls the Christ, is not thus historical. The Day of the birth of Jesus is not known from the New Testament or from any other sources, and was not celebrated in the early Christian centuries.

Christmas ⁱⁿ ~~and~~ its origin is the pagan Sun Feast, celebrating the turning of the sun at the time of the winter solstice. Its customs of the Yule tree and the Yule log, the giving of presents and the lighting of tapers and the illuminated tree are all of them heathen in their origin.

Good authorities believe Christmas to be a development out of the Roman Saturnalia and the Jewish Chanukah. The Germans call Christmas "Weihnacht" - the "Night of Dedication", and the Greeks call it the "Feast of Lights".

Let us Teach our children to understand early in life who and what they are and why they are what they are. Let us celebrate our own Jewish festival. Let us not hide our Jewishness. We need less of the cowardice of the Hellenists and more Maccabean courage.

The whole world is singing the song which 'tis said the angels sang two thousand years ago - "Peace on earth, good-will toward men". Is it mockery, or was it a vain dream? Ever since two thousand years ago, there have been war and

strife. The nineteenth century with its boasted advancement and its vaunted enlightenment was witness to an outpouring of rivers of human blood. In the early morning of the twentieth century more soldiers are under arms than ever were in the day when Grecian phalanx was unbroken and the tramp of Roman legions unconquerable ~~was heard over~~ ^{shook} the three continents of the ancient world.

There is not peace on earth, neither is there good-will toward men. The Jew hears the Christian psalm and eagerly awaits its fulfillment. He longs for the birth of the true Christian spirit. Let the Christian world learn and teach the humanity of man to man - by love to soften the ages of insult and injury - by Justice to efface the deep impress of centuries of persecution. Let the stream of love quench the fires of hate throughout the world.

The Messiah has not come. There has not been and there is not now the fulfillment of the Messianic hopes and the Messianic prophecies. The Jew upon his own person bears the cruel wounds of the hate of centuries. The Jew is witness by his tragic ^{his} story in time medieval and modern that the Messiah is not yet.

Has the Messiah come in Russia or in the lands of Eastern Europe? The night of the nativity, that should publish glad tidings to all the world, is a night of terror to Jews in lands called Christian. The twentieth century still feels the full sweep of human hate. The birthday of the Messiah has not yet risen out of the depths of the Eastern seas.

The world has not yet learned the true Christian message, that all mankind is one through God the Father of mankind. Let heralds of love and ~~angels~~ of heaven proclaim God to the world.

The world has not yet learned the true Chanukah message, that God is one, and all mankind one. The world needs a new proclamation of God. Lift the banner of the Jew, the glorious banner of the Maccabees, inscribed with the memorable words - "Who is like unto Thee among the mighty, O God". 'Tis the Jew's one historic dis-

tinction, that Israel believed in, and through the centuries has lived toward God.

The real message of Chanukah is not a glorification of the national spirit, nor the clarion call to arms, nor the triumphant song of liberty, but the re-dedication of altars and of loyalty to God, symbolized by the warrior, victorious, in the Temple before the altar, kindling the holy lamps.

Quaint and beautiful the Talmudic legend of the miracle of the one cruse of oil, sufficient for but a single night, burning through the eight days. There was no miracle in the hour of the re-dedication of the Temple. But miracle there has been - the cruse of oil filled the lamps of the seven-branched candlestick and the light of Israel has burned not only eight days, but for two thousand years. Israel is still the light-bearer unto the nations.

