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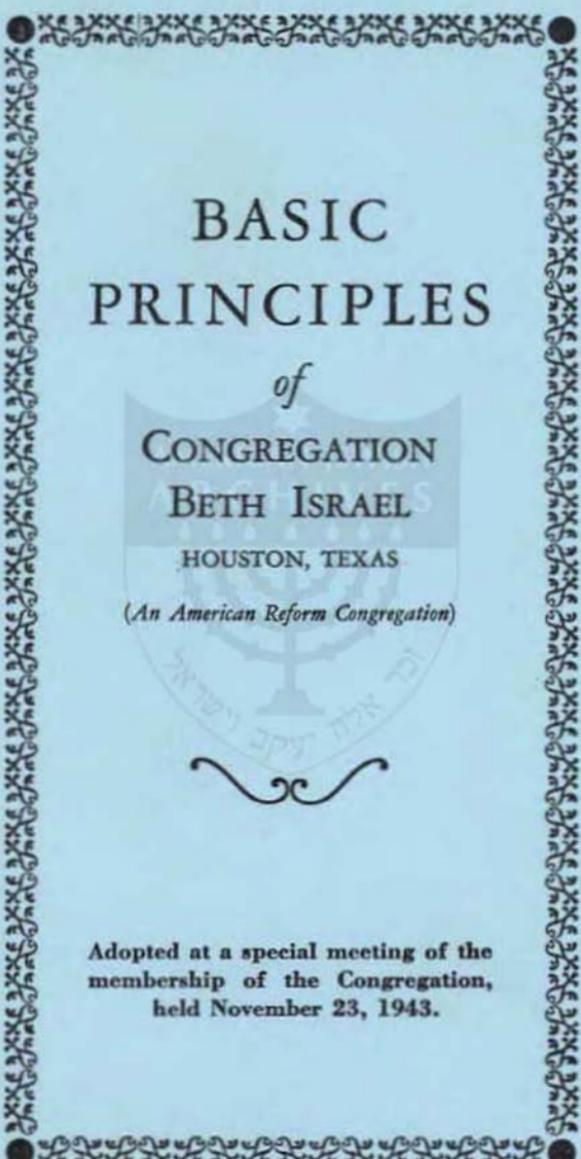
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Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Congregation Beth
Israel, Houston, Tex. 1943-1944.

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BASIC
PRINCIPLES

of

CONGREGATION
BETH ISRAEL
HOUSTON, TEXAS

(An American Reform Congregation)



Adopted at a special meeting of the
membership of the Congregation,
held November 23, 1943.

PRINCIPLE No. 1

We believe in the mission of Israel which is to witness to the Unity of God throughout the world and to pray and work for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. Our watchword is "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is One." We accept it as our sacred duty to worship and to serve Him through prayer, righteous conduct and the study of our Holy Scriptures and glorious history.

PRINCIPLE No. 2

We are Jews by virtue of our acceptance of Judaism. We consider ourselves no longer a nation. We are a religious community, and neither pray for nor anticipate a return to Palestine nor a restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state. We stand unequivocally for the separation of Church and State. Our religion is Judaism. Our nation is the United States of America. Our nationality is American. Our flag is the "Stars and Stripes." Our race is Caucasian. With regard to the Jewish settlement in Palestine we consider it our sacred privilege to promote the spiritual, cultural and social welfare of our co-religionists there.

PRINCIPLE No. 3

We believe in the coming of a Messianic Age and not in a personal Messiah. We recognize that it is our hallowed duty to speed the coming of the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God, which is the Messianic ideal for which the righteous of all people work and pray.

PRINCIPLE No. 4

We accept as binding only the moral laws of Mosaic legislation and Prophetic teaching. While respecting the convictions of our Orthodox and Conservative brethren concerning the rabbinical and Mosaic laws which regulate diet, priestly pur-

ity, dress, and similar laws, we, however, as an American Reform Congregation, reject the religious obligatory nature of the same, as having originated in ages and under influences of ideas and conditions which today are entirely unsuited, unnecessary and foreign to the beliefs and observances of progressive Judaism in modern America. We shall maintain and use in connection with our religious services only such ritual and ceremonies as may be approved by the Congregation from time to time and which may symbolize, in effective and beautiful form, the principles of our faith, and, which are adapted to the progressive and liberal spirit of our times.

PRINCIPLE No. 5

We recognize the complete religious equality of woman with man.

PRINCIPLE No. 6

The treasures of Divine revelation were given in the Hebrew language and in such language are preserved the immortal remains of a literature that influences all civilized nations. As the fulfillment of a sacred duty therefore, the cultivation of the Hebrew language must always be urgently desired by us. However, the Hebrew language has become unintelligible to the vast majority of our co-religionists; therefore, while a measurable content of Hebrew is essential and desirable in our rituals and services, it must be used wisely as is advisable under existing circumstances.

PRINCIPLE No. 7

The basis of brotherhood among the Jews throughout the world is Religion. Hence, it is our duty to help our co-religionists whenever and wherever the need may arise, even, as we must help all mankind that may be in need, in accordance with the principles of our faith.

V.A.H.C.



REPLY OF THE

Executive Board of the Union

TO CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL
OF HOUSTON, TEXAS . . .

Cincinnati, Ohio, March 28, 1944

Mr. Leopold L. Meyer, President
Congregation Beth Israel
Houston, Texas

Dear Mr. Meyer:

The Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, considering the resolution on the Union adopted by Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, a member congregation, comments thereon as follows:

The Executive Board regrets that the Houston congregation found it necessary to make public charges against the Union. Particularly it regrets that the Houston congregation refused the request of our Director, Rabbi Maurice N. Eisen-drath, to discuss with it the proposed resolution before it was publicized.

We find the resolution contains reference to:

- A. Retrogression and Dereliction of Leadership.
- B. The Conduct of the Union Delegates at the American Jewish Conference.
- C. The Failure of the Executive Board to Disavow the Action of the Conference and to Withdraw Therefrom.
- D. The Use of the Word "Liberal" instead of "Reform" in the name of the Union Magazine.
- E. Personnel and Literature in the Department of Education.

F. Laymen and Rabbis at Conventions and on Commissions.

A

With reference to the charge that

"a large share of the retrogression that has taken place in Reform Judaism must be considered dereliction of leadership upon the part of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations,"

the Union Board feels that there has been no retrogression; on the contrary we have lived up to the highest principles of Reform as taught by Isaac Mayer Wise, Kaufmann Kohler and other great Rabbis in their day and ours.*

The opposite of the word "retrogression" is "progress." We cannot refrain, at this juncture, from pointing to the progress of the Union in recent years. In addition to the many religious and educational activities in which we are engaged, we have in the last five years—

1. Increased the distribution of educational materials by 37½ per cent.
2. Within that period the Union inaugurated the publication of a magazine, LIBERAL JUDAISM, the excellence and high quality of which have been widely acclaimed.
3. It has also published within the last year or so a special literature for the Jewish men in the armed forces, of which we have already distributed, on the request of Jewish and Christian Chaplains, over three-quarters of a million copies.
4. Since the outbreak of the war, we have been largely instrumental, in cooperation with the Central Conference of American Rabbis and

*This allegation against the leadership of Reform, as well as the matter of Congregation Beth Israel's newly adopted requirements for membership, has been effectively answered by Dr. Solomon B. Freehof, President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. A copy of this reply will be furnished by the Union on request.

other religious bodies, in setting up a Chaplains' Committee, which has provided 225 Jewish Chaplains, of which 113 are representatives of Reform Judaism.

5. We have set up, for the first time in American Jewish history, a Pension System, to take care of our rabbis in their old age.
6. We have created two large federations of our congregations in the metropolitan areas of New York and Chicago, which serve as effective agencies for the promotion of Reform Judaism.

With regard, then, to the assertion that our "retrogression" was due to the "dereliction of its (the Union's) leadership," we leave that to such unassailable facts as well as to the judgment of our congregations.

With reference to the specific criticism of

"the failure of the delegates of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to the recent American Jewish Conference to forthwith register and publicly announce a dissent from that Conference's Palestine Zionist resolution, which said resolution far exceeded the Palestine resolution accepted by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and presented to its delegates as instructions before the American Jewish Conference convened,"

the resolution of the Union, passed April 1, 1943, authorizing its participation in the American Jewish Conference reads as follows:

Resolved, That we adhere to the American Jewish Assembly with the reservation that the Union of American Hebrew Congregations shall not be bound by the conclusions of the American Jewish Assembly without ratification by the Executive Board of the Union. A special meeting of the Executive Board for such purpose shall be called as soon as possible after the adjournment of the American Jewish Assembly.

This imposed a distinct limitation upon the rights of the delegates to commit the Union because its Executive Board reserved this right to itself.

The interpretation placed by Congregation Beth Israel upon the Declaration of Principles adopted by the Union is erroneous. These Principles were adopted two months after authorization to enter the Conference was given. They were to serve not as mandatory "instructions," but as a guide and as the basis of the Union's appeal to the Conference for a moderate Palestine resolution. This Declaration was presented to the Palestine Committee of the American Jewish Conference and its acceptance was forcefully urged by our delegates.

It is further charged that "the silence of the Union delegates gave the impression of assent to the Palestine resolution . . ." If there was such an impression, the responsibility cannot be laid at the door of the Union. As a matter of fact, the President of the Union gave a written statement to Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, Chairman of the Palestine Committee, to present to the plenary session of the Conference, indicating that the Executive Board of the Union had restricted the rights of our delegates to commit the Union. Acting on this request, Dr. Silver made a public declaration before the entire Conference, which is part of its official record, in which he said:

There are some organizations represented here through their appointed delegates which have not yet taken official action on some of the issues which have been raised at this Conference and that may be raised at this Conference . . . It should be made clear that all organizations have the right to ratify any action taken here if they so desire. This was the basic agreement underlying the Conference.

Hence it is unwarranted to charge that "the silence of the Union's delegates gave the impres-

sion of assent to the Palestine resolution." The fact is that the Executive Board of the Union did *not* ratify this resolution. In accordance with its specific mandate, within one month after the adjournment of the American Jewish Conference, the Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations met on October 3rd, 1943. All the resolutions passed by the American Jewish Conference were offered for ratification. Five resolutions passed by the American Jewish Conference, viz., on Post-war Problems; Rescue; Gratitude to the United States; Message to the Jews of Europe, and a Call to Faith were ratified by a unanimous vote of our Executive Board. The resolution on Organization of the American Jewish Conference was referred to a special committee for study. The resolution on Palestine was referred to the supreme body of the Union, namely the Council, because the Board found itself almost evenly divided on the Palestine resolution. It was realized, after lengthy debate, that with the Board evenly divided, no decision would be regarded as final and generally accepted by the constituent congregations, because it was clear that many of the congregations were themselves divided on the Palestine issue.

C

With reference to the allegation that

"the failure of the Executive Board to disavow the action of the American Jewish Conference and to withdraw from said Conference . . . has the practical effect to place the prestige and influence of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations . . . fully behind the maximal Zionist political program,"

we maintain that this is an interpretation with which we most emphatically must disagree. On October 3rd, 1943, as indicated above, our Board did not take action for or against the Palestine resolution, and again on January 18, 1944, we voted to "refrain from taking any action on the

Palestine resolution adopted by the American Jewish Conference." We have given wide-spread publicity to both of these decisions of our Board. We have likewise notified the American Jewish Conference of the conditions upon which we remain in the Conference, and have received their reply accepting these conditions. We have made known our attitude with reference to the Palestine resolution both in the public press and by direct communication to our individual congregations. No one can be misled by the action of the Union in remaining in the American Jewish Conference.

The resolution of Congregation Beth Israel criticizes the Union for its failure to "withdraw from the Conference." It raises the question: How can a group, holding a different judgment on an important question, decided on by a majority vote of an organization, prevent misunderstanding as to its position? Beth Israel's answer is "withdrawal." Is this a truly democratic procedure? Is there no other remedy more consonant with the spirit both of America and of Judaism? We believe there is. In our case, by giving adequate publicity to our position of neutrality, we are enabled to remain in the Conference in order to participate in other vital activities as have other organizations faced with the same problem.

We know that organizations and individuals occasionally resort to the method of withdrawal as a means of registering dissent from a majority opinion. But if this procedure were followed every time a majority decided against a minority, it would eventuate in the total dissolution of organized institutional life. It would fragmentize American Jewry and render us impotent in the face of the direst tragedy Israel has ever known. It would belie the vision of our founder, Isaac Mayer Wise, who dreamed and labored for a union of "all Israelites" in America.

In the kind of world in which we Jews live,

it is imperative that we nurture the cohesive principle rather than the divisive. Shall we, who stress our religious heritage and who preach the brotherhood of man, repudiate this principle in the field of Jewish action; can we do less than to "seek our brethren" in unity in this hour of doom for so many of our fellow Jews?

The Board of the Union was moved, because of such compelling considerations of conscience and stark necessity, to remain in the American Jewish Conference, and therefore resolved on January 18th:

The Union, continuing as a member of the American Jewish Conference, declares its sense of fellowship with all Israel and will associate itself with all worthy and practical efforts designed to ameliorate the tragic plight of world Jewry and to assist in reconstructing those communities that have suffered from the ravages of Nazi tyranny.

Would any fair-minded person or loyal Jew expect us to do otherwise?

D

Certain strange deductions are drawn from the use of the word

"Liberal" instead of the word "Reform," particularly in the name of our new magazine.

We believe that these deductions are in nowise justified.

On page 262 of "Life and Selected Writings" by Philipson and Grossman, Isaac Mayer Wise says: "Progressive Judaism would be a better designation than Reformed Judaism." Dr. Israel Matuck, a graduate of the Hebrew Union College, rabbi of a temple in London, a non-Zionist, ministers in the *Liberal Jewish Synagogue*.

At its organization meeting in London in 1926, in which outstanding leaders of American Reform Judaism participated actively, the World Union for Progressive Judaism, after due deliberation, by unanimous decision, adopted its

name, employing the term "Progressive" rather than "Reform" as being the most descriptive of our movement. Moreover, in the evaluation of various designations, it was the unanimous opinion that the term "Reform" was less precisely descriptive and adequate for our movement than "Progressive" or "Liberal." In the light of this considered judgment on the part of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, why should anyone cavil at the Union's use of the word "Liberal"?

E

Severe criticism is levelled against the Union

"for the recurring and constant compromise of the principles of Reform Judaism," particularly in: "the employment in its educational department of men in authority who are admittedly nationalistic in viewpoint with the resultant publication or endorsement of educational materials for both adults and children which give a predominantly nationalistic interpretation of Jewish life and history."

Congregation Beth Israel, which speaks in the name of religion and Americanism, would wish us to discriminate against our fellow American Jews who happen to be Zionists. The Executive Board of the Union unequivocally rejects the suggestion that it should employ or refuse to employ its professional workers on the ground of either their anti-Zionism or their Zionism. We consider such discrimination to be both un-Jewish and un-American. It violates the very freedoms for which we are at present fighting. It so happens that a majority of the executives in our national office is non-Zionist. But this proportion simply "so happens." Our executives are not chosen with reference to their being Zionists or anti-Zionists, but in accordance with their ability to fulfill the functions which they are expected to perform.

As to the content of our textbooks referred to in the charge that the employment of "men in

authority who are admittedly nationalistic" has resulted in the "publication and endorsement of educational materials which are predominantly nationalistic in their interpretation of Jewish life and history," this charge is altogether inaccurate, as may be shown by the examination of the textbook literature. The interpretation which is emphasized throughout our books is essentially *religious* in character. Of course, we do not exclude from the treatment of Jewish history or modern Jewish problems, any of the vital questions of our day, of which Zionism is surely one. All good teaching involves the presentation of more than one point of view. Each congregation is free, through its rabbi and its teaching staff, to give whatever emphasis it wishes to the material taught in the classroom.

It is contended, likewise, that "text substance in the textbooks of the Union is subordinated to the commercialization for sale of such books in Orthodox and Conservative religious schools." The charge that "text substance is subordinated to commercialization, etc." is preposterous. At no time were any of our principles or points of view subordinated in the slightest degree to such a purpose. It should be pointed out in this connection that the Commission on Jewish Education, since its reorganization in 1928 (and of course before 1923) has had as its principal officers (until 1942) Dr. David Philipson, Chairman, whose leanings are far from nationalistic, and Rabbi George Zepin, Secretary, likewise a non-Zionist. Furthermore, the majority of its members and a majority of its committee chairmen, throughout those years, were either non-Zionists or anti-Zionists. Every manuscript published is read by at least three members of the Commission, and only upon their recommendation is the manuscript in question published. Controversial questions must be decided by the rabbinical readers and not by our professional executives.

If, then, as should be evident to any unprejudiced observer, no principles are abandoned or sacrificed in our textbooks, nor owing to the organization of the Commission could they possibly be so sacrificed, then why should there be any objection to the popularity of our books in non-Reform congregations? Would the Houston congregation say that the use of our books by Orthodox and Conservative Jews disqualifies them for use in Reform Jewish schools? Our books are so extensively used because they are effective in writing and in format. Their popularity is a compliment to the statesmanlike manner and to the tact which our workers have exercised in the preparation of our materials, as well as to the excellent quality of the books from the point of view of their content, method, and their esthetic appearance.

The charges of the Houston congregation against our textbooks and our Commission on Jewish Education are wholly unfounded. The vast popularity of our textbooks in all types of schools is the most telling proof obtainable that we are working constructively in the field of American Jewish education. Our textbooks, perhaps more than any other single Reform activity and achievement, are promoting "the advancement of Reform Judaism."

F

In the resolution of Congregation Beth Israel it is urged that

"delegates to future Biennial Councils be preponderantly laymen."

The truth is that a substantial majority of the delegates to the Councils of the Union have always been laymen. Each congregation is entitled to determine for itself the composition of its own representation to the Biennial Councils. With the exception of some of our professional executive officers, the officers of the Union are laymen; a preponderant majority of the mem-

bership of the Executive Board consists of laymen. Almost all of the members of the Administrative Committee, which acts in the interim between meetings of the Executive Board, are laymen. Even a cursory review of the programs of recent Biennial Councils shows that most of the scheduled speakers and panel leaders were laymen.

No good purpose would be served by requiring Rabbis to attend Biennial Council sessions solely in an advisory capacity. This would in no way facilitate the work of the Union. If a member congregation prefers to have its religious leader as one of its representatives, why should it be deprived of this right?

Where joint action is called for between rabbis and laymen an effective *modus operandi* has been achieved which gives substantially equal representation to both groups. For example, such Commissions as those on Synagogue Activities, Information about Judaism, Pulpit Placement, and Survey already reflect such equal representation. Other standing Commissions such as those on Education and on Ceremonies now consist chiefly of Rabbis, primarily because of their more obvious qualifications for the task, in view of their specialized training. However, if any member congregation has in mind additional names of any qualified laymen who might serve on such standing Commissions, the officers and Executive Board of the Union would give any such recommendations most serious consideration.

CONCLUSION

We have endeavored to set forth herein the position of the Union with regard to the various criticisms made in the resolution of Congregation Beth Israel. We are not averse to constructive criticism. On the contrary, we welcome it.

It must be borne in mind that the Union of American Hebrew Congregations is a Union or Federation of the Reform Congregations of

America, organized for the specific purpose of carrying out those activities, indispensable for the persistence, growth, and progress of Reform Judaism on this continent, which no single congregation can perform for or by itself. Without the Union, Reform Judaism in America cannot survive. The Union is as strong only as the sum total of its constituent congregations acting together for the common cause. The Union has no authority other than that which its constituent congregations, meeting in its Biennial Councils, confer upon it. It operates only in conformity with the directives given it by these Councils, and follows strictly the democratic procedure of both American and Jewish thought and action.

Every constituent congregation has full and equal right and freedom to voice its opinion and to exercise its influence within the Biennial Councils of the Union. That alone is the ultimate tribunal. Every congregation has the right likewise to express its opinion concerning the principles, policies or actions of either the Council or the Executive Board, whether of assent or dissent, through written communications directed to the Executive Board, which is vested with the authority to act in the interim between Biennial Council meetings.

The officers and Executive Board of the Union are ever vigilant to give responsible consideration to the viewpoints thus presented to them by our member congregations. The Union asks its constituent congregations to give it their full and constant support in order that through the Union, Reform Judaism may go forward with maximum efficiency toward its consecrated goal.

For the Executive Board of the
Union of American Hebrew Congregations

ADOLPH ROSENBERG, *President*

MAURICE N. EISENDRATH, *Director*

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THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE
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THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF TEMPLE BROTHERHOODS
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34 WEST SIXTH STREET · CINCINNATI, OHIO · PHONE Parkway 7345

April 4, 1944

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Abe Wurzburg, Memphis

Dear Friend:

On January 12, 1944, Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas transmitted to us official resolutions which it adopted at its congregational meeting on November 23, 1943.

Inasmuch as these already widely distributed and publicized resolutions were most critical of the program, policies, and personnel of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, they were brought to the attention of our Executive Board at its meeting in Chicago on January 18.

The Executive Board resolved that the matter be referred to a committee, to be appointed by the President, to prepare the formal answer of the Union to the charges of Congregation Beth Israel of Houston.

A committee consisting of Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, Director of the Union; Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof, President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis; Lester A. Jaffe, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College; Rabbi Julian Morgenstern, President of the Hebrew Union College; Adolph Rosenberg, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, Vice-President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, was appointed to draw up the Union's reply to the allegations contained in the resolutions of Congregation Beth Israel.

This committee has given most earnest and deliberate consideration to its responsibilities in this most important matter, and has formulated the comprehensive reply attached hereto.

I would deeply appreciate your full and frank reactions, for, I assure you, our officers and Executive Board wish always to be guided by the counsel of our member congregations.

With cordial greetings, I am

Yours most faithfully,

Maurice N. Eisendrath

Maurice N. Eisendrath
Director

RABBI LOUIS I. EGELSON
Administrative Secretary

RABBI GEORGE ZEPIN
Honorary Secretary

MNE:GS
Encl.

RESOLUTION

We feel an intense pride in Judaism for priceless religious contributions to the followers of Judaism and to all mankind. Faith and belief in a moral and universal God; the Bible; the Ten Commandments; the moral and ethical concepts inherent in a truly religious way of life-- -- all these stand as living evidence of the spiritual mission of Israel. This is our Judaism which we would perpetuate.

American Reform Judaism did not "just happen". It represents clear and careful thinking. It was created to express the firm conviction that our mission is solely that of a religion; a most wonderful religion. It was designed to retain those traditional rites and customs which significantly illuminate the principles of our faith.

We answer in clear and simple manner the fundamental question: What do we want to be? We have chosen America as our nation and want no other national designation, either in whole or in any degree. We are Jews because we have chosen Judaism as our religion. Being a part of Jewry, we do not wish the concept or status of Jewry entangled with national affiliations or implications deriving from a fictitious Jewish nationhood. We wish our religion and nationality to remain entirely separate and distinct. We define our Jewishness as our religion; purely, simply and solely. The only national homeland we recognize is the national homeland we share with our fellow Americans of all faiths.

In confused and troubled times it is easy to stop thinking and forget fundamentals. Yet such is the very time when fundamentals are needed most. We revere American Reform Judaism. We deem it wholesome and essential to ever keep in mind its fundamental principles. If we remain true to our ideals-- --if we perpetuate our spiritual mission-- --we will not only enrich our own lives, but, in concert with the great brotherhood of religions, will continue to add to the blessings of all humanity. We will also help our children to enjoy the way of life which has made us happy and will make them happy in the land we love.

To these ends, and in consonance with the expression of all members of our congregation, we reaffirm the basic principles of our faith.

PRINCIPLE NO. 1

We believe in the mission of Israel which is to witness to the Unity of God throughout the world and to pray and work for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. Our watchword is "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." We accept it as our sacred duty to worship and to serve Him through prayer, righteous conduct and the study of our Holy Scriptures and glorious history.

PRINCIPLE NO. 2

We are Jews by virtue of our acceptance of Judaism. We are not a nation. We are solely a religion. We stand for the continuation of Judaism solely as a religion; and not as a national group, either in whole or in part. We stand unequivocally for the separation of Church and State. Our religion is Judaism. Our nation is the United States of America. Our nationality is American. Our

flag is the Stars and Stripes. We look upon Palestine not as a Jewish nation, but as one of the places where those who are oppressed may find a haven of refuge. We consider it our sacred privilege to promote the spiritual, cultural and social welfare of our co-religionists there and elsewhere.

PRINCIPLE NO. 3

We hope for the coming of a Messianic Age and not a personal Messiah. We recognize that it is our hallowed duty to speed the coming of the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God, which is the Messianic ideal for which the righteous of all people work and pray; and we believe that only in such universal, moral evolution in man will Israel find the answer to its historic and tragic problems.

PRINCIPLE NO. 4

We accept as binding only the moral laws of Mosaic legislation and Prophetic teaching. While respecting the convictions of our Orthodox and Conservative brethren concerning the rabbinical and Mosaic laws which regulate diet, priestly purity, dress and similar laws, we, however, as an American Reform Congregation, do not regard these as being religiously obligatory. We shall continue to maintain and use in connection with our religious services only such ritual and ceremonies as may be approved by the congregation from time to time and which may symbolize, in effective and beautiful form, the principles of our faith, and which are adapted to the progressive and liberal spirit of our times.

PRINCIPLE NO. 5

We recognize the complete religious equality of woman with man.

PRINCIPLE NO. 6

Many treasures of Divine revelation were recorded in Hebrew and in such language are preserved immortal remains of a literature that influences all people. As a reminder of its religious significance we use in our ritual a limited number of expressions having particular beauty. Except for this we conduct our services in the English language.

PRINCIPLE NO. 7

The basis of brotherhood among the Jews throughout the world is Religion. Hence, it is our duty to help our co-religionists whenever and wherever the need may arise, even as we must help all mankind that may be in need, in accordance with the principles of our faith.

We realize that no principles endure except in the hearts and souls of human beings who believe in them. Unless we require that new members believe in the fundamentals upon which our institution rests, we shall have thought only of today and forgotten tomorrow. We have defined Judaism as a matter of belief, rather than birth or nationality. By the same token we look to the beliefs of those who seek admission as American Reform Jews. We therefore provide: All new members shall subscribe to the basic principles of our faith.

We are firmly convinced that the destiny of American Reform Judaism depends upon steadfast adherence to the fundamental principles of our faith. We regretfully record our feeling that the Central Conference of American Rabbis has abandoned them in large part; that the Union of American Hebrew Congregations has neutralized them; and that the Hebrew Union College has failed to adequately teach them.

We fear that there has been worshiping of the idol of "unity". It is desirable to have as much unity as may be consistent with principle. Whenever unity is placed above principle the result is eventual loss of both unity and principle.

We respectfully urge that while there is still time the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Central Conference of American Rabbis and Hebrew Union College give to their programs vigorous and thorough analysis, reconstruction and action.



An obscure development in Lincoln, so far almost unnoticed, ultimately may affect more people than most things which happen here. Not only does it have important bearing on both a religion and a political

Answer to Anti-Semitism?

movement, it also represents a challenge to a dominant politico-social force of our times. Reform Judaism is the religion; Zionism the political movement, nationalism the force under fire. The development should be of interest to Jews and so-called Gentiles alike. For should it succeed in taking Judaism out of the realm of politics, it may make it less vulnerable to political attack. It may provide at least a partial answer to anti-Semitism to the extent that it revises the connotations of Semitism itself.

In Lincoln's Temple B'nai Jeshurun (South Street Temple) has taken place a schism which may either split Reform Judaism in two, or channel it in a new direction. It grew from a struggle neither

Statement of Principle

of factionalism nor of personalities, but of belief. The public first received notice of it in an announcement, last April, of the incorporation of the American Reform Congregation of Lincoln, Neb., with the following as a basic principle: "We are Jews by virtue of our acceptance of Judaism. We are not a nation. We are solely a religion. We stand for the continuation of Judaism solely as a religion; and not as a national group, either in whole or in part. We stand unequivocally for the separation of Church and State. Our religion is Judaism. Our nation is the United States of America. Our nationality is American. Our flag is the Stars and Stripes." The announcement added that "all members shall be required to subscribe to the foregoing principle."

There were ten incorporators. All had been members, and several of them officials, of the South Street Temple. For more than two months the group had worked within the temple for the adoption of a set of principles repudiating all concepts of Judaism as anything but a religion, and of a provision requiring new members to subscribe to those principles. When the trustees finally voted them down they withdrew to form their own congregation. Since then the new church has held Friday evening services regularly in the various homes, with members in charge. They plan to start a religious school, and hope to call a rabbi. The Lincoln group did not conceive of the idea of confining their interest in Judaism to religion and only religion. The American Council for Judaism, with several thousand members, has been fostering the doctrine for a year. And last winter the big Congregation Beth Israel in Houston, Tex., was induced, after bitter travail, to adopt a similar set of principles. The action was reported in detail in *Time* magazine. But the Lincoln group is the first to break away from an established congregation and start keeping spiritual house on its own. In Houston the move-

ment won over the rabbi and the temple; in Lincoln it originated among the laity and seceded. In the two places, thus, alternate trails to the same end have been blazed.

The full significance lies in the direct repudiation of Zionism, that articulate, well-organized school of Jewish thought which attaches a political meaning to Judaism. Zionism, which is Jewish nationalism, con-

Challenge to Zion

ceives of the Jews as the chosen people with a promised land, a dispersed nation which can have no rest until it has won for itself a national home in Palestine. Thru Zionism, thus, Jews have a stake in world politics, and in all the cross purposes of middle eastern affairs. To this embroilment, and to the dual allegiance which Zionism implies, the Lincoln reformers are unalterably opposed. Not all members of the congregation from which they withdrew are Zionists, but they could be if they chose; no one can be a member of the new congregation and be a Zionist. Dissociate themselves from all aspirations for a Jewish state, they believe, and they have both strengthened their religion, as such, and removed any possible mortgages on their Americanism.

Jews cannot make themselves into non-Jews (if they wanted to, and they don't want to) simply by saying their Judaism is only a religion. But by narrowing their self-definitions they may be able to broaden the field for tolerance. The writer in 1935 saw scrawled across Berlin synagogues the slogan "Heraus mit dem Juden." He recalls asking a nazi where, pray tell, the Jews were to go if expelled from Germany, and the nazi's reply, "Zu Palestine." Well, if Jews themselves claimed Palestine was their rightful home, there was a certain amount of plausibility to the nazi argument that Germany was not. But as a spiritual community their right to equality with other citizens wherever they make their home is undeniable.

Zionism—and the idea of nationalism generally, for that matter—has its roots deep in the Hebrew tradition. In orthodox synagogues the celebration of the Passover keeps the tribal tradition alive by emphasizing the occasion as

The Law and the Prophets

the anniversary of the actual expulsion from Egypt. In the Hebrew tradition, in the Law of Moses, is found the doctrine of exclusivism, of the chosen race, which backfired in the anti-Semitism of those peoples whose developing nationalism adopted the ancient Hebrew pattern of exclusivism for their own. Also in the Hebrew tradition, however, in the later Old Testament prophesies of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, is found the idea of the universality of man, which is the antithesis, or, as the prophets saw it, the perfection of nationalism. On the latter ground the Lincoln schismatics propose to build their temple.—R. A. McC., jr.

American Reform Congregation

Lincoln, Nebraska

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DR. HARRY M. GRADWOHL
JULIAN I. GRAFF

August 9, 1944

Dear Friends:

We are happy to advise you of the formation of a new congregation dedicated to the true fundamentals of American Reform Judaism.

At meetings of the congregation and board of directors on July 28 a resolution was unanimously adopted which contains a complete set of basic principles. Enclosed is a copy of the resolution. The articles of incorporation themselves, filed in April, also give positive support to these principles.

It is of utmost importance that the fundamentals of our faith shall survive. American Reform Judaism expresses a way of living which has brought great happiness to all of us. Today, however, we stand at the cross-roads. Repeated compromise and appeasement have shaken the very foundations upon which Reform was created. One need only re-examine the writings and utterances of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise and our other revered pioneering fathers to realize how sadly we have drifted from our course.

You will be interested in the results of the action we have taken in Lincoln. First and foremost, there has been a religious enthusiasm which is almost beyond description. Acting in complete accord with one's innermost beliefs is a truly invigorating experience. Although our congregation is not large in numbers, the spirit is remarkable in the extreme. Attendance of the various members has been almost one hundred percent each Friday evening. There have been no absences except for definitely unavoidable causes. The children, as well as the adults, have taken a keen interest. Every member of the group has remarked about experiencing a very warm and close feeling toward his faith -- -- far more personal and vital than any feeling which had ever existed before.

Another encouraging reaction is from the general public. Since the news stories of the formation of our congregation ap-

peared in local papers we have had a series of strong responses. These have included important public officials, professional men, business men, ministers and all other elements of the public. The typical reaction has been, first, amazement that there are Jews who do not believe in these principles; and, second, a decided feeling that general understanding of these fundamentals would greatly retard anti-semitism and that nationalism will increase it.

"Reform Judaism" is something more than just a name. The time has come for those who believe in its basic fundamentals to do more than maintain silence and watch the lights dim out. A vigorous movement is springing up throughout the land to reaffirm and revitalize these principles of American Reform Judaism which are so indispensable to the welfare of ourselves and our children. Our house can yet be set in order; but prompt and effective action is essential.

The initial burden must be largely carried by laymen. Here we find a parallel to the very origin of the American Reform movement; for such was also true during the first decade of Reform.

With kindest greetings and hoping that we may hear from you, we remain

Sincerely yours,

AMERICAN REFORM CONGREGATION
OF LINCOLN

By Bernard S. Gradwohl
President.

CONGREGATION B'N-EI ISRAEL

Galveston, Texas,

January 10, 1944.

COPY COPY

Mr. J. L. Park,
Stewart Title Coy. Co.,
Houston, Texas,

Dear Jacob:

Your circular letter has destroyed the excellent opinion I held of you for these many years - sorry enough as I for the change!

In reading your protocol, I am reminded of the Talmudic dictum - "Hatred knows no law", for I do not recall ever having read such expressions of overflowing hate as your diatribe, paralleling one of Hitler and Goebbels!

That an honest difference of opinion should give rise to such animosity is past my understanding!

Your representation of the matter, or rather your misrepresentation, is so filled with hatred that a discussion thereon is precluded.

Sincerely,

JLO:G

(Signed) Henry Cohen

Congregation Beth Israel

ORGANIZED 1856

KEYSTONE 3-6670

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HOLMAN AND LA BRANCH STREETS

HOUSTON, TEXAS

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May 15, 1944.

TO THE OFFICERS, TRUSTEES AND RABBIS
OF THE REFORM CONGREGATION ADDRESSED:

Gentlemen:

You were recently favored with a communication from Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof, President Central Conference of American Rabbis, and as the issues discussed therein and concerning the subject matter embodied in the Resolution of Beth Israel Congregation, Houston, Texas, are in no-wise disposed of, we are replying to Rabbi Freehof per printed copy attached.

It is also a pleasure to enclose "A Hand Book of True Facts Concerning the 'Basic Principles' of Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, Texas, An American Reform Congregation," in which we believe you will find set forth highly elucidating data and material in support of Beth Israel's position.

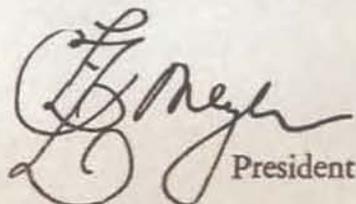
It is the conviction of Beth Israel that it is morally obligated to continue to pursue the aims and objectives embodied in its Basic Principles and in its Resolution; accordingly, Beth Israel will continue to keep all Reform Congregations informed of its actions and deliberations, through the mails, as there is not presently available any other medium at Beth Israel's disposal.

We solicit not only your careful perusal of the accompanying printed matter, but also your influence and assistance in the attainment of revisions and reforms in our national agencies, U. A. H. C., C. C. A. R., and H. U. C., in which must lie our hope for the redemption and revitalization of American Reform Judaism.

Your comments are earnestly solicited.

Very truly yours,

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL


President

SO BOB KAHN RESIGNED

Well who cares? Who is Bob Kahn and what's he to me? It so happens I remember Bob Kahn well. We went to the Hebrew Union College together. He was a clean cut, wholesome chap. He entered the Rabbinate by and by and made a good name for himself. When the war came he volunteered at once for the Chaplaincy. He is now in the wilds of New Guinea. Out there, word reached him that the congregation which he had been serving—he was associate rabbi in Houston, Texas — conferred second class membership upon those who observe Kashruth or believe in Zionism—conferred in a sense second class membership upon him who is doing a first class job for his country. Well, Bob Kahn is a man and a soldier. He sat down, wrapped his hand in a towel to keep the perspiration from the paper, and wrote down his resignation.

The irony of it is that in Houston the new rabbi and the Board wrap themselves triply in the American flag. In its name they presume to confer this second class membership upon Zionists, presume to impugn their patriotism. Bob Kahn in New Guinea flings back this abominably false charge. Patriotism is not the monopoly of one group in American Israel. As a matter of fact in this instance I wonder who the true patriots are: the Zionist rabbi in New Guinea or the anti-Zionist rabbi and trustees in Houston? Be that as it may, the people in Houston do not deserve the privilege of associating their name with his—Robert E. Kahn, Rabbi, Zionist, man of principle, Chaplain in the United States Army.

—William G. Braude,
Rabbi of Temple Beth-El,
Providence, Rhode Island

Horowitz

*The American Council
for Judaism*

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES

JACOB J. WEINSTEIN



Reprinted from
THE NEW PALESTINE
January 21, 1944

The American Council for Judaism

By JACOB J. WEINSTEIN

IT IS well for us to admit that the four votes cast against the Palestine Resolution of the American Jewish Conference represented the attitudes, not only of the anti-Zionists who were interested enough in Jewish life to vote for delegates to the Conference, but also of that indeterminate number of Jews who were too indifferent or too scared to vote for a delegate. These Jews could not be mobilized into taking a positive stand on an issue of Jewish concern but they are being mobilized to oppose what other Jews have already done. I recall a statement made by the executive secretary of the American Jewish Committee in Oakland, California, in 1938, to the effect that the Committee was as proud of what it had persuaded certain Jews *not* to do as it was of what it had actually done. It is the accretion of these "brake" Jews which has given the American Council for Judaism the power to retard somewhat the work of the interim committee of the American Jewish Conference.

I have carefully read the names listed by the American Council in their Information Bulletins and, since a fair cross-section of these signers are familiar to me, I venture this analysis of the motives that prompt them to support the published program of the Council.

It is more essential to discuss motives than arguments. The Zionist-anti-Zionist debate has been carried on for forty years. There is nothing to be added to the logic and the facts brought forth by Louis Marshall, Emil Hirsch and Kaufman Kohler; by Max Nordau, Israel Zangwill and Louis Brandeis. The psychological predisposition to accept or re-

ject these facts and reasonings must concern us here.

First of all, I note, among the supporters of the Council, a remnant of old-line reform religionists. They believe sincerely and intensely that we are Jews by virtue of our pure ethical monotheism, that the difference between our monotheism and the Christian or the Mohammedan versions is deep and important for the welfare of humanity. This remnant believes that it is our mission to preach our faith to the peoples of the earth as Abraham preached it to the Mesopotamians. For this purpose, our dispersion in all the countries of the earth is fortuitous—perhaps, even, divinely ordained. They are not discouraged by our small results as missionaries since they realize that we have not been free to proselytize during most of the last two millenia. Furthermore, we are the eternal people of an eternal God in whose sight a thousand years are as yesterday when it is passed. Sir Claude Montefiore and Lily Montague were fine examples of this faith. I see among the Council supporters men and women who honestly believe that a Jewish National Home in Palestine would encourage Jews to consider themselves as bound together by the "accidents" of history, language, folkways and memories rather than by this religious mission which derives from our covenant with God. By concentrating our work in Palestine, by reviving Hebrew as the language of the national community, we would be localizing our influence and making our unique faith less understandable to the peoples of the world. They recall that neither Helena of Adiabene

nor the Chazars would have been converted if Judaism had been anchored to Palestine and the Hebrew language.

Then, there is among the signers a small element which has been snagged in the net of 19th century cosmopolitanism. Their ideas were formed in the cooling-off period of modern nationalism when the forces which had liberated the collective power of the third estate and had vitalized the cultures of the various nations became the tools of the new and aspiring states in their lust for domination over their neighbor states. Nineteenth century idealists, whether laissez-faire liberals or Marxian Socialists confused the abuses of nationalism with the nature of nationalism. They ignored the deep authentic compulsions of the creative consciousness in nationalism. They dismissed all forms of nationalism as a detour on the high road toward one universal government, one universal language and one universal religion. To discover how few are these genuine cosmopolitans, look among the names of the Council for those who are as fervidly opposed to American nationalism as they are to Zionism or look for any Trotzkyist (Lehavdil) among them. To this remnant of a remnant, an amorphous, generalized Reform Judaism is an advantage for it is all the more ready to merge into the watered-down amalgam of undifferentiated universalism. Zionism, they believe, by giving Jews a local habitation and a name, congeals Judaism into slag in the cosmopolitan melting pot.

To these who have a more or less conscious philosophy of Reform Judaism and, therefore, a reasoned objection to Zionism, must be added the larger number of the unconscious assimilationists. They have lived in areas where anti-Semitism has been very polite or almost non-existent—among the wealthy upper middle-class, in small villages and Southern towns, or among the "emancipated" intellectuals. They have accepted their position as the

pet or tolerated Jewish minority in the town or the profession. They have, at least outwardly, compensated for social snubs by organizing their own city clubs, country clubs, fraternities, sororities, and women's improvement leagues. They are not too much distressed by the plight of the European Jew or, have sublimated that distress in working for the United Jewish appeal and the Community Chest. They have experienced considerable mixed marriages among themselves and see in these marriages the ultimate solution of the Jewish problem. Forced by Hitlerism and the revival of native anti-Semitism to count themselves among the Jews, they choose to affiliate with those groups and accept those programs which require least change in their habits, which least set them off from their neighbors, whose organizational apparatus can be most readily shed when anti-Semitism is called off and the all clear signal is given again.

A considerable part of the Council program has been written with this group in mind. With almost pathetic insistence the Jew is reminded that he is an American "endowed with rights for which he is answerable only to God"; that he is a citizen of a country . . . "conceived in a spirit which knows neither special privilege nor inferior status for any man" . . . "American Jews hope that, in the peace for which all of us pray, the old principle of minority rights will be supplanted by the more modern principle of equality and freedom for the individual" etc., etc.

Almost a Neurosis

It is obvious that many of those who have signed the Council statement of principles are suffering from a deep anxiety about their status and their security. It amounts almost to a neurosis. To help people in such a crisis requires a leadership that is itself unafraid and that can patiently explain the complex factors in our political, economic and international life

which are threatening the security of all peoples—not alone the Jews. But the leadership of the American Council is heavily studded with frustrated people who have themselves been made so insecure by the present crisis as to seek outlet for their frustration by acts of aggression against scape-goats—and the Zionists are their chief scape-goats. They are enraged against the Zionists because the Zionists have crystallized the conflicts seething within them—have pushed them against the sharp horns of the dilemma which they have cushioned with cottony phrases for many years.

I note, among these leaders, Rabbis who have passed themselves off as wardens of our tradition. They have induced their congregations to build very expensive Temples for the faith of Israel. They have annually put their Confirmation Classes through the oath of undying loyalty to the Torah of Israel. Yet, they know that they have built broken cisterns that can hold no living waters. They realize that they have built whited sepulchres for year-end and life-end Jews. Formerly, they could be satisfied with their mouth-filling platitudes about universal peace and justice. The melody of the words soothed the smug congregants and the thickness of the Temple walls kept from their ears the cries and complaints of the underprivileged third of our nation. But now the world tragedy has pushed through these walls. The very sons and daughters of the Reform Temples are plagued with the same doubts and fears that dog the steps of the poorest of our youth. They demand the palpable security of bread and butter and cheese—not the ghostly breath of distant promises. But bread and butter and cheese can be assured only through drastic changes in our vested patterns of production and distribution. One must speak in terms of government controls, social security, full production, guaranteed employment,

equalizing taxation, if one is to give prophetic Judaism a voice in the making of a better tomorrow. Some of my colleagues whose names I see on the list of Council sponsors dare not do this. They are not so callous, however, as not to feel twinges of conscience about their disloyalty to the prophetic message to which they have claimed first patent rights. The Zionists are the answer to their prayers. They can reconstitute themselves as defenders of the faith of the prophets and, on an issue which is much safer to discuss—the issue of nationalism vs. universalism. By defending prophetic universalism against the “narrow” nationalism of the Zionists, they satisfy their queasy consciences about the prophets and satisfy the members who want to sing praises to love and justice and at the same time hate Roosevelt, the New Deal, labor unions and the high taxes for a social security program.

Misinterpret Prophets

In their frenzy to attack the Zionists, my colleagues on the American Council grossly misinterpret the teachings of the prophets. Neither Amos nor Isaiah, neither Jeremiah nor Ezekiel put up this false dichotomy between nationalism and universalism. Israel was indeed to be a light among the nations—but, also, a nation among the nations. We were not to dissolve as salt in other people's soup. We were not to be the eternal gad-fly on the flank of the majorities. We were to restore the tabernacle of David in the land of David. The Torah of the Universal God was to go forth from Zion—nor did Isaiah leave a foot-note to the effect that Washington, Paris or London was to be our Jerusalem.

The prophets of Israel may have been narrow-minded giants but they were far better psychologists than some of my colleagues who claim to be their official heirs. They understood the elementary fact that

there could be no universal without a particular—no higher loyalty that was not built on a series of lower, primary loyalties; that a man was a focal point of many loyalties—different in nature one from another and at times conflicting with one another. Loyalty to Israel as a unique, particular, identifiable national community was in no way a contradiction or a barrier to loyalty to the city, the nation or the world in which one lived. In fact, loyalty to Israel—being what the prophets and sages have made it—is a very excellent preparation for loyalty to the federation of nations which must, in our time, become the highest loyalty of our lives if we are to be true to the Command of our Shema.

How paradoxical it is that our crusaders for simon-pure prophetism ignore the nationalism of the prophets just when the best students of nationalism, such as Carelton Hayes, Parker Moon, Hans Kohn and Salo Baron, come to see in it the hope and promise of the creative, cultural nationalism of the future—the only nationalism which will at the same time satisfy the historic sense of belonging and the need for a world organization consonant with our global interdependence.

The Russian writer, Illya Ehrenbourg, has captured the spirit of this new nationalism in these words:

"National consciousness is in the air of our times. The cosmopolitanism of the nineteenth century (on which the Communist ideology was based) is a thing of the past, the dreamers who were patriots of time and space have died out. Love for one's own village has been resurrected. . . . I fear nobody more than the 'mankind lovers' who are egotistically indifferent to their own mothers and children. *We have not lost faith in the brotherhood of nations, but our love for our motherland has made it a living faith.*"⁹

Now that Russia has openly disavowed cosmopolitanism, we should soon expect to see the break-up of the unholy alliance of the American Jewish Committee and

the Jewish Labor Committee—the sons of Julius Rosenwald and of Charney Vladek. These strange bed-fellows were brought together by their common antagonism toward Jewish nationalism—especially as it expressed itself in Zionism. The plutocratic assimilationists will no longer have the uneasy companionship of the proletarian socialist assimilationists.

Mr. Ehrenbourg has really put his finger on the deepest source of the conflict which disturbs the great majority of the signers of the Council program. They have no faith for all their hysterical claim to being Jews by religion only. They have no real faith in the Unity of God, or the brotherhood of man, or the goodness of nations. They fear that the rebirth of American nationalism after the war will put minority groups in jeopardy—especially groups of high visibility such as the Negroes and groups that can be easily labelled, such as the Jews. Their scepticism is in large measure a reflection of their own narrow loyalty to their economic interests—and these interests whether they speak in the international terms of Lamont, Davies and Harriman or in the America-first terms of Spangler, McCormick and Hearst—do not have the love of the motherhood which is a love for all its people or a love for the world which implies a quart of milk per day even for the Hottentots.

Pull of Economic Interests

Against the pull of these economic interests our wealthier Jews feel the tug of their Jewish identity. As industrialists or business men, they must oppose costly social security plans and government control of business. As Jews, they are beginning to feel vaguely that security for the masses is the best protection for themselves. But they are not too sure. They resent the conflict. They would rather not face it. They convince themselves

⁹ From *Furrows*—Volume I, January, 1943—p. 5—Published by Habonim.

that if it were not for the loud Jews, the Orthodox Jews, the Zionist Jews, they would not have this additional burden of choice. They could go along with the bankers and the directives of the National Association of Manufacturers. In their fear and frustration, they seek a scape-goat. They blame those who make the Jewish position visible—especially the Zionists.

In vain do many of our German refugees plead with them not to repeat the costly errors which they made when they trusted the promises of the polite German industrial fascists. In vain do we plead with them the cause of cultural pluralism in America as the prototype of the federation of nations in a workable world organization. In vain do we beg them to

join with the progressive minority of industrialists to fight the well-laid plans of the right-wing of reaction. In vain do we plead that, since they must surrender much of their privileges in the post-war transition period, they surrender them for a world that holds some real hope for their children and the children of all men. Fear has addled their reason. The denial of their peoples' right to a dignified future is but one aspect of their suicidal Torah-less universalism, an indication of a morbid self-hate which must lead to self-destruction. They can find no balm in Gilead to medicine their souls—nor will they find it in San Francisco, Chicago or New York. They are deaf to argument and adamant to persuasion. They need the help of a good psychiatrist.



COPY

U. S. Army
Office of the Chaplain
Headquarters Sixth Medical Battalion
APO 6 c/o Postmaster San Francisco, Cal.

Officers and Board of Congregation Beth Israel,
Holman and LaBranch,
Houston, Texas.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with regret that I submit my resignation as Associate Rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel.

This is not a hasty nor impulsive act. I have given it my careful consideration every since hearing, in December, that the Congregation determined to make agreement with its Basic Principles a qualification for voting membership.

Nor has it been an easy decision to make. My entire rabbinical career has thus far been as a spiritual leader of the congregation. My more than seven years of service have been extremely happy and satisfying ones. Most of my dearest friends are among its members, and I count many others in the Jewish and general community of Houston. To Houston I brought my wife, and there our son was born. It has been in the fullest sense of the term, my home. It is not easy to cut myself loose, and more especially so because my service in the Army prevents my putting down stakes elsewhere. But the same self respect and respect for principles which led me to don the uniform of my country now compel me to dissociate myself from the spiritual leadership of Congregation Beth Israel.

It is not the content of the "Basic Principles" which so much troubles me. It is a rather poorly written hodge-podge of theology, anti-defamation, anti-Zionism, and anti-Orthodoxy.

It proclaims that we are not an inferior race but of the same racial stock as Hitler and Goebbels, and this at a time when men of goodwill are striving to eliminate the whole concept of "racialism" from the thinking of mankind.

It implies that other Jews and other congregations are not quite patriotic.

In an effort to demonstrate to the non-Jewish public that we do not keep the religious customs of those "other Jews", it has stirred up a most unfortunate and needless religious controversy which could have been foreseen by anyone who had the welfare of Jewry at heart.

It categorically states, in its original form (the form upon which the congregation did vote), that prayer not understood is a soulless form, whereas all of us know people whose prayers in Hebrew they cannot translate are more soulful and sincere than the English prayers of many.

But these observations do not surprise me, for I have heard them expressed again and again by some few members of the congregation.

What does surprise me, what does trouble me, what does still shock me today as it shocked me three months ago, is that such principles (or, for that matter, any set of principles except the belief in one God) should become the basis for voting membership in the congregation. If such a step had been taken by any other congregation, I would have spoken against it. Such a step having been taken by the congregation of which I am Associate Rabbi, I, because I am a Reform Rabbi and an American, must protest by resignation.

I believe in Reform Judaism. I have never lived any other kind of Judaism. I attended the religious school of a Reform Temple of which my parents were members. I was confirmed and inspired to the Rabbinate by a Reform Rabbi. I spent eight years preparing myself for my life-work in the Hebrew Union College, founded by Isaac M. Wise. I know well the history of our people and the origins, growth, and development of Reform Judaism. I cannot recall an instance in Jewish history, early or late, in which a creed or set of "basic principles" has ever been the sine qua non for voting membership in a Jewish religious community. Such a requirement is alien to the spirit of democracy so magnificently preached and practiced by our people long before the Declaration of Independence or even the Magna Charta. Beth Israel's recently adopted policy has introduced into Jewish life a practice contrary to everything I have been taught by my Reform Jewish teachers. As a Reform Rabbi I can no longer acquiesce by silence to such action by the congregation I serve. Those who do not agree with the "Basic Principles", if they wish to worship in Beth Israel, can do only as non-voting or second class members. I am a first class citizen of the United States. I am a first class officer in the U. S. Army. But, by implication, I have been placed in a second class category in the congregation I have served for almost eight years. For, were I to seek membership in Beth Israel today, I would not be able to become a voting member. To be placed in this position is abhorrent to me.

I am an American, and I believe in the American, the democratic way. I must record my objection to any measure in any phase of American life which would "freeze" the relationship between a majority and a minority so as to place in a permanent minority position any group of people. It does not seem to me to be in consonance with the American way for a majority to say, so to speak, to a minority; "We are a majority. And we are going to continue to be a majority. We shall not allow you, the minority to increase your numbers, since we shall not allow others who hold with you to become voting members of this organization." This is what the majority in Beth Israel has done. As an American, I condemn such an act, and take the only course left open to me: resignation.

Though I must thus differ with you, I extend to you my personal greetings in memory of many happy years of cooperation and friendship.

Sincerely yours,

Chaplain Robert I. Kahn.

Resolution adopted by the members of Hebrew Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas (an American Reform Congregation) at a special meeting of the Congregation held on November 23, 1943.

— PREAMBLE —

The members of Hebrew Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, Texas (which Congregation was established May 8, 1856) view with great concern and with much regret the persistent, consistent and growing deviation of organized American Reform Judaism from the ideals and pattern which were established at its founding under the leadership of Isaac M. Wise. We are deeply concerned by the processes which, during the last two decades, have vitiated the broad universalism of this Judaism and have set in motion within it, forces which do not belong to the new world of emancipation and promise, but which are attuned to and are a part of the old world's concept of segregation and despair for Jewish life.

The three great institutions of American Reform Judaism are still those instrumentalities born of the vision of Isaac M. Wise, THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS, THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE, and THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS. Whatever strength this Judaism may have must come by way of leadership from these three institutions. Whatever defection there may be from the classical patterns of this Judaism must similarly, in very large measure, be the responsibility of these institutions.

Therefore, as a member of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and, as an American Reform Congregation that has in the past and hopes to continue in the future to look to the Hebrew Union College and to the Central Conference of American Rabbis for its spiritual leadership and guidance, we respectfully submit the following resolution in the devout hope that the action of this Congregation may inspire similar action in other congregations and that, united in action, we may be able to revive, strengthen, and re-inforce the heart and soul of that Judaism so long and honorably associated with the term "American Reform".

(A)

WHEREAS, the UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS is the official organization of the laymen of American Reform Judaism, and was called into being by Isaac M. Wise to provide support for the Hebrew Union College and to effectively provide a vehicle for the active participation by Reform Jewish laymen in the development and progress of American Reform Judaism, and,

WHEREAS, because of its position of leadership a large share of the retrogression that has taken place in Reform Judaism must be considered dereliction of leadership upon the part of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that as a member congregation of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, we register a severe criticism to that body for the recurring and constant compromise of the principles of Reform Judaism and particularly upon the following specific counts:

1. The failure of the delegates of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to the recent American Jewish Conference to forthwith register and publicly announce a dissent from that Conference's Palestine Zionist resolution, which said resolution far exceeded the Palestine resolution accepted by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and presented to its delegates as instructions before the American Jewish Conference convened. Their silence gave the impression of assent and any subsequent action must fail to overcome the dereliction of the responsibilities of delegates representing the laymen's reform movement to publicly disavow a commitment of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to the full, maximal Zionist political program as endorsed by the Conference; further, the failure of the Executive Board to disavow the action of the American Jewish Conference and to withdraw from said Conference but instead to refer the Palestine resolution to the next biennial convention, which is eighteen months hence, has the practical effect to place the prestige and influence of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations during this period, which may be the critical period of decision, fully behind the maximal Zionist political program which is contrary to the historical position of the Reform Congregations and the members thereof upon this question;

2. The recent tendency to eliminate the word "Reform" as the descriptive title of American Judaism and the gradual substitution of the word "liberal", as, for example, in the new magazine, "Liberal Judaism", the official organ of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. We submit that "Reform Judaism" has an established and honorable connotation in American life, both Jewish and non-Jewish; that it represented and represents certain definitive characteristics of religion in general and Judaism in particular; that the term, "liberal" is vague, non-definitive as applied to our particular American branch of Judaism and open to misunderstanding; and that in all probability this unexpected switching of term without rhyme or reason, represents still another concession to those who are not "Reform" but who desire to have the advantages of Reform Judaism's established position in the American scene;

3. The employment in its educational department of men in authority who are admittedly nationalistic in viewpoint with the resultant publication or endorsement of educational materials for both adults and children which give a predominantly nationalistic interpretation of Jewish life and history;

4. The subordination of "text substance" of text-books issued by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to the "commercialization for sale" of such books to the end that such books being used in our religious schools cannot longer be used for the advancement of Reform Judaism because they are designed so as to be saleable also to conservative and orthodox religious schools as well, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that these examples in our judgment call for a thorough investigation of all of the departments of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations with the underlying and avowed purpose of having the policies and personnel of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations vigorous and enthusiastic in the advancement, without apology or compromise, of the historic principles of American Reform Judaism, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in the future conventions of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations consideration be given, through amendment to by-laws or otherwise, to insuring that the accredited delegates be preponderantly laymen in American Reform Judaism; that congregations be notified that their accredited delegates should by preference be laymen; that rabbis attend in advisory capacities; that addresses and committee actions be consciously designed, however, to express the laymen's viewpoint; and that for purposes where joint action is called for, between Reform Rabbinate and Reform laymen, some effective modus operandi be designed which should give equal representation to rabbis and laymen, and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in all important standing commissions of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, particularly those having to do with education, ceremonies, public information about Jews and Judaism, etc., the membership of laymen, in advisory capacities be greatly increased, in order that in these important and controversial areas, the opinion of the Reform Jewish laity may be adequately represented.

(B)

WHEREAS, the Central Conference of American Rabbis is the Rabbinical body obligated with leadership for American Reform Judaism, and

WHEREAS, its own members, above all others, should recognize and acknowledge that the Judaism over which they have been given the leadership and supervision has certain distinctive qualities which called it into being as an interpretation of Jewish life, and

WHEREAS, in the past few years the energies of the Central Conference of American Rabbis seem by both impression and record to have been in the direction of apologizing for the differences between Reform Judaism and other branches of Judaism, rather than to have been directed toward planning the strengthening and the extension of Reform Judaism, and

WHEREAS, the historic pattern of Reform Judaism has been one of opposition to political Zionism and Jewish nationalism, regardless of what may or may not have been the relationship between these forces and other branches of Judaism, now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that this congregation, an American Reform Congregation, served by members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis does hereby protest against that body's departure from the historic pattern of American Reform Judaism, as first enunciated by Reform Rabbis in conference in this country at Philadelphia in 1869 and at Pittsburg in 1885, as re-stated at Rochester in 1920 (after the Balfour declaration) and as further re-defined in the Columbus platform of 1937, which departures are indicated by the following actions of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

1. The entertainment and subsequent adoption of a resolution endorsing a "Jewish Army" at its 1942 convention, which action was a definite embroilment of a religious interpretation of Jewish life in a political quarrel and the commitment of that religious interpretation of Jewish life to a partisan, political program;
2. The entertainment and adoption of a resolution at its 1943 convention, asserting that there is "no essential incompatibility between Reform Judaism and Zionism," when as a matter of historic fact and action, the very essence of Reform Judaism has been opposition to both Jewish nationalism and to such emphasis upon the racial, folkloristic, tribal vestiges of Judaism as stem from it;
3. The inclusion in the latest, revised version of the Union Prayerbook Volume I, of service numbered "V", for the Sabbath Evening, which is admittedly nationalistic in character when, again, the whole structure and tradition of Reform Judaism has been one of departure from and emancipation above and beyond a religion of nationalistic limitations and delineations, as evidenced in the historic fact that among the modifications for which early Reform contended was the elimination of prayers which alluded either to the restoration of or the return of Israel to a physical Zion;
4. The accession of the delegates officially representing the Central Conference of American Rabbis to the American Jewish Conference to the maximal Zionist program of that Conference, despite the fact that the official platform of the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted in Columbus in 1937, is violated in spirit and in letter by such maximal, Zionist resolution. The American Jewish Conference's resolution, from which the Central Conference of American Rabbis delegates registered no dissent far exceeds any declaration upon Palestine upon which Central Conference of American Rabbis membership has been permitted a free and democratic vote and does not represent, as a result of any referendum or otherwise, the recorded or ascertained convictions of the membership of the Central Conference of American Rabbis;
5. The acceptance through their silence of the Central Conference of American Rabbis delegates to the American Jewish Conference, (and the participation by some), in the undignified, abusive, and unwarranted attacks upon fellow rabbis and laymen who are members of Reform Congregations and whose "crime" consisted in the exercise of the right of free speech to state what has been the traditional position of Reform Judaism in the United States upon the question of political Zionism.

(C)

WHEREAS, the Hebrew Union College is the rabbinical seminary founded by Isaac M. Wise for the exclusive and specific purpose of providing American Reform Jews with leadership trained in and harmonious with the traditions of American Reform Judaism, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that this Congregation, an American Reform Congregation, joined by such others as may entertain similar views, which Congregations traditionally look to the Hebrew Union College for spiritual leaders, urgently request of the responsible College authorities a thorough and complete investigation of the curriculum, requirements and personnel, some or all of which must provide some of the basic reasons for the fact that over the recent years, an overwhelming preponderance of graduates have openly expressed little sympathy with and have actively sought little expansion of the historic principles of Reform Judaism, and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in the course of such investigation, particular attention be placed upon the following factors which would seem to have an important bearing upon the attitudes of recent Hebrew Union College graduates;

1. Increasing emphasis by College authorities upon a considerable background of Hebrew to pass the entrance examinations. It is our information and belief that such an emphasis has a tendency to make it more difficult for young men with the background of American Reform family upbringing to qualify as students at Hebrew Union College, since a profound knowledge of the Hebrew language has never been a cardinal tenet of Reform Judaism. Thus, while apparently pursuing the pathway of Reform Judaism, we are in effect disqualifying our own Reform-educated boys from future leadership in the movement in which they were raised as Jews. This is but a process of self-defeat. The tendency is to attract to Hebrew Union College greater proportionate students from Orthodox and Conservative backgrounds than from Reform.

2. The failure to provide a more thorough course at the Hebrew Union College that is designed to provide an understanding of the history and the ideology of Reform Judaism itself. We do not minimize the need of a knowledge of the totality of Jewish life and thought but the Hebrew Union College is an American Reform institution and its graduates are held forth as Reform Rabbis who have been educated at the expense of American Reform Jews, therefore, we submit that it is not expecting too much that they should be specialists in the promulgation and the defense of that particular interpretation of Judaism.

CONCLUSION

WHEREAS, it is the judgment of this Congregation, that in the final analysis, the life and the destiny of American Reform Judaism depends upon the vitality of the belief in such Judaism among the members in the Congregations, and,

WHEREAS, in its inception, Reform Judaism was a movement that was born of the vision and desire of laymen who sought a Judaism in consonance with the emancipation of their lives, and,

WHEREAS, in the less than a century of its active participation in the American scene, Reform Judaism has rendered notable service and made lasting contributions for all Judaism, now therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, by the members of Congregation Beth Israel, that it is our earnest hope that the congregations of American Reform Judaism once again through their lay officers and members will study this frank protest and survey the whole status of American Reform against the pattern of its historic principles and demand of the next convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations that it take immediate steps to formulate a program and to implement it with action of a constructive kind, designed to restore to American Reform Judaism that liberal, universal emphasis which made it historically significant and distinctive as an interpretation of Jewish life and a blessing to Israel and mankind.

Let There Be Light

By

HYMAN JUDAH SCHACHTEL

Rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel

Houston, Texas

Without knowing all the facts, many have criticized the Basic Principles of Reform Judaism adopted Nov. 23, 1943, by an overwhelming majority of Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas. That there may be light and understanding is my purpose in writing the following.

Congregation Beth Israel is almost ninety years old. It is one of the oldest and one of the largest Reform congregations in the country. It is in a part of the United States which, for half a century, has enjoyed the vigorous Reform leadership of such well-known rabbis as Dr. Henry Cohen, Dr. Henry Barnston, and Dr. David Lefkowitz. Without any intervention on my part, the leaders of my congregation have culminated a three year period of study and thinking and planning by drawing up seven Basic Principles of Reform Judaism to be recognized as the spiritual platform of their congregation. These men saw clearly how, in the past decade, Reform Judaism has been pushed from one position to another and was gradually surrendering its unique character. They wished to avoid falling into a nondescript status. They were disturbed by the increasing power over the future of Reform Judaism exercised by leaders in Political Zionism. After careful study of the history of Reform Judaism and its development, they wrote their principles, presented them to the congregation, and saw them accepted, by an overwhelming majority, at the largest congregational membership meeting in the history of Beth Israel. Hence, when violent critics have assailed me as the "arch priest" of these principles, as the one who forced them upon the congregation (at this time of writing, I have been here about seven weeks; and the principles were adopted four weeks ago) the truth of the matter is that I had nothing to do with either the formulation or the adoption of the principles as submitted. This is clearly and inspiringly a layman's movement to revitalize and reaffirm the principles of American Reform Judaism as these laymen, after careful research, understand them.

The ferocity of the attacks have been, for the most part, aimed at Principle No. 4. This principle reads as follows:

"We accept as binding only the moral laws of Mosaic legislation and prophetic teaching. While respecting the convictions of our Orthodox and Conservative brethren concerning the rabbinical and Mosaic laws which regulate diet, priestly purity, dress, and similar laws, we, however, as an American Reform Congregation, reject the religious obligatory nature of the same, as having originated in ages and under influences of ideas and conditions which today are entirely unsuited, unnecessary and foreign to the beliefs and observances of progressive Judaism in modern America. We shall maintain and use in connection with our religious services only such ritual and ceremonies as may be approved by the Congregation from time to time and which may symbolize, in effective and beautiful form, the principles of our faith, and which are adapted to the progressive and liberal spirit of our times."

The critics claim that this means that a Jew who observes the traditional dietary rules is barred from membership in the congregation. This is untrue. The fact is that individuals in this congregation are free to do as they like. They may or may not observe the traditional dietary laws; but this congregation, as a Reform Jewish congregation, affirms what has been common knowledge about Reform Judaism for years, namely, that, as a Reform congregation, it does not regard the observance of the traditional dietary laws as religiously obligatory. The congregation says that if a member does not observe the traditional dietary regulations, he is not sinning against God.

Principle No. 2 is another favorite target of critics. That principle reads as follows:

"We are Jews by virtue of our acceptance of Judaism. We consider ourselves no longer a nation. We are a religious community, and neither pray for nor anticipate a return to Palestine nor a restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state. Our religion is Judaism. Our nation is the United States of America. Our nationality is American. Our flag is the 'Stars and Stripes'. Our race is Caucasian. With regard to the Jewish settlement in Palestine we consider it our sacred privilege to promote the spiritual, cultural and social welfare of our co-religionists there."

The particular idea in this Principle No. 2 which has aroused the greatest ire is the statement, "Our race is Caucasian." Now these laymen here know that there are also Ethiopian Jews and Chinese Jews and Jews in India. But—they were writing principles for their congregation in Houston, Texas, and in their congregation the membership and the potential members in the city belong to the Caucasian race. Remember that they were not writing principles for Reform Judaism throughout the world; they were writing them for Houston. They were writing them for their own congregation. Webster's New International Dictionary defines "Caucasian" as follows: "Designating or pertaining to the division of mankind comprising the chief races of Europe, North Africa and Southwestern Asia . . . The typical peoples of the race are comprised of the speakers of the Indo-European, Semitic and Hamitic languages."

Another charge has been hurled against this congregation—which is, that in establishing an associate-membership for those who do not accept these principles but wish to, nonetheless, be associated with this congregation, a "second-class" membership has been instituted. This, too, is a charge without foundation. The associate-membership, and other categories of special memberships, are to be found in many Temples. In each case, specific rules govern the kind of membership that an applicant for Temple affiliation may be granted. Most frequently, it involves financial considerations. The applicant must be able to afford a full membership. Here at Congregation Beth Israel, however, everything possible has been done to eliminate the financial barrier to full membership. Young single people, to the age of twenty-eight, pay twelve dollars a year. For widows and single persons who can pay no more, the cost is eighteen dollars per year. Whole families may pay as low as twenty-four dollars a year. (Almost 40% of the congregation pay between eighteen and twenty-four dollars a year.) This includes everything—voting rights for husband and wife, High Holyday seating for the entire family, religious school instruction, free burial permits, the purchase of a cemetery plot at a rate which is 20% lower than that charged to non-members, and the service of the rabbi for special occasions like weddings and funerals. Furthermore, the unassigned pew system prevails so that on the Holydays, there are no reserved seats.

Anyone can choose the kind of affiliation he wants and to which he is entitled within the generous regulations just described. Those who do not accept the principles of Reform Judaism as the congregation sees them may, if they wish, be associate-members with all the

aforementioned privileges save that of voting. The privilege of voting is reserved for those who believe in the "Basic Principles" which are now the religious platform of this congregation. Thus, the doors are open to all Jewry, while, at the same time, the congregation is maintaining itself as an American Reform Congregation, and is assuring its survival as such.

Finally, the critics of these principles declare, on the basis of Principle No. 6, that we are banishing Hebrew from our services. Let me quote you Principle No. 6:

"The treasures of Divine revelation were given in the Hebrew language and in such language are preserved the immortal remains of a literature that influences all civilized nations. As the fulfillment of a sacred duty, therefore, the cultivation of the Hebrew language must always be urgently desired by us. However, the Hebrew language has become unintelligible to the vast majority of our co-religionists; therefore, while a measurable content of Hebrew is essential and desirable in our rituals and services, it must be used wisely as is advisable under existing circumstances."

The nonpartisan reader of this principle must see what is quite obvious—that this principle, as in the case of the traditional dietary laws, is merely reaffirming what Reform Judaism has declared since its inception—that the service should be as intelligible as possible to the worshippers. But "a measurable content of Hebrew is essential and desirable in our rituals and services." Also, "as the fulfillment of a sacred duty, therefore, the cultivation of the Hebrew language must always be urgently desired by us." Only a biased critic can charge that this congregation seeks to drive Hebrew out of the Temple.

The perilous practice of name-calling indulged in by the critics of Congregation Beth Israel is a sickening affair. Let us have fair play. Let there be light.

NOTE: The above statement released for publication to the Independent Jewish Press Service, Inc., Dec. 30, 1943.

HYMAN JUDAH SCHACHTEL, SENIOR RABBI
DR. HENRY BARNSTON, RABBI EMERITUS
ROBERT I. KAHN, ASSOCIATE RABBI
(ON LEAVE AS CHAPLAIN IN U. S. ARMY)

Congregation Beth Israel

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Houston, Texas
January 11, 1944

TO THE OFFICER, TRUSTEE AND RABBI
OF THE REFORM CONGREGATION ADDRESSED:

The resolutions herewith submitted were adopted by an overwhelming majority of the members of Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, Texas, at a special meeting held Nov. 23rd, 1943. The meeting was the largest ever held by this Congregation, there having been more than 800 men and women present.

We forward these Resolutions to you in the spirit of constructive criticism and with a profound concern for the future of American Reform Judaism. Today there are only 55,000 families affiliated with American Reform Congregations. We are not satisfied with this showing, after seventy-five years, and are not content to see Reform Judaism disappear from the American Jewish scene. Our aim is to build and we hope to see Reform Judaism, as envisaged and planned by Isaac Mayer Wise, grow in strength and influence throughout the land.

Sincerely,

Sidney L. Mayer,
Secretary.

P.S. You may also be interested in seeing a copy of the Basic Principles of the Congregation and the article pertaining thereto released by our Rabbi to the Anglo-Jewish press, which we enclose herewith.

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THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE
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Rabbi Jonah B. Wise, New York
Abe Wurzburg, Memphis

January 26, 1944

Dear Friend:

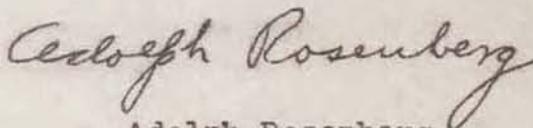
On January 14, 1944 I received a letter from Mr. Leopold L. Meyer, President of Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, containing a resolution criticizing the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Information has reached us that a copy of this resolution was sent to every Board member of our affiliated congregations.

I brought the Houston resolution to the attention of our Executive Board at its meeting in Chicago on January 18. Our Board regretted that this resolution was circulated among the members of our congregations before the Union had an opportunity to reply to the charges contained therein.

The Board voted to refer the matter to a subcommittee for proper and prompt action. I trust that you will withhold judgment on this regrettable action by the Houston congregation until the report of this subcommittee reaches you, which will be in the very near future.

With kind greetings, I am

Sincerely yours,



Adolph Rosenberg
President

AR:GS



RABBI LOUIS I. EGELSON
Administrative Secretary

RABBI GEORGE ZEPIN
Honorary Secretary

Houston, Texas
January 4, 1944

Board of Trustees, Temple Beth Israel,
(An American Reform Congregation)
Houston, Texas.

Gentlemen:

On May 22, 1943, I wrote the president of the Congregation setting forth my views on the manner in which the affairs of the congregation were conducted. The events that have transpired since that time have not been such as to warrant my retracting a single syllable of that statement. On the contrary, I have become more confirmed in the conviction that the ouster of Doctor Barnston and the election of his successor were accomplished by a course of conduct characterized by deceit, chicanery and hypocrisy that would bring a blush of shame to Tammany at its worst. I will not unduly prolong this resignation with a bill of particulars, which will be cheerfully furnished upon request. Some of the facts were set forth in the Beth Israel Sentinel, which one of your Masterminders denominated "that sheet" because he could not successfully challenge a single statement of fact therein contained. For the present, suffice it to say that the meeting of Nov. 23d was a fitting culmination to a campaign of hate, calculated to drive a certain segment of the membership from the temple and that to the sins of deceit, chicanery and hypocrisy there was added the shameful spectacle of anti-semitism and un-Americanism in a Jewish house of worship. On my calendar November 23 is a day of infamy second only to December 7.

In my open letter to the congregation, published on Nov. 22d, I stated that "I am not getting out until I am forced out." After Nov. 23d I refused to obey my first impulse and I have deferred writing of this letter so that I could view the events that led up to the crowning infamy, with some objectivity. I have regretfully come to the conclusion that I have been forced out and I therefore tender you my resignation and that of my wife, effective at once. On Tuesday, Nov. 23, 1943, the House of God was defiled and desecrated by the most brazenly anti-semitic outburst that I have ever heard from the lips of any person anywhere, not to mention a Jewish house of worship. (Naturally, I have never attended any of Father Coughlin's mass meetings, nor those of Gerald L. K. Smith.) Under the circumstances, I could not in good conscience again set foot in that building until it has been cleansed and purified and until the stain of that wanton attack has been eradicated by proper atonement. In my eyes, that building has achieved the sanctity and dignity of a concentration camp.

Last you should be constrained to breathe a premature sigh of relief at being rid of the "orthodox menace" and be too happy to receive this resignation, you should know that although I am resigning my membership so as to put myself out of reach of any punitive action you might wish to take were I to remain within the temple, I shall not fail to avail myself of any and every legitimate

opportunity to make this sordid story known to the world. I have no more lost interest in the sanctity of a Jewish house of worship than has, let us say, Thomas Mann lost his interest in the regeneration of Nazi Germany after he was forced to flee from its terror. The truth shall be my sword; faith in Democracy and the American Way, my shield and armor. So armed I will be immune to your threats of reprisal. So long as I speak the truth, you cannot silence me. The whole world should know that at a time when thousands of our men and many women are dying on and near the battlefield in defense of freedom and when the national watchword is "Unity", you have seen fit to foment strife and to split this community asunder and to array class against class; brother against brother. I intend, when I shall have completed my file, to turn a copy of it over to the Houston Ministerial Alliance. If you have followed the path of rectitude, as you so piously claim, you should have no objection to the truth --all of it-- being known. A termite it is well known, cannot live in the sunlight.

I think it is proper at this time, that several matters should be made known to the Board and to the membership:

1. My letter of May 22, 1943 to the president of the congregation contained an indictment against the Board, but not a word of defense of Zionism or of Orthodoxy. I challenged the action of the Board because the democratic process had been abused when Doctor Barnston was uncerimoniously ousted from his pulpit on a pretext. (The real reason was that the Board wanted a paid propagandist of its new "cause", the Jewish version of America First, to occupy that pulpit.) A copy of that letter went to Doctor Barnston and it should be known that he voluntarily called at my office to thank me for my attitude and that he heartily agreed with the stand that I had taken. He stated (in so many words): "I was booted out" by men who are cold blooded and who have learned nothing from what has happened to the arrogant Jews of Germany who prided themselves on being 110% Germans and who had the same contempt for the "Ostjuden" that you have for those who have amassed less of the coin of the realm than you have. I learned from Doctor Barnston, that one of the three men who demanded his resignation was not even a member of the Board; just a merchant prince. Also, that the very gentleman who introduced the laudatory resolution of "regret" at his going was none other than that staunch exponent of Benevolence, Brotherly Love and Harmony who had, at a meeting of the Board, exhibited a picture of the interior of the temple taken on a Friday night, during services, - to show the empty pews. Was that Benevolence or was it Brotherly Love toward another Ben B'rith of the same Lodge? After this piece of hypocrisy, came another sincere - and very pompous- gentleman who introduced a resolution granting him the empty honor of Rabbi Emeritus. How conveniently those resolutions came forth from inside coat pockets after these gentlemen had recovered from the surprise of the "resignation"! Words fail me when I try to appraise such conduct.

2. At the same conference with Doctor Barnston, he urged me to enlist the support of those members of the congregation who were opposed to these high-handed methods, and to form an ORGANIZED opposition to the ruthlessness and arrogance of that

clique that has been for too long entrenched in the temple. At least two of that clique are not even members of the Board, while some members of the Board are mere "yes men." If I have shown any zeal in this fight against such abuses, it is partly due to the inspiration derived from that interview. I understand his viewpoint better now. Also, I am beginning to understand what Mrs. Barnston meant when, following the services on the succeeding Friday night, she grasped my hand and said: "You are a brave man." I don't want to indulge in heroics, but in all candor and simplicity, I state that I am prepared to take all you have to offer; but you should be prepared to take all I shall give in return,- just the plain, unvarnished truth. There is where you are singularly vulnerable.

3. My wife and I do not intend to join any orthodox or conservative congregation. We shall remain unaffiliated refugees from the wrath and fanaticism of the new "cause" until a decent, democratic reform congregation is organized in Houston or until Beth Israel has been made clean and wholesome by a return to sanity. It is true that I am a member of that group that you contemptuously refer to as "those Yiddish-speaking masses" and I have never avoided speaking- or writing- Yiddish when occasion demanded, nor do I apologize for it. But I embraced what I conceived to be LIBERAL Judaism, even before your present rabbi discovered his divine "call" (at so much per), and I did it in good faith, accepting it as a way of life and NOT as a way of making a luxurious living. While I had worshipped in orthodox synagogues as a boy, I have never been a member of either an orthodox or conservative congregation on my own. My wife, on the other hand, is of the third generation of reform and taught in a reform Sunday school in Virginia. She had never heard a word of Yiddish till she came to this part of the country. She does not share the abhorrence of some of the first-generation Americans on the Board, for THEIR mother tongue. Your rabbi, it should be remembered, is a son of a mohel and chazan in a congregation on the East Side of Buffalo and when he accepted the "call" of Beth Israel, was conducting services in a New York Congregation, while wearing a tallis and a skull cap. I have never owned either a tallis or a yarmulke, to be so readily put away in mothballs! For a man with that background to join in a pogrom on the "Yiddish-speaking masses" and to publicly ridicule the dietary laws and the folkways of the Jewish people, is truly a "chillul Hashem", a profanation of the name of the Lord! and speaking of Yiddish, it might be appropriate to add that I can also speak and write English, which is more than can be said for some of that august clique.

4. You should know that though I am a Zionist by conviction I was not affiliated with the organization in Houston until about three years ago, and then only as a dues-paying member; that is, until the beginning of the pogrom. One of the members of your Board knows that I have devoted all of my spare energies to B'nai B'rith. But did that prevent his joining in the witch-hunt? In your fanatical attack against Zionists you have caused a number of lukewarm Zionists to become ardent in their devotion to the cause, just as the Hitler terror has caused many Jews to return to the Judaism they had deserted.

5. The stab you gave to Captain Bob Kahn after he joined the armed forces will some day come back to plague you. That is the way in which you should show your patriotism! In the safety and security of your positions, you gave him a big sendoff when he left, but when the time came for that lavish celebration of the Roman holiday, that in a time of war is positively vulgar, you couldn't even find it in your hearts to mention, in all that spread of publicity which you so abhor when other congregations indulge in it, that the only chaplain (Jew or non-Jew) that had gone from Houston to the field of battle was, before he left, the associate rabbi of this congregation. In all of that elaborate and expensive program that you printed, you could reproduce a spurious letter of congratulation from Rabbi Jonah Wise --written and signed in Houston-- but you could find no room for one word of greeting from that man at the front. and was it just an accident that HIS name was omitted from the plaque in honor of those who have entered the service? It was not lost on the public, either, that not a single rabbi or layman from any of the other Jewish congregations in the city had any part in the program of installing the high priest of the Council for Judaism in America, the Jewish version of America First Isolationism.

I abhor hypocrisy at any time and in any place, but especially in the house of God, and I think that you achieved the ultimate in hypocrisy when, after forcing your rabbi to resign, then making him the subject of scandalous and scurrilous reports and innuendos until -able to resist you no longer- he gave you a clean bill of health, you then had the effrontery to celebrate in HIS honor with a big simchah that was a stench in the nostrils of decent men- an abomination in the sight of the Lord.

The enclosed memorandum of a few historical parallels should prove refreshing. Extra copies are available and will be furnished upon request, for general distribution.

Yours very truly,

J. L. FARB,
801 Caroline Street.

JLF/1

A CANDID CAMERA STUDY OF TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL
(Some interesting and deadly Parallels)

IN MODERN GERMANY

IN CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL
(An "American Congregation")

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 2. When the Nazis needed a leader, An Austrian was imported, one with a German veneer & fanatical zeal.
 3. The voters registered a unanimous "Ja" in the plebiscite for the Saar Valley as a result of intimidation, close scrutiny of voters & pressure.
 4. To justify their position before the world, the Nazis insisted that Norway, Holland and Belgium were to invade Germany, forcing the nazi to move first. Thus was the Blitz made into a weapon of "righteousness".
 5. The Nazis ^{adopted the Nurnberg} ~~confiscate property and~~ laws and through edict made a helpless minority second-class citizens
 6. The Nazis confiscate property and deprive "inferior" people of their citizenship and their homes without regard for vested rights.
 7. The nazi machine controls government, schools and homes. It trains the young in nazi ideology. Parents have no right to interfere.
 8. In non-Democratic countries, "numerous clauses" is invoked as a device to limit the number of Jews who may attend educational institutions, or even to exclude them entirely.
 9. The Nazis have their technique of three operations: the Putsch, the Blitz and the Pogrom.
 10. The Nazis first nazified Germany; then all Europe. This was easy so they decided they might as well enlighten the entire world.
 11. In the beginning the victories were for the nazis. The world was their oyster - with plenty of pearls - until Russia turned the tide.
 12. When the Nazis dispose of a troublesome individual (Li quidate is their word for it), such as von Fritsch and others, they give him a state funeral and all the big-wigs, including the "all-highest" weep crocodile tears.
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 12. With Dr. H. Barnston safely deposed, what beautiful resolutions the Board could indite! When he obliged with a letter at the right moment, they stood up and cheered, --and of course, only hung his portrait, declaring a Roman holiday and calling in the world to witness their hypocrisy.

I AM NOT MAKING HISTORY ----- I AM SIMPLY RECORDING IT!

----- J.L. Farb -----
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BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL, HOUSTON, TEXAS
(An American Reform Congregation)

ADOPTED AT A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CONGREGATION,
HELD NOVEMBER 23, 1943

PRINCIPLE No. 1

We believe in the mission of Israel which is to witness to the Unity of God throughout the world and to pray and work for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. Our watchword is "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is One." We accept it as our sacred duty to worship and to serve Him through prayer, righteous conduct and the study of our Holy Scriptures and glorious history.

PRINCIPLE No. 2

We are Jews by virtue of our acceptance of Judaism. We consider ourselves no longer a nation. We are a religious community, and neither pray for nor anticipate a return to Palestine nor a restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state. We stand unequivocally for the separation of Church and State. Our religion is Judaism. Our nation is the United States of America. Our nationality is American. Our flag is the "Stars and Stripes." Our race is Caucasian. With regard to the Jewish settlement in Palestine we consider it our sacred privilege to promote the spiritual, cultural and social welfare of our co-religionists there.

PRINCIPLE No. 3

We believe in the coming of a Messianic Age and not in a personal Messiah. We recognize that it is our hallowed duty to speed the coming of the Brotherhood of Men under the Fatherhood of God, which is the Messianic ideal for which the righteous of all people work and pray.

PRINCIPLE No. 4

We accept as binding only the moral laws of Mosaic legislation and Prophetic teaching. While respecting the convictions of our Orthodox and Conservative brethren concerning the rabbinical and Mosaic laws which regulate diet, priestly purity, dress, and similar laws, we, however, as an American Reform Congregation, reject the religious obligatory nature of the same, as having originated in ages and under influences of ideas and conditions which today are entirely unsuited, unnecessary and foreign to the beliefs and observances of progressive Judaism in modern America. We shall maintain and use in connection with our religious services only such ritual and ceremonies as may be approved by the Congregation from time to time and which may symbolize, in effective and beautiful form, the principles of our faith, and, which are adapted to the progressive and liberal spirit of our times.

PRINCIPLE No. 5

We recognize the complete religious equality of woman and man.

PRINCIPLE No. 6

The treasures of Divine revelation were given in the Hebrew language and in such language are preserved the immortal remains of a literature that influences all civilized nations. As the fulfillment of a sacred duty therefore, the cultivation of the Hebrew language must always be urgently desired by us. However, the Hebrew language has become unintelligible to the vast majority of our co-religionists; therefore, while a measurable content of Hebrew is essential and desirable in our rituals and services, it must be used wisely as is advisable under existing circumstances

PRINCIPLE No. 7

The basis of brotherhood among the Jews throughout the world is Religion. Hence, it is our duty to help our co-religionists whenever and wherever the need may arise, even, as we must help mankind that may be in need, in accordance with the principles of our faith.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL, HOUSTON, TEXAS
(An American Reform Congregation)

ADOPTED AT A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CONGREGATION,
HELD NOVEMBER 25, 1943

PRINCIPLE No. 1

We believe in the mission of Israel which is to witness to the Unity of God throughout the world and to pray and work for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. Our watchword is "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is One." We accept it as our sacred duty to worship and to serve Him through prayer, righteous conduct and the study of our Holy Scriptures and glorious history.

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This is ours

A group of members of Congregation Beth Israel, challenging the Board on the assertion that the "BASIC PRINCIPLES", as set forth by the Board, constitutes the Creed of Reform Judaism, petitioned the Board on October 25th in accordance with our By-Laws, Sec. 9 & 10 Art. II, to call a special meeting of the Congregation to determine the sentiment of the membership.

This petitioning group represents a cross section of the membership, as may be ascertained by any one interested in seeing this petition at the office of the Congregation.

This group is not a Zionist group. Some of the signers are anti-Zionists, some are non-Zionists and others who are only Zionists by virtue of paying dues, the same as our Congregational President, Leopold Meyer, and other Board members. It is not an orthodox group. Many of the signers have been members of Beth Israel for generations.

Many more would have signed if approached. Some who were approached preferred not to sign but assured us that they felt the same way about it.

The action of the Board went farther than the petition called for. Their action made it clear that the issues involved are more than casual differences between members. There are fundamental decisions to be made, especially as to the true interpretation of American Reform Judaism and its direction in the many years to come.

In order to properly determine the true direction we want our Congregation to take in interpreting American Reform Judaism, this group insists upon a closed ballot as the only democratic American way to decide this important issue fairly, and in accordance with each individual's conscience.

This petition, and other materials contained in this envelope, is the first of a series of mailings designed for your information.

The petition reads as follows:

**TO THE PRESIDENT AND BOARD MEMBERS OF
CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL:**

We, the undersigned members of Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, respectfully petition you to call a special meeting of the Congregation, in accordance with the provisions of Section 9 and 10 of Article II of the By-Laws of the Congregation, for the following purpose:

To determine whether or not the majority of the Beth Israel membership is in accord with the sentiments expressed in the "Basic Principles" embodied in the application for membership.

We object to the continuance of this application form upon the following grounds:

1. It is not in keeping with the true spirit of the accepted doctrines of modern American Reform Judaism as expressed by the two parent bodies of American Reform Judaism, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Congregation Beth Israel is affiliated with these two bodies and should act in accordance with the principles of these two outstanding Reform organizations.
2. It is our conviction that the majority of members of Congregation Beth Israel are in direct opposition of the continuance of this application, because:
 - a. It sets up a second class membership.
 - b. It is a direct and vicious negation of democratic principles.
 - c. The test for membership is un-American.
 - d. It is irreligious.
 - e. It tends to undermine and destroy the prestige and religious influence of Congregation Beth Israel in its own membership and in the community at large.
3. To make certain the true democratic processes, we, the petitioners, demand as a fulfillment of the purposes of this special called meeting, that such vote upon this proposition be carried through with democratic procedure and a closed ballot.

With perfect confidence that you, who conduct the affairs of the Congregation, will abide by the true tenets of Americanism, we respectfully petition you to call this meeting at the earliest time provided by Section 10, Article 2 of the By-Laws.

There is a crisis in our
Temple Beth Israel
A crisis borne out of confusion
and misinformation and misunderstanding
as to what
the true principles of
American Reform Judaism are

★ ★ ★

We believe in American Reform Judaism. We believe in the true American spirit. We are aware of the implications of a modern world on religion and religious life. We do not want you to be misled. We are sending you this reprint so that you might understand. Read this message carefully. It is titled

THE PROGRAM OF AMERICAN REFORM JUDAISM

by Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath

Rabbi Eisendrath is the Director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations of which our Temple Beth Israel is a member Congregation. In this article is contained the true tenets of American Reform Judaism. Read them. Think them over carefully. Compare them with what you have received from the Temple Board as the new gospel.

“A well informed people is a safe people.”

Sent you through the

COMMITTEE FOR THE PETITIONERS

Dr. Harry Caplovitz, Chairman

J. L. Farb

Mrs. H. J. Getz

M. H. Jacobs

Ben Noble

Reprinted from the
Rosh Hashanah Edition
of the
JEWISH HERALD-VOICE

The American Jewish Conference brought together many strange bedfellows. It provided an excellent opportunity for various segments of Jewish life to rub shoulders with Jewish personalities and organizations that have heretofore been virtually unknown one to the other. Among those little known to a larger section of American Jewry was the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

The Union was one of the oldest of the national organizations represented in the Conference. Beside it, many of the numerically stronger groups seem but youngsters barely out of their swaddling clothes. Founded in the year 1873, it has already reached the ripe old age of three score years and ten. But it has far from completed its allotted span of life. On the contrary, it is in the midst of a renaissance of mind and spirit, not the least significant sign of which can be seen in the active role which it played in the organization of, and participation in, the American Jewish Conference. It responded spontaneously to the first call for unity by its presence at Pittsburgh and, ever since, its leaders have been recognized as a constructive factor in the pursuit of American Jewish unity. Nor is such a task something new under the sun insofar as the Union is concerned.

It is a caricature of Reform Judaism to regard it as separatistic and schismatic, as drawing in the hem of its garments from its brother Jews. That

may have been true of some of the earliest lay-founders of Reform in Germany, although even they were restrained by the rabbinic reformers from such radical departures as might conspire to convert Reform Judaism into a separate sect cut off from the main body of Israel. As far as reform in America is concerned, the founder of the U. A. H. C., Isaac Mayer Wise, continuously sought to bring a larger measure of unity into American Jewish life. It is significant that the first clarion call to unity to be heard on the soil of this new land was issued by Dr. Wise and was directed not merely to his fellow "reformers," nor even to his co-religionists" alone; but rather to "ALL Israelites," be they religious or secular. That was almost one hundred years ago. And it is interesting to point out that in the Report of the Committee on Preliminary Studies for the American Jewish Conference it is stated that "the first call for an American Jewish Congress was promulgated by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1903 and was again suggested after the Kisheneff pogrom in 1907." Far from being a divisive force in Jewish life, as some of its detractors insist, Reform Judaism, as represented by the Union, has ever sought and is seeking most vigorously and hopefully today the most inclusive unity with the whole body of Israel that can be attained.

It is seeking such a unity, likewise, by taking the initiative in approaching the large Yiddish-speaking masses in America. There is blame on both sides and this is not the place to appraise the precise proportion of which each may be guilty. But while skeptics may continue to scoff and cynics will impute ulterior motives, the fact remains that there is a determined and genuine attempt being made on both sides to find some common ground between a liberal re-interpretation of our faith and of our role as Jews in the modern scene and

the masses of Jewry who have never known anything about Reform except its negative and least attractive phases, but who are already beginning to recognize the exceptional role it is playing in enriching the educational and cultural life of American Jewry.

To effect such a reapproachment, there must be changes of attitude on both sides. Insofar as Reform is concerned these changes are marked. They are changes, however, which are quite in harmony with its essential purpose. Take, for example, the present program of the Union with regard to the re-introduction of ceremony and form into the practice of synagogue and home. There are those who interpret this as a complete volte face and a humiliating surrender of the principles of Reform. On the contrary, even so radical a reformer as Dr. Kaufman Kohler, president of the Hebrew Union College from 1903 to 1921, insisted that "we must guard against conferring upon them (the early founders of Reform) the claim in infallibility—we would sin against the very spirit of progress which made them leaders and prophets of their age, should we attempt to canonize their every word. Truth grows, and so a thing which seemed true fifty years ago is no longer considered so today."

The same applies to our present attitude to Zionism which is another indication of the Union's quest for unity with its brethren of the house of Israel. Foremost among those things which seemed true fifty years ago can "no longer be considered so today," was the supreme confidence of the early Reformers that the millennium was immediately around the corner and that the dream of returning to Zion was seriously out of harmony with the spirit of that supposedly humanitarian age. Grim reality has compelled considerable re-think-

ing on this problem and we do "sin against the very spirit of progress" if we attempt to canonize every word of a Kohler and a Wise on the place of Palestine in Jewish life, precisely as they insisted we would sin in applying without reserve the dicta of Geiger and Holdheim, Einhorn and Hirsch in their day. Consequently, Reform Judaism has provided many of the outstanding leaders in the Zionist movement today while the Union itself, as early as the year 1937, voiced its unequivocal demand for the literal and legal fulfillment of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate for Palestine. To be sure, it will continue to insist upon a religious, rather than a nationalistic, interpretation of Jewish destiny especially in America. Yet it formulated a declaration of principles for the American Jewish Conference to provide a platform upon which the various dissidents in Jewish life today might find common ground. The Union, comprised as it is of various shades of opinion relating particularly to Palestine, took full advantage of its unique opportunity to effect a synthesis between these opposing viewpoints. It seems that only the blinded partisan could fail to give serious attention to its program which seeks the fullest implementation of the Balfour Declaration while refraining from reducing all Israel to a mere political entity which would make our proud and historic people "like unto all nations."

"Truth grows, and many a thing seemed true fifty years ago is no longer considered so today." These words should serve as a warning to Zionists as well as to static reformers. Jewish life, like all life, must continue to be dynamic. The whole era of nationalism may be on the wane and we must fix our gaze forward rather than backward. We in the Union want full justice for the Jew everywhere; we wish to see a homeland for the Jews facilitated and speeded in Palestine. But we have

a larger and greater and loftier purpose. Despite all heartbreaking reaction, we have our eyes still focused on that "one world"—old as our prophets' dreams, new and challenging as today's best seller. Reform Judaism — or better, under its more palatable, more progressive, more all-inclusive nomenclature — Liberal Judaism would offer leadership in this consuming and consecrated quest.

Above all, Liberal Judaism argues that if there are those who insist that the Jew cannot live without his land; surely it must be conceded that he cannot live without his God, without his Torah, without his synagogue, without his distinctive spiritual way of life. If there be assimilationists in our midst today, they are to be found not merely among the reformers, but among those who neglect these erstwhile axioms of Jewish survival. Liberal Judaism, through the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, seeks such a re-awakening of the

spirit of the Jew and of his faith. In this grave moral crisis, it would go out to the "men of the abyss" with its light of hope for a better day which we must help to build. Girded and guided, as it originally was, by prophetic principles, it would turn from its "rich men's clubs" of yesterday, to throbbing centers of Jewish education and social aspiration which might win the plodding multitudes to itself as offering a way of life stimulating and satisfying for such a time as this.

Again, as in the day of Isaac Mayer Wise, there is need for "all Israelites to unite:" to unite, first and foremost to save our brother Jews and to offer them a haven and a home in their own land as well as wherever they may choose to dwell. But to unite also in proclaiming "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God—is One" and one world, one humanity has He summoned us to bring into being.

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These are modern times — we cannot go back in our thinking either in religion or politics. This is for you to decide. The issues are quite clear. In your hands and in your keeping is the future of your children. What kind of Jews do you want them to be?

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The American Way gives to each one the right of religious freedom. Why should we bind ourselves and bind others in direct contradiction to this ideal in American living.

★ ★ ★

THIS IS IMPORTANT: If revelation did not come at Sinai it certainly did not come at Pittsburgh. Religion grows and what was true the last decade of the Nineteenth Century at Pittsburgh does not hold true in every detail in these days and times.

Houston, Texas
January 4, 1944

Board of Trustees, Temple Beth Israel,
(An American Reform Congregation)
Houston, Texas.

Gentlemen:

On May 22, 1943, I wrote the president of the Congregation setting forth my views on the manner in which the affairs of the congregation were conducted. The events that have transpired since that time have not been such as to warrant my retracting a single syllable of that statement. On the contrary, I have become more confirmed in the conviction that the ouster of Doctor Barnston and the election of his successor were accomplished by a course of conduct characterized by deceit, chicanery and hypocrisy that would bring a blush of shame to Tammany at its worst, I will not unduly prolong this resignation with a bill of particulars, which will be cheerfully furnished upon request. Some of the facts were set forth in the Beth Israel Sentinel, which one of your Masterminders denominated "that sheet" because he could not successfully challenge a single statement of the fact therein contained. For the present, suffice it to say that the meeting of Nov. 23d was a fitting culmination to a campaign of hate, calculated to drive a certain segment of the membership from the Temple and that to the sins of deceit, chicanery and hypocrisy there was added the shameful spectacle of anti-semitism and un-Americanism in a Jewish house of worship. On my calendar November 23 is a day of infamy second only to December 7.

In my open letter to the congregation, published on Nov. 22d, I stated that "I am not getting out until I am forced out." After Nov. 23d I refused to obey my first impulse and I have deferred writing of this letter so that I could view the events that led up to the crowning infamy, with some objectivity. I have regretfully come to the conclusion that I have been forced out and I therefore tender you my resignation and that of my wife, effective at once. On Tuesday, Nov. 23, 1943, the House of God was defiled and desecrated by the most brazenly anti-semitic outburst that I have ever heard from the lips of any person anywhere, not to mention a Jewish house of worship. (Naturally, I have never attended any of Father Coughlin's mass meetings, nor those of Gerald L. K. Smith.) Under the circumstances, I could not in good conscience again set foot in the building until it has been cleansed and purified and until the stain of that wanton attack has been eradicated by proper atonement. In my eyes, that building has achieved the sanctity and dignity of a concentration camp.

Lest you should be constrained to breathe a premature sigh of relief at being rid of the "orthodox menace" and be too happy to receive this resignation, you should know that although I am resigning my membership so as to put myself out of reach of any punitive action you might wish to take were I to remain within the temple, I shall not fail to avail myself of any and every legitimate

opportunity to make this sordid story known to the world. I have no more lost interest in the sanctity of a Jewish house of worship than has, let us say, Thomas Mann lost his interest in the regeneration of Nazi Germany after he was forced to flee from its terror. The truth shall be my sword; faith in Democracy and the American Way, my shield and armor. So armed I will be immune to your threats of reprisal. So long as I speak the truth, you cannot silence me. The whole world should know that at a time when thousands of our men and many women are dying on and near the battlefield in defense of freedom and when the national watchword is "Unity", you have seen fit to foment strife and to split this community asunder and to array class against class; brother against brother. I intend, when I shall have completed my file, to turn a copy of it over to the Houston Ministerial Alliance. If you have followed the path of rectitude, as you so piously claim, you should have no objection to the truth - all of it -- being known. A termite it is well known, cannot live in the sunlight.

I think it is proper at this time, that several matters should be made known to the Board and to the membership:

1. My letter of May 22, 1943 to the president of the congregation contained an indictment against the Board, but not a word of defense of Zionism or of Orthodoxy. I challenged the action of the Board because the democratic process had been abused when Doctor Barnston was uncerimoniously ousted from his pulpit on a pretext. (The real reason was that the Board wanted a paid propagandist of its new "cause", the Jewish version of America First, to occupy that pulpit.) A copy of that letter went to Doctor Barnston and it should be known that he voluntarily called at my office to thank me for my attitude and that he heartily agreed with the stand that I had taken. He stated (in so many words): "I was booted out" by men who are cold blooded and who have learned nothing from what has happened to the arrogant Jews of Germany who prided themselves on being 110% Germans and who had the same contempt for the "Ostjuden" that you have for those who have amassed less of the coin of the realm than you have. I learned from Doctor Barnston, that one of the three men who demanded his resignation was not even a member of the Board; just a merchant prince. Also, that the very gentleman who introduced the laudatory resolution of "regret" at his going was none other than that staunch exponent of Benevolence, Brotherly Love and Harmony who had, at a meeting of the Board, exhibited a picture of the interior of the temple taken on a Friday night, during services, - to show the empty pews. Was that Benevolence or was it Brotherly Love toward another Ben B'rith of the same Lodge? After this piece of hypocrisy, came another sincere - and very pompous - gentlemen who introduced a resolution granting him the empty honor of Rabbi Emeritus. How conveniently those resolutions came forth from inside coat pockets after these gentlemen had recovered from the surprise of the "resignation"! Words fail me when I try to appraise such conduct.

2. At the same conference with Doctor Barnston, he urged me to enlist the support of those members of the congregation who were opposed to these high-handed methods, and to form an ORGANIZED opposition to the ruthlessness and arrogance of that

clique that has been for too long entrenched in the temple. At least two of the clique are not even members of the Board, while some members of the Board are mere "yes men." If I have shown any zeal in this fight against such abuses, it is partly due to the inspiration derived from that interview. I understand his viewpoint better now. Also, I am beginning to understand what Mrs. Barnston meant when, following the services on the succeeding Friday night, she grasped my hand and said: "You are a brave man." I don't want to indulge in heroics, but in all candor and simplicity, I state that I am prepared to take all you have to offer; but you should be prepared to take all I shall give you in return, - just the plain, unvarnished truth. There is where you are singularly vulnerable.

3. My wife and I do not intend to join any orthodox or conservative congregation. We shall remain unaffiliated refugees from the wrath and fanaticism of the new "cause" until a decent, democratic reform congregation is organized in Houston or until Beth Israel has been made clean and wholesome by a return to sanity. It is true that I am a member of that group that you contemptuously refer to as "those Yiddish-speaking masses" and I have never avoided speaking - or writing - Yiddish when occasion demanded, nor do I apologize for it. But I embraced what I conceived to be LIBERAL Judaism, even before your present rabbi discovered his divine "call" (at so much per), and I did it in good faith, accepting it as a way of life and NOT as a way of making a luxurious living. While I had worshipped in orthodox synagogues as a boy, I have never been a member of either an orthodox or conservative congregation on my own. My wife, on the other hand, is of the third generation of reform and taught in a reform Sunday School in Virginia. She had never heard a word of Yiddish till she came to this part of the country. She does not share the abhorrence of some of the first-generation Americans on the Board, for THEIR mother tongue. Your rabbi, it should be remembered, is a son of a mohel and chazan in a congregation on the East Side of Buffalo and when he accepted the "call" of Beth Israel, was conducting services in a New York Congregation, while wearing a tallis and a skull cap. I have never owned either a tallis or a yarmulka, to be so readily put away in mothballs! For a man with that background to join in a pogrom on the "Yiddish-speaking masses" and to publicly ridicule the dietary laws and the folkways of the Jewish people, is truly a "chillul Hashem", a profanation of the name of the Lord! And speaking Yiddish, it might be appropriate to add that I can also speak and write English, which is more than can be said for some of the august clique.

4. You should know that though I am a Zionist by conviction I was not affiliated with the organization in Houston until about three years ago, and then only as a dues-paying member; that is, until the beginning of the pogrom. One of the members of your Board knows that I have devoted all of my spare energies to B'nai B'rith. But did that prevent his joining in the witch-hunt? In your fanatical attack against Zionists you have caused a number of lukewarm Zionists to become ardent in their devotion to the cause, just as the Hitler terror has caused many Jews to return to the Judaism they had deserted.

5. The stab you gave to Captain Bob Kahn after he joined the armed forces will some day come back to plague you. That is the way in which you showed your patriotism! In the safety and security of our positions, you gave him a big sendoff when he left, but when the time came for that lavish celebration of the Roman holiday, that in a time of war was positively vulgar, you couldn't even find it in your hearts to mention, in all that spread of publicity which you so abhor when other congregations indulge in it, that the only chaplain (Jews or non-Jews) that had gone from Houston to the field of battle was, before he left, the associate rabbi of this congregation. In all of that elaborate and expensive program that you printed, you could reproduce a spurious letter of congratulation from Rabbi Jonah Wise - written and signed in Houston - but you could find no room for one word of greeting from that man at the front. And was it just an accident that HIS name was omitted from the plaque in honor of those who have entered the service? It was not lost on the public, either, that not a single rabbi or layman from any of the other Jewish congregations in the city had any part in the program of installing the high priest of the Council for Judaism in America, the Jewish version of America First Isolationism.

I abhor hypocrisy at any time and in any place, but especially in the house of God, and I think that you achieved the ultimate in hypocrisy when, after forcing your rabbi to resign, then making him the subject of scandalous and scurrilous reports and innuendos until - able to resist you no longer - he gave you a clean bill of health, you then had the effrontery to celebrate in HIS honor with a big simchah that was a stench in the nostrils of decent men - an abomination in the sight of the Lord.

The enclosed memorandum of a few historical parallels should prove refreshing. Extra copies are available and will be furnished upon request, for general distribution.

Yours very truly,

J. L. FARB

801 Caroline Street

JLF:1

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OF
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March 15, 1944

Dear Colleague:

As you undoubtedly know, the Beth Israel Congregation of Houston drew up resolutions of protest against the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Instead of sending these resolutions first to me as President of the Conference, and thus giving me a chance to answer them, they sent them to all the Board members of all the Reform Congregations simultaneously with or even before sending them to me.

Had the resolutions been sent to me, I would have answered them in a private letter to the Houston Congregation, and thus would have been able to avoid further disturbance of the peace in American Reform Judaism by public disputations.

However, since the Beth Israel Congregation made a public manifesto of their resolutions against the Conference, I counselled with the Executive Board, and the Board voted seventeen to two that I should send our answer to the same Board members to whom the Houston Congregation sent its protests. This is now being done. I am also sending you a copy of my response in behalf of the Conference.

I hope that this exchange of open letters will end the controversy, at least for the present.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Solomon B. Freehof

SOLOMON B. FREEHOF, President
CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

SBF:GS
Enc.



Mr. Leopold L. Meyer, President
Congregation Beth Israel
Houston, Texas

Dear Mr. Meyer:

The essence of your protest against the Central Conference of American Rabbis is that it has departed from the "classic" pattern of Reform Judaism, as laid down in earlier rabbinical meetings of Reform Rabbis (Philadelphia, 1869, Pittsburgh, 1885, etc.). Without considering for the moment the specifications of the charge, the general case can well be admitted, namely, that Reform Judaism as expressed in ideas and utterances of most members of the Central Conference does indeed represent a departure from some of the ideas and practices laid down by Reform Jewish leaders in past generations.

It is only an Orthodoxy which dares not depart from "classic" patterns laid down by past generations. It is the principle of Orthodoxy that all laws authentically deduced from past laws are sacred and represent the will of God, and that customs which have been widely accepted in the past have the force of law and may not be abolished even when circumstances change. But Reform Judaism is a liberal Judaism. It proclaims the right of each generation to change customs and rituals and even to restate doctrines, provided the essential principles of Judaism are preserved and strengthened by such changes. The same liberal principles which gave the Reform pioneers the right to change the venerable customs and prayer texts of Orthodoxy give us the right to change practices and modify doctrines of the pioneers.

Dr. Kaufmann Kohler, one of the great leaders of early Reform Judaism in America, convener and leading spirit of the Pittsburgh Conference of 1885, made a statement which no Reform Jew should ever forget:--

"In order to form a just estimate of such Reform-Pioneers as were Geiger, Holdheim, Einhorn, Hirsch and others in Germany, we must guard against conferring upon them the claim of infallibility which they themselves have wrested for us from the authorities of old. We would sin against the very spirit of progress which made them leaders and prophets of their age, should we attempt to canonize their every word. We would, therefore, do them injustice, were we to weigh all their utterances and opinions in

the scale of modern research and by the standard of recent investigations. Truth grows, and many a thing which seemed true fifty years ago is no longer considered so today." (Hebrew Union College and Other Addresses, page 75.) Dr. Kohler spoke as a true reformer and liberal. Geiger and Holdheim would have rejected any suggestion that later generations of rabbis and laymen should be compelled to keep unchanged and sacrosanct the pattern of ideas and customs which they had constructed. All the early reformers were great liberals.

Any attempt, such as your congregation seems to be making, to fix Reform Judaism at the pattern of one hundred years ago or of fifty years ago petrifies it into Reformed Judaism, a form of Judaism which had at one time been Reformed and then remained forever fixed. It is the resolve of the Central Conference of American Rabbis to keep Reform Judaism liberal and alive to the realities of the age. It is our hope that in so doing we are strengthening both the Reform movement and Judaism itself.

You will not mind, I am sure, if I include in our discussion the question of the by-laws which your congregation has recently drawn up, since these by-laws are the result of the same mood which led you to draw up your resolutions against the Conference and to spread them broadcast.

The clear purpose of your by-laws is to keep from membership in the congregation those individuals who believe in a Jewish state in Palestine, who believe that Kashrus is an essential practice in Judaism, and that the Hebrew language is indispensable in school and in worship. It is true that if a man cannot subscribe to your by-laws he may become a non-voting member; but of course no self-respecting Jew will join your congregation if he knows that his convictions will disfranchise him and make him a second-class member. Your object is definite; you wish to exclude those who disagree with you on any one of the above points.

Most of these by-laws were, of course, taken from the Pittsburgh Platform. I note, however, that you have reworked the Pittsburgh Platform. You speak in your Principle #1 of the Mission of Israel, but you avoid the Platform's great phrase: "Jewish people" and "priesthood." You also omit from your program Part 8 of the Pittsburgh Platform, namely, that: "In accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society." For these two elements in the great classic pronouncement of American Reform Judaism you substitute your carefully worded caution (not found in the Pittsburgh Platform) against the use of too much Hebrew in the Service. As a disciple of Dr. Kohler, I assure you that your omission of the hallowed and meaningful words "Jewish people" and "priesthood," which you consciously passed over in your borrowing from the Pittsburgh Platform, would have shocked him severely. Dr. Emil G. Hirsch (who proposed plank #8) would certainly have protested

against your omission of the avowal of Israel's dedication to social justice. By what right do you vary the classic pattern of Reform Judaism?

The only right you have must be based upon the premise that Reform Judaism is liberal Judaism. You do have the right to change, as you have seriously changed, the Pittsburgh Platform. You have also the right to publish and declare that these are the principles of your congregation. But you have no right, as a liberal congregation, either to protest against the right of the Conference to vary the older patterns or have you the right to exclude from your congregation those who do not agree with the ideas which you have selected.

What you have done is not only to transform, by omission of essentials, a great classic statement of Reform, but you have, I fear, misunderstood the intention of the framers of the Pittsburgh Platform. These men well knew that there were many men and women in their congregations who did not agree with the new ideas which they proclaimed in Pittsburgh. They certainly did not intend that those who did not accept the Pittsburgh Platform be deprived of the right to vote or, in case of new applicants, not be admitted into the congregation as full members. They understood that there were many in their congregations who did not understand or even agree. But they hoped to influence their congregations. They themselves called it a "platform," as a party platform. They did not mean it to be a test of admission into the congregation. It was a curriculum, not a creed.

You, as a liberal congregation, have the same right. You may say to all who wish to join: "This is what we will teach in our school and from our pulpit. It is for each prospective member to decide whether he will join or not." But you have no right to propose a credal test of conscience, to say to any Jew who wishes to join: "Make a confession of faith. If you cannot accept our creed, you may not be a full member." You have no right to examine the conscience of any child of Israel in order to decide whether his beliefs are acceptable to you. You have the right to influence him once he joins. You have the right to a platform, to a curriculum, but not to a creed.

Official creeds as tests for admission into a congregation are frequent in the Christian Church; there are none such known in Judaism. Jewish congregations and groups of congregations have often suspended or even expelled members (by use of the ban) and even whole groups of Jews have been placed under the ban. Jewish Orthodox law also classifies certain violators of traditional practice as apostates, yet it was scrupulously careful to safeguard all the basic religio-legal rights of apostates (as inheritance, marriage, etc.). As for the ban of exclusion, it is to be noted that even so solemn a ban as that imposed by the great Elijah of Vilna against the sect of Chasidim had almost no effect on Jewish life. It was completely nullified by the deep-rooted sense of comradeship of the Jewish communities. At all events, the policy and

practice of exclusion is a logical and even a justifiable instrument in the hands of an Orthodox religious body which claims divine validity for all its creeds and rituals; but it makes no sense in a liberal congregation.

Returning to your complaints against the Central Conference of American Rabbis, your premise is that we have departed from the classical pattern of Reform. Of course we have, and so have you, and so may every liberal religionist depart from older patterns, provided the essentials are thereby strengthened. The only question is whether the changes which have occurred have violated the essential (not necessarily the classical) principles of Reform Judaism. An examination of the specifications in your resolution indicates that they all concern Zionism in one way or another.

The simplest way to discuss them is to put them together into the one charge which you clearly mean to make: "The Central Conference has become Zionistic and has thereby abandoned the essentials of Reform Judaism."

The answer to this implied charge can be made unequivocally. The Conference has not become Zionistic. It has, however, ceased to be anti-Zionistic. In past years the Conference, in a number of resolutions, expressed its anti-Zionism. There were few Zionists in the Conference in those years. By the way, the anti-Zionist majority would have been appalled if anyone during all these years had ever made the un-Jewish suggestion that Zionist Reform Rabbis, disagreeing as they did with the avowed principles of the Conference, should not have the right to vote. As the years went by the number of Zionists in the Conference increased. By this time it may well be that the majority of our members are Zionists. We do not seek to know. We do not submit our members to a credal test.

The manifest fact now is that there are many, perhaps even a majority, of our members who are both convinced Zionists and convinced Reform Jews. These rabbis do not find their Reform Judaism and their Zionism to be mutually incompatible. It is obvious, then, that there has been a definite change of mood in our Conference. Therefore, in harmony with liberal principles, this new mood was acknowledged in our 1943 Resolution. We recognized the fact, plainly observable in the life of hundreds of our Reform Rabbis, that Reform and Zionism are quite compatible. Each member of our Conference may decide for himself whether to accept or reject Zionism. Whichever way he decides will not affect his status or his moral right to be part of our Conference.

Whether we are justified in thus changing a past emphasis, or whether what we have changed is an essential, indispensable doctrine, may well be debated. All I can say to you is that the majority of the Rabbis of the Conference believe that it is a justified and liberal change to permit each member to have his own opinion on Zionism without considering this opinion a violation of Reform. If the judgment of the majority of the Reform Rabbis

on this question is not acceptable to you, whose judgment will you accept?

Since it is the responsibility of a rabbi to counsel his congregation, may I, as President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, take the liberty of offering a word of counsel to you? Please do not be so nervous about the future of Reform Judaism. Reform Judaism is strong. Its influence in America extends far beyond those institutions which are avowedly Reform. All the American Jewish congregations which are departing from strict Orthodoxy have been influenced by the example of our Reform Jewish institutions. Our leaders are giving guidance to many Jewish and general movements in America. You do not need to build a fence around a Reform congregation to protect it against attack. Reform is of the future; it is a dynamic movement in American Judaism. Let us be bold, confident, and friendly with all of Israel.

SBF:LSF

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVE
(Signed) SOLOMON B. FREEHOF
President,
Central Conference of
American Rabbis

