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American Council for Judaism, 1945.

The American Council for Judaism, Inc.

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March 9, 1945

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver
19810 Shaker Rd.
Cleveland, Ohio

My dear Rabbi Silver:

American Jewry is confused! It needs unity and has dissension.

These are two, familiar observations on the contemporary Jewish scene.

American Jewry is confused because for a quarter of a century it has limped along without organization, being completely in the hands of those who were Jewish nationalists. It has achieved no unity because there has been no articulate group that has set for itself the task of clarifying the fundamental question of Jewish status and defining a basis of real unity.

Both of these great tasks have been undertaken by the American Council for Judaism within the last year.

I urge you to read the enclosed pamphlet with great care. It sets forth, in simple style, the issue which the Council has joined.

If you subscribe to the principles of the Council, we believe this record of service merits your support for the furtherance of our work.

If you agree with our position therefore, may I urge you to fill out and return to us the enclosed membership card?

With my sincerest thanks for your kind attention, I am

Very sincerely yours,

Rabbi Elmer Berger

EB:SG

Encl:

Congregation B'Nai Israel

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

April 25, 1945

To Our Good Friends Everywhere:-

Our Congregation affirms its adherence to the Principles of American Judaism; denies the right of Zionists to speak for it. Our nation is AMERICA; our religion is JUDAISM.

At a special meeting this week, Congregation B'Nai Israel of Baton Rouge wrote into its Articles of Incorporation the historic Pittsburgh Platform of American Judaism, and provided also that each Rabbi, Officer and Trustee should take a solemn vow to fulfill, sustain and strengthen all of its ideals.

Realizing that this is a rather unique procedure, we believe that a full explanation of the purposes of this action is necessary.

Congregation B'Nai Israel was organized in 1858 with the help and inspiration of the immortal Isaac M. Wise, and with the desire of consecrating itself to the American Judaism that he preached and practiced. It has consistently sought to fulfill that purpose through its eighty-seven years of history.

The Pittsburgh Platform was adopted unanimously in 1885 by a Conference of the Reform Rabbis of America under the leadership of Isaac M. Wise, and his many inspired helpers like Kaufman Kohler, Joseph Krauskopf, Adolph Guttman and David Philipson, the men who founded and created all of the great reform institutions.

The Baton Rouge Congregation re-affirms the Pittsburgh Platform at this particular time because of the misrepresentation occasioned by Zionist leaders who presume to speak for all of American Jewry. Zionism stands in contradiction to the wording of the fifth principle of the Pittsburgh Platform which says in part "We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine..... nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish State." Not only do Zionists speak, in our name and in the name of all Jews, contrary to what is fundamental to our conscience and belief, they have attempted to challenge our right to speak for ourselves. They have used every device of organization, lobbying with government officials and the people's representatives, propaganda and indoctrination among Jews and non-Jews. They have infiltrated into organizations that were originally established with an anti-nationalist ideology to attain their purpose. Thus far, unfortunately, most anti-nationalists have not been vocal. Their silence has been too

often misjudged as assent to the Zionist viewpoint. They must, therefore, now speak out clearly and unmistakably and soon, or they may be faced with the fait accompli of an established Jewish State and a "Jewish Nationality" in those nations in which the majority of Jews will always want to live. The confusion that would result to their own status and that of their children and their children's children in our own and other nations of the world is inestimable.

In this dilemma Congregation B'Nai Israel has resolutely taken the first step to show where the Jews of Baton Rouge stand on this issue. The meaning intended in the action was publicized for a period of two months prior to the vote. The action, therefore, was taken in the fullest meaning of a democratic procedure. It must be remembered that our Congregation is the only congregation in Baton Rouge and that with few exceptions all Jews in this vicinity are members of it. There are 161 members. The interest and enthusiasm ran high as is evidenced by the vote, which resulted in 110 in favor of the inclusion of the Pittsburgh Platform and the vow to uphold it, and 36 against.

We think we have protected the right of our own Congregation to speak for itself and to do so without equivocation. We have affirmed again the historic pattern of American Judaism; that we are Americans of the Jewish faith. We have also demonstrated that the Zionist voice, though loud and persistent, is not really as strong as it pretends to be.

We recommend our action to other congregations.

Earnestly, sincerely and reverently,

Walter Gilbert Peiser

Walter Gilbert Peiser
Rabbi of Congregation B'Nai Israel

Al M. Weiss

Al M. Weiss
President of Congregation B'Nai Israel

H. Louis Cohn

Henry Louis Cohn
Secretary of Congregation B'Nai Israel

AMENDMENT TO CHARTER OF CONGREGATION B'NAI ISRAEL
ADOPTED APRIL 20, 1945

In accordance with the historic intention of this Congregation to further the purposes of Reform Judaism as interpreted by the early and great American Rabbis, under the leadership of Isaac M. Wise, we hereby re-affirm the Pittsburgh Platform of American Judaism adopted unanimously by the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference on November 17, 1885, and which we quote herein:-

"In view of the wide divergence of opinion and of the conflicting ideas prevailing in Judaism today, we, as representatives of Reform Judaism in America, in continuation of the work begun at Philadelphia in 1869, unite upon the following principles:

FIRST--We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite One, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended amid continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.

SECOND--We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as priest of the One God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age and at times clothing its conception of divine providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narratives.

THIRD--We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.

FOURTH--We hold that all such Mosaic and Rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our day is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.

FIFTH--We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approach of the realization of Israel's great

Messianic hope for the establishment of the Kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the administration of the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish State.

SIXTH--We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason. We are convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving the historical identity with our great past. Christianity and Islam being daughter-religions of Judaism, we appreciate their mission to aid in the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth. We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellow-ship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.

SEVENTH--We reassert the doctrine of Judaism that the soul of man is immortal, grounding this belief on the divine nature of the human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism the belief in bodily resurrection and Gehenna and Eden (hell and paradise), as abodes for everlasting punishment or reward.

EIGHTH--In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation which strives to regulate the relation between rich and poor, 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."

With this re-affirmation, we rededicate this our Congregation and this Charter thereof to the fulfillment of the purposes of this Platform and to strengthen its perpetuity in this Congregation, each rabbi and each trustee of this Congregation shall, prior to his assuming the duties of his office, take a solemn vow to fulfill, sustain and strengthen all the ideals for which this Congregation is organized, in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter, as herewith amended.