

[Rochester, Monroe Co.]

Jews and Christians Have Union Service, Resuming Former Custom
Universalist, Unitarian and Temple Berith Kodesh Congregations Meet Together:
America Must Learn Properly to Apply Its Blessings, Says Rabbi

Jew and Christian united yesterday morning to worship a common God in a Protestant church in commemoration of a national holiday set aside for the purpose of giving thanks to their Creator for blessings bestowed on them and their nation in the last year.

The union service was planned by the Universalist and Unitarian churches and Temple Berith Kodesh, and was conducted in the First Unitarian Church. It marked the revival of a custom of long standing which had been discontinued some years ago.

Sermon by Rabbi Bernstein

Vice-mayor Isaac Adler, member of Temple Berith Kodesh, read the President's Thanksgiving Proclamation. Rev. David Rhys Williams, minister of the First Unitarian Church, pronounced the invocation. Rev. Charles C. Blauvelt, minister of the First Universalist Church, offered the prayer of Thanksgiving, and Rabbi Philip Bernstein of Congregation Berith Kodesh preached the sermon and pronounced the benediction.

"Thanksgiving, in my judgment, is not an occasion for smugness and satisfaction. Rather does it call for a searching of the heart," Rabbi Bernstein charged his listeners. "We are grateful for the blessings that have been conferred upon us. Yet our gratitude must be of that intelligent, humanitarian variety which causes us to be aware at the same time that others have not been blessed as we, and that we possess shortcomings which challenge our happiness and our virtue.

Time for Heart Searching

"Thanksgiving calls for a searching of heart. I am convinced that we have been blessed in a material way beyond all the people of the earth. The words of our President, which were read to you a few moments ago, are, in my judgment, absolutely true.

"Our fields have been abundantly productive. Our industries have flourished. Our commerce has increased. Wages have been lucrative, and contentment has followed the undisturbed pursuit of honest toil."

Rabbi Bernstein then summarized successes of America in the last year, stressing the statement that efficient industrialization, what has been called the machine age, mass production and its attendant developments, have tended to better America.

American culture has been improved rather than handicapped by these activities, he said. Various scientific developments and their applications

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have made possible a spreading of culture and a raising of standards of living in general, although they have not assured them, he said.

Must Be Properly Applied

Despite this improvement, this adding of advantages and increase of blessings, reminded Rabbi Bernstein, America must make direct and profitable application of them to the benefit of humanity in order to realize their fullest promise.

"We should consider this now," he said. "How we used our wealth, our power over forces of nature, our efficiency? What message have we spoken to our own people, to the world, to ourselves?"

"We have not succeeded in applying our efficiency and our religio-ethical ideals to our own social life," he stated. "Our materialistic civilization cannot justify itself, cannot stand up against attacks from without unless it remedy these evils quickly, sympathetically, and effectively."

Rabbi Bernstein contended that America has lost its moral leadership gained through the World War when it took an unselfish stand and after which its President stated principles which were to become the basis of a new society.

Can Be Regained

The position may be regained, he said, but not if this country approaches the peace table with a covenant in one hand and "the dogs of war at leash" in the other.

Another serious danger, he asserted, is that this country shall become overwhelmed with the desire for prosperity to the detriment of its striving for certain valuable ideals.

"What shortcomings there are in our America life can be overcome," said Rabbi Bernstein, "by religion—religion not so much in terms of churches and rituals, important though these are; but religion which gives men [sic] a vision of a better world that is to be, from which wrongs shall be vanished, whose inhabitants will know peace, whose foundation shall be justice and truth, understanding and love—religion which shall move us to the heroic sacrifice of our comforts, our pleasures, our positions, our means, in order that we shall speed the coming of the day when humanity shall be freed from disease and poverty, exploitation and tyranny, war and famine."

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Transcribed on 6 Feb 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY