

SPEECH BY THE VERY REV. DR. J.H. HERTZ,
THEN CHIEF RABBI OF THE UNITED HEBREW
CONGREGATIONS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE ON
THE OCCASION OF THE WEST LONDON SYNAGOGUE
PREMISES AT 33 SEYMOUR PLACE ON 27th MAY
1934

I deeply appreciate the cordial welcome you have extended to me. And yet I feel that my presence here requires some words in explanation. It is certainly not due to the fact that I dismiss the religious issues which led to the formation of this Synagogue ninety-four years ago as of trifling importance. I am the last person in the world to minimise the significance of religious difference in Jewry. If I have nevertheless decided to be with you this morning, it is because of my conviction that far more calamitous than religious difference in Jewry is religious indifference in Jewry.

Now, the erection and dedication of a building such as this, primarily intended for school purposes, mean a determination on the part of the West London Synagogue of British Jews to provide the only adequate safeguard against religious indifference; namely, a more intensive and extensive system of Jewish religious education that will bring all the children and adolescents within the sphere of your influence to the living fountains of Jewish inspiration and belief. Such a step on the part of this Congregation can only command respect. For some time, we have hailed with enthusiasm every effort that had for its aim the rescuing for our Faith of the religiously-neglected children of the poor. It is heartening to find that in many directions there is today an equally laudable endeavour to rescue the religiously-neglected children of those who cannot be described as poor.

And now may I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the spirit of co-operation that has been shown by the men guiding the destinies of your Congregation in relation to the religious institutions of the Orthodox community. Thus, the Rev. Isidore Harris was a life-long worker on behalf of the Jewish Religious Education Board; and two Triennial Dinners in aid of the funds of that all-important body were presided over by the late Sir Edward Stern in 1922, and last year by Major F.C. Stern. Sir Philip Magnus was for a number of years Vice-President of Jews' College; and in the untimely death of his brilliant son, Mr. Maurice Magnus, the Council of the College lost one of its most valued members. And so I could go on enumerating instances of your disinterested working together with the larger community.

Your co-operation is especially welcome at the present day, when there is need for emphasising the religious nature of Anglo-Jewry, in face of the exaggerated racialism proclaimed by some Jews. For you are of those who maintain that Anglo-Jewry is far more than a racial group with certain social and civic interests; and that Israel is first of all a spiritual community, to whom the God of our Fathers in the days of old entrusted a Law of Truth, and thereby planted everlasting life within us.