

W. E. Todd's Attempt to Convert to Judaism and Study for the Reform Rabbinate in 1896

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Late-nineteenth-century Classical Reform Judaism advocated a universalistic conception of the Jewish religion which held that non-Jews could and should embrace the religious concepts and perhaps even the form of American Reform Judaism. Already at the Philadelphia Conference of 1869, and certainly at the Pittsburgh Conference of 1885, attempts were made to present Judaism as a universalistic religion consistent with the current ideas on evolution, biblical scholarship, and the concept of progress which could fulfill the religious needs of all people, not just those born Jewish. Yet most Classical Reform rabbis struggled to reconcile this universalistic rhetoric with their particularistic focus. While a few Reform leaders such as Solomon Schindler, Charles Fleischer, and of course Felix Adler moved away from a particularistic Judaism entirely, most tried to stay closely within Judaism. Such rabbis justified the continued existence of the Jewish people with the religious mission given to Israel and concluded that Judaism should try to spread the universal religious message it contained to all those it could reach. That was the proselytizing among America's non-Jews. While in principle many accepted the desirability of receiving converts and rejected the traditional view that proselytes should be discouraged, they understood that their congregations were not by any stretch of the imagination universalistic centers of ethical monotheism but rather somewhat cliquish groups of German Jews who isolated themselves socially not only from most non-Jews but even from their East European coreligionists.

While on paper they preached universalism, in their rabbinates they catered to the specific needs of a clearly defined socioeconomic ethnic subgroup. While rabbis preached against an ethnic concept of Jewishness, they could do little to change the social reality. Samuel Sale of St. Louis wrote in Emil Hirsch's *The Reform Advocate* that "we must stop prating about our race, else the glory of our fathers will put to shame...The race-Jew is a fiction in the light of facts, and excrescence, a vampire on the life of Israel, he is a Jew, who is my brother by moral kinship, and not by blood; it is a religion and not the race."¹ Adolph Moses of Louisville even suggested that the term "Judaism" should be changed to "Yahvism" in order to make it completely clear to prospective coreligionists not born as Jews that Judaism is a religion for all those interested and not a religion exclusively or even primarily for those born as Jews.²

While Adolph Moses was exceptional in creativity, his basic premise was accepted by the overwhelming majority of late-nineteenth-century Reform rabbis. Thus it is surprising that on the few occasions when potential proselytes approached Reform rabbis for conversion without a Jewish partner the response was usually far from enthusiastic. A curious correspondence dating from 1896 throws light on this gap between the professed universalistic ideology of the Classical Reformers and their actual responses in a real situation.

¹ *The Reform Advocate*, I (March 13, 1891), 64.

² Adolph Moses, *Yahvism and Other Discourses* (Louisville, 1903).

W. E. Todd wrote at least four letters to Rabbi Edward Nathan Calisch expressing a strong interest in converting to Judaism and studying for the rabbinate at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.³ Calisch is perhaps best remembered today as a member of The American Council for Judaism in the 1940's⁴ but was for several decades one of the most prominent rabbis in Virginia.⁵ Calisch was born in Toledo, Ohio in 1865, the son of Henry and Rebecca van Noorden Calisch, both of whom were of Dutch Jewish ancestry. Henry was a language teacher, first in Toledo and then in Chicago. In 1871 the Chicago Fire destroyed all the family's property, and Henry died shortly thereafter, leaving Rebecca with three small children. Edward, the middle child, went to work as a cashier in a department store, but a year later his mother was forced to send him to the Cleveland Jewish Orphan Asylum. As is well known, Isaac Mayer Wise recruited some of the early rabbinical students for Hebrew Union College from Midwestern orphanages. Wise discovered Calisch when Wise attended the graduation ceremonies for the orphan asylum and heard Calisch give one of his speeches. He was reported to have exclaimed, "I want that Boy." In truth, Wise would probably have been interested even if Calisch had not been such a good speaker-he was very definitely short of students. But he made a good choice with Calisch, who after his graduation in 1887 served the synagogue in Peoria, Illinois for four years and then Beth Ahabah Congregation in Richmond for 46 year.⁶

Todd was living in Tappahannock, a small town in Essex County, forty miles northeast of Richmond, Virginia, with a population of less than a thousand. Presumably he wrote to Calisch because Calisch was a well-known rabbi in Richmond, the closest large city.⁷ The letter, dated November 27, 1869, states:

Enclosed you may find a brief of my "brief" existence. I am now convinced that if I can enter the college at Cincinnati, I ought to do it. I told you that I was fit for nothing but the pulpit, but you will see by the enclosed brief that, mechanically speaking, I can do several things; but I am out of my "element" in anything but ministerial work.

Would it not do for me to be an assistant in some large city parish and study with minister in charge instead of going to college so long before taking up work? However, I am ready to accept your advice in the matter. Will you please write me soon for I am full of anxiety as to what will be the proper course for me to pursue in profiting righteousness: but theoretically, I think I hold your views. I publish the "Rappahannock Times"⁸ here, a semi-weekly newspaper, but my heart does not enter into my work: for I know that I ought to be in religious work. Hoping for "light" I am,

³ The documents are at the American Jewish Archives, Edward N. Calisch Collection, file SC-1558.

⁴ On the American Council for Judaism, See Thomas A. Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism, 1942-1948* (Philadelphia, 1990).

⁵ See Myron Berman, "Rabbi Edward Nathan Calisch and the Debate over Zionism in Richmond, Virginia" *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (March 1973): 295-305.

⁶ See Edith Linderman Calisch, "Edward Nathan Calisch- A Biography," in *Three Score and Twenty. A Brief Biography of Edward Nathan Calisch: Selected Addresses and Sermons* (Richmond Virginia, 1945), 12; *The Light Burns On: 1841-1891-1941 Centennial Anniversary Congregation Beth Ahabah Golden Jubilee* (Richmond, Virginia, 1941); and Myron Berman, *Shabbat in Shockoe Richmond's Jewry, 1769-1976* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1979), 241-83, 381-86. Beth Ahabah Archives Trust, Richmond, Virginia has archival material relating to Calisch. Calisch's scholarly contribution is limited. His major work is *The Jew in English Literature* (Richmond, Virginia, 1909).

⁷ There was a small Jewish community in Fredericksburg (see Calisch's letter of December 23, 1896, cited below). The community which numbered about forty people, had a Sunday school as well as a Hebrew Aid Society. Thus, there was a local Jewish community with which Todd could, and apparently did, make some contact. See *The Jewish South*, October 27, 1893, 3.

⁸ There are no extant copies of the *Rappahannock Times* from 1896. The newspaper itself has copies dating back to the 1920's, probably to 1926. The Virginia Historical Society, The Virginia Baptist Historical Society and the University of Virginia all have copies from 1897 or 1898, but none from the period during which W.E. Todd was editor.

Very Truly Yours
W.E.Todd
Tappahannock,
Va.⁹

Apparently Todd had had previous contact with Calisch for he writes, "I told you." He may have visited Richmond and met with Calisch, or, less likely, Calisch may have passed through Tappahannock.¹⁰ It is also possible that Todd is referring to a previous letter that he had written to Calisch. While it was logical for Todd to contact Calisch because of Calisch's position, he may also have heard about the conversion that Calisch had performed that May. Described in the Beth Ahabah congregational history, the conversion appears to have attracted a good deal of attention.¹¹ In dealing with Ida Frazer, Calisch showed himself extremely cautious in accepting converts:

Mrs. Frazer is president of the local Council of Jewish Women at her home. Mrs. Frazer expressed a wish more than five years ago to embrace Judaism. Rabbi Calisch, who was then located in Peoria, finding her firm in her purpose, undertook to instruct her in the faith. She continued her studies assiduously, and for the last three years has been identified with the congregational work in Peoria.¹²

What was unusual about the Frazer conversion was that it was the culmination of several years of study. Indeed, Frazer continued studying with Calisch even after he left the Peoria pulpit for Richmond. Further, unlike the vast majority of conversions, it was not on account of an intermarriage. Frazer was as serious and committed a proselyte as one could possibly hope for.

Calisch's handling of the Frazer conversion shows that he had very conservative views on conversion to Judaism relative to other late-nineteenth-century Reform rabbis. Calisch was therefore not the most sympathetic figure for a prospective proselyte-rabbi to choose as his mentor. One can only speculate about what might have been the final result if Todd had chosen to write to Adolph Moses in Louisville or any of a number of other Reform rabbis. But Calisch was the logical choice because of his location, and Todd was almost certainly unaware of Calisch's inherent conservatism.¹³

The Autobiography Todd mentions in his first letter is not found in the archival collection today, and it seems reasonable to assume that Calisch sent it to one of the men he consulted concerning how he should respond to

⁹ Calisch Collection, American Jewish Archives, *op.cit*

¹⁰ He probably did visit Fredericksburg. Calisch was chairman of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' Commission on Circuit Preaching. Calisch visited Danville, Charlottesville, Staunton, and many other communities in Virginia. Louis Ginsberg, *Chapters on the Jews of Virginia 1658-1900*, (Petersburg, Virginia, 1969), 35, 78. See also *The Jewish South*, Dec. 7, 1894, 2; Dec. 21, 1894, 2; June 14, 1895, 2, and *The Jewish Progress*, Jan. 10, 1896, 4.

¹¹ *A History of Congregation "Beth Ahabah" Richmond, Virginia: From its Organisation to its Sixtieth Anniversary 1841-1901* (Herbert T. Ezekiel, [1901 or 1902]), 43-44. *The Jewish South* reported on this conversion at the time but in somewhat less detail; June 12, 1896, I.

¹² *The Menorah* 21 (July 1896), 48. (For information on the Peoria section of the national Council of Jewish Women see *The American Jewess*, (November, 1896), 67-69. Page 69 has a photograph of Ida Frazer.

¹³ While Calisch was greatly admired in Richmond by both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, he was not one to make drastic or dramatic moves. This inherent conservatism was not going to allow Calisch to put his prestige behind a candidate who would be seen by many as a controversial or at least questionable rabbinic candidate. As we will see below, even Rabbi Emil Hirsch, who did tend to support radical causes, would be highly reluctant in this case.

Todd.¹⁴ We do know that Todd had come to Virginia from Iowa and had studied to be a Congregationalist minister.¹⁵ Exactly when he arrived in Virginia is unknown, but on July 20, 1896, he signed the papers to purchase *The Rappahannock Times* from L. J. Warner, J. L. Warner and A. D. Warner, all from Warsaw, Virginia.¹⁶ The paper had begun publication in 1852 as *The Rappahannock Gazette*, with Henry W. Daingerfield as editor and William A. Muse as publisher. While it is uncertain whether publication ceased during the Civil War, by 1869 it was being printed as the *Tidewater Index* under the editorship of James Roy Micou and Judge Thomas E. Blakey. On January 1, 1893, Thomas B. Lee of Pittsburgh bought the paper and changed its name to the *Rappahannock Times*.¹⁷ Like Todd, Lee was from the North, a fact that certainly was not overlooked by Southerners still sensitive to Northern carpetbaggers. Two years later Lee sold the paper to H.L. Warner and Co. of Warsaw, Virginia, who shortly thereafter resold it to Todd.¹⁸ Todd paid \$1000 for the newspaper, of which 400 was to be paid in cash and the remainder in monthly installments of fifteen dollars each.¹⁹ Like many Northerners of the time, he hoped that he could find a good position and a secure income from his new business in the South. Many local Tappahannock residents undoubtedly mistrusted Todd as another Northern carpetbagger without deep roots in the community and without clearly defined political loyalties.

While Todd expresses no dissatisfaction with Tappahannock, he does feel less than satisfied with his new occupation, as his inquiry to Calisch testifies. Calisch did not immediately answer Todd, and on December 6, 1896 Todd wrote him a second letter:

My Dear Sir:

I wrote you a letter some days since and was wondering why I had not heard from you, until in last night's paper that you had been in Louisville, Ky. The meetings of the assembly which you attended were well reported in the "Baltimore Sun," daily, and I followed the proceedings with a great deal of interest.

After much prayer, meditation and consultation with Mrs. Todd (my wife) I have reached the conclusion that if it can be arranged for me to enter the Hebrew Union College at Cincinnati, I ought to do it, and I think I can arrange to go by opening-time if it can be arranged for me to enter. Would it be a better arrangement for me to study with Rabbi Hirsch (the late Prof. Swing's friend) of Chicago, or with you a year before entering the college?

Please advise me as soon as it may be proper, for I would like very much to hear from you. I wish you might spend the time to pay me a visit by and by for I would be very happy to have a good understanding with you. It is, all present, quite clear to me, that if the way opens up I ought to do as above. May you be richly rewarded in your Sunday evening services at "Beth Ahabah".²⁰

¹⁴ This was probably Bernhard Gettmann who may have mailed the letters back to Calisch or passed them on to someone else without the autobiography.

¹⁵ Catherine Deshazo, Lillian MaGuire and John Reynolds Jr. eds., *Tappahannock, Virginia: Port of Entry*, (Tappahannock, Virginia, 1982), 29. I would like to thank Mitzi A. Bame of Tappahannock for her assistance in acquiring this book as well as for her help in tracking down other leads.

¹⁶ Circuit Court of Essex County Archives, Deed book 58, pp. 245-46 (1895-1899), Essex County Virginia. I would like to thank Agnes D. Andrews, Deputy Clerk, for making this document available to me.

¹⁷ The Rappahannock River flows through Tappahannock.

¹⁸ *Tappahannock, Virginia: Port of Entry, op.cit.*, 28.

¹⁹ Essex County archives Deed book 58, *op. cit.*

²⁰ *The Light Burns On, op. Cit.*, 2-3.

Very truly your Bid:-²¹
W. E. Todd

Todd had apparently decided that he definitely wanted to study for the rabbinate and mentions the possibility of studying with Emil Hirsch of Chicago, one of the best known of the late-nineteenth-century Reform rabbis. This prompted Calisch to write Hirsch for advice, but even before Hirsch responded, Calisch answered Todd's letter. While this letter is not extant, we can see that Calisch asked Todd whether his wife shared his interest in and commitment to Judaism and how he planned to go to Cincinnati to study for several years if he had a family to support in Virginia. On December 11, 1896, Todd replied:

Dear Sir:

Your kind letter, which was full of interest to me, awaited my return from Fredericksburg the a.m. was very glad to hear from you, and I hope that you may learn of a possible entrance to Hebrew Union College for me. In response to you queries I beg to say: 1st, that Mrs. Todd and myself are in accord in matters of belief, and she is ready to do whatever is necessary as to the furtherance of our hopes: 2nd, our thoughts have been as follows: that if I should be absent from home the best part of four years, or more, we might do like this, unless something better would develop: I have been asked to accept the appointment of Post Master here during the McKinley administration and if I do that Mrs. Todd could be "deputy" and my sister might live with her and this, she could manage very well.

If a better plan should be developed, in the meantime, we stand ready to be advised of those matters and we both beg to state that any query you find it proper to make concerning us, either past or present we certainly should be glad to fully answer.

Very Truly Yours
W.E. Todd²²

Todd, an eminently practical man, had come up with a plan which would allow him to study for several years at Hebrew Union College without impoverishing his family.

Todd emphasizes that he is not looking to the rabbinate because he lacks career options. While the *Rappahannock Times* may or may not have been profitable, Todd had political connections and could secure various appointments if need be. If nothing else, he was certainly an innovative and enterprising man. But his plans did have a solid basis. In 1896 many prominent conservative Virginia Democrats, including Governor Charles Triplett O'Ferrall, were opposed to the free silver policies of their own political party, so O'Ferrall, were opposed to the free silver policies of their own political party, so O'Ferrall and many others tacitly supported Republican presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan.²³ This was to be the only time a Republican came close to winning the state of Virginia in a presidential election over a period of several decades as well as the last time significant numbers of white Virginians would vote Republican prior to 1928.

Todd had apparently extracted a promise from the Republicans that in exchange for his paper's political support he would be appointed after the presidential elections. Unfortunately for Todd, despite a very strong showing

²¹ "Bid" was Todd's term for friend. See his final letter, dated Dec. 23, 1896, below.

²² American Jewish Archives, Calisch Collection, *op. cit.*

²³ On Bryan see Leroy Ashby, *William Jennings Bryan, Champion of Democracy* (Boston, 1987). The election of 1896 is described on pp. 41-71.

by McKinley Bryan carried Virginia by a narrow margin. Nevertheless, McKinley did win the presidential election and Todd apparently still expected to be appointed postmaster. This was not to be, but he was not aware of this while corresponding with Calisch. It is indeed possible that the news that he would not be receiving the appointment was one of the factors leading to his apparent abandonment of a rabbinical career.

On December 23, 1896, Todd wrote Calisch a fourth and possibly final letter:

My Dear Sir:

Your favor of yesterday just came to hand as I am writing I will answer at once assuring you that scrutiny of the most rigid sort is no object with me.

As many of old have said: "The a spirit of God is upon me," so I feel inspired to teach the true religion and have been endeavoring so to do, until I began to fear that the "whole truth" was not within me.

Now, friend Calisch (or "bid" as we say in Christianity). I simply am convinced that the older faith is the proper religion, or the "true faith" for all mankind and I desire to be put in order to teach it, even if it takes some time to this purpose. 'Tis truly wisdom on your part to move cautiously, perhaps particularly as will regards to myself, but I am not a little anxious to learn as soon as possible just what I may do and what would be required of me if I can become one with you. Heartily appreciating your kindness, I am.

Very Respectfully
W.E. Todd

P.S. There are 40 Jews in Fredericksburg. They seldom have preaching, but they are organized. W.E.T.²⁴

Calisch had apparently advised Todd that he should anticipate "scrutiny of the most rigid sort," and so Todd is assuring Calisch that such scrutiny "is no object with me." Unfortunately, Calisch was not stating that Todd would have to meet vigorous academic and religious standards but trying to hint that the powers that be would not look favorably on his application to Hebrew Union College. Todd is not dissuaded by this expectation of scrutiny nor by Calisch's comment that it may be necessary to "move cautiously." While Todd considers this policy "truly wisdom," in the next sentence he sites that "I am not a little anxious to learn as soon as possible what would be required of me" to convert to Judaism. What Todd did not know was that Calisch had received a letter from Emil G. Hirsch, the well-known radical reformer from Chicago whom Todd himself had mentioned, recommending that Todd be discouraged.²⁵ Hirsch addressed his letter to the Reverend Rabbi Kalish, indicating by his misspelling of Calisch's name that they were not

²⁴ Calisch Collection, American Jewish Archives, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Hirsch was born in Luxemburg in 1851, the son of the philosopher and rabbi Samuel Hirsch. In 1866 his father accepted a rabbinic position in Philadelphia, and Emil was brought to America with his family. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1872 and then studied at the Universities of Berlin and Leipzig, the latter institution awarding him a Ph.D in 1876. At the same time, he undertook rabbinic studies at Berlin's Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums. Hirsch then served congregations in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Louisville before being called to Sinai Congregation in Chicago in 1880. He also served as Professor of Rabbinic Literature and Philosophy at the University of Chicago, which he had helped found. See David Einhorn Hirsch, *Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, The Reform Advocate* (Chicago, 1968); Kaufmann Kohler, "Memorial Resolutions Emil G. Hirsch," *CCAR Yearbook*, 33:145-54; Schwartz, "Emil Gustave Martin, "The Message of Emil G. Hirsch's Sermons" (rabbinic thesis, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, 1951); Morton Kaplan, "The Religious Attitudes of Archives, Box #2352, Small SC – 5035; Bernard Martin, "The Religious Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch," *American Jewish Archives* (1954): 151-65.

well acquainted. Hirsch, who was highly interested in the question of proselytes and conversion to Judaism, writes as follows:²⁶

Dear Sir:

In reply to your favor of last week. I beg leave to say that my advice to your friend would be to the Unitarian or liberal Christian Ministry and with that end in view to put himself into communication with the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, General Secretary of the Congress of Liberal Religious Societies, 3903 Langley St., Chicago, Ill. It will be impossible for him to procure a position in a Jewish congregation. For the more orthodox will object to his Christian antecedents, while the more liberal require a more thorough training in Jewish literature than he will be able to acquire. Theory in our congregations is, as you will know, one thing, practice another. We are liberals, until a non-Jew believes to be in earnest.

I have the honor to be,

Rev Sir,
Yours truly
Emil G. Hirsch²⁷

In the words of Jacob Rader Marcus, “when the cards were down, almost Jewish Reform rabbis were also ethnicists. They did not welcome newcomers.”²⁸ While Hirsch’s statement that even he more liberal congregations would “require a more thorough training in Jewish literature than he will be able to acquire” would certainly be true of Hirsch’s own congregation where standards were very high, how would he be so sure that smaller and or poorer congregations would be so selective? Indeed a perusal of Hirsch’s own writings shows that he cites biblical sources and biblical scholarship much more often than Talmudic and rabbinic sources. Surely Hirsch would hold that a background in general religious studies was sufficient to begin the rabbinic program at the Hebrew Union College, where many students arrived without any background in general or Judaic studies.

Todd already had a background in general religion from his studies for the Congregationalist ministry.²⁹ Hirsch admits as much by limiting his criticism to Todd’s supposed inability to master Jewish sources, making no mention of his inability to master general religious studies. Yet as a highly motivated student Todd might have exceeded the academic performance of younger, Jewish –born students, who in many cases may have had less interest in Judaic studies or less motivation for studying for the rabbinate.³⁰

Hirsch himself had published statements which contrast glaringly with his private correspondence with Calisch. Like most Classical Reform rabbis, Hirsch believed that the Jews had a sacred mission to fulfil in the world. In one of

²⁶ He wrote on the topic in various newspapers and even wrote the “Proselyte” article for the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1905). Hirsch gives an overview of his views on Reform Judaism in “The Philosophy of The Reform Movement in American Judaism” (1895), reprinted in Joseph L. Blau, *Reform Judaism: A Historical Perspective* (New York, 1973), 24-25.

²⁷ Calisch Collection, American Jewish Archives.

²⁸ Jacob Rader Marcus, letter to author, April 29, 1994.

²⁹ And possibly the Presbyterian ministry before the Congregationalist ministry. See Bernhard Bettmann’s letter, Calisch Collection, American Jewish Archives, *op. cit.* It is not known exactly what type of academic training this included.

³⁰ Hirsch stated his views on what a rabbinic student should study in “scholastic Requirements for the Jewish Ministry,” *The Reform Advocate* (February 17, 1894), 3-8. This was a paper Hirsch read before the Rabbinical Association of Chicago. See also Hirsch’s Oration, at the Commencement of Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, June 24th, 1892, “*The Reform Advocate* (June 25, 1892), 403. Hirsch’s views on the role of the rabbi can be seen in his “Rabbi and Congregations,” *The Reform Advocate* (January 7, 1893), p. 317; and “Is the Rabbi a Pastor?” *The Reform Advocate* (December 2, 1893), I.

his essays, he discusses his concept of the mission of Israel and why this mission does not require the Jews to segregate themselves:

This mission does not imply distinctness from others in dress, in custom, in diet, in habit, in language, this mission does not involve the segregation of Jews into a ghetto of their own making. We must so live that indeed through us God's name be sanctified and the families of the earth be blessed through our influence for the good, noble and true.³¹

Hirsch then relates his views on the mission of Israel to the charge that Judaism has a socially exclusive attitude towards outsiders. According to Hirsch, "We are not more exclusive than our nature is, than history always is. We open the door to whomsoever may wish to have part and share in our mission. But we will not, the most radical of radicals will not, in order to win the world – destroy Judaism."³² Having made it clear that universalistic tendencies should not lead to the elimination of Judaism, Hirsch openly encourages those from outside to come in: "Let those that are no longer Christians – those that are no longer in sympathy with dogmatic religion, join our ranks! They will find a warm welcome in his house."³³

Hirsch's conception of the mission of Israel was among the more radical, even for Reformers. He believed that the ultimate purpose of Judaism is to promote the coming of an era of universality. All mankind will be united under one religion whose cornerstones will be justice, truth and peace. Creeds and forms will no longer divide mankind, and Judaism will relinquish its unique identity because its mission will have been fulfilled. Hirsch was heavily influenced in this view by both his father and David Einhorn. According to Hirsch, American Judaism welcomes proselytes:

Today our congregation does not require Jewish birth as a condition for joining it. Our doors are open. Whoever wishes to come is welcome. It is only our foolish fiscal policy which you men of financial ability seem to hold necessary that it stands in the way of making this congregation universal in this city at least and therefore a shining example to all the other congregations of earnest purpose in this land. With that stumbling block removed, which is also a stumbling block against the admission of your own sons and daughters – we may indeed carry out the prophetic ideal of a religion which is all embracing.³⁴

Hirsch criticizes the temple board for maintaining a dues structure which keeps out not only many potential proselytes but even the children of the members themselves. He does not mention that one of the reasons Temple Sinai's dues were so onerous was that his was the highest rabbinic salary in the entire United States.³⁵ But Hirsch states that he aspires to represent a Judaism "which is all embracing."

As Liberal Christianity and Reform Judaism were coming closer together ideologically, the appearance of a rabbinical student such as W. E. Todd should not have surprised Hirsch. Indeed, he foresaw that such a unification of

³¹ Emil G. Hirsch, "Why Am I a Jew?" *Twenty Discourses* (New York, no date), 22-23.

³² *Ibid.*, 23

³³ *Ibid.*, 23

³⁴ Emil G. Hirsch, "Wanted, A New Religion," *The Reform Advocate* (December 1, 1894), 236.

³⁵ Hirsch was elected rabbi of Sinai Congregation on July 25 1880 for a period of ten years with an annual salary of \$3,600. In 1882 his salary was raised to \$4,500 and a year later to \$5,000. His salary eventually reached \$12,000, which did not include the premiums on his life insurance policy which were paid by the congregation, See *The Reform Advocate*, May 4, 1901, 327, and also *The Jewish Progress*, Jan. 20, 1888, 4. In January 1896 *The American Israelite* reported that Hirsch was to accept the pulpit of Temple Emanuel in New York at a salary of \$18,000; *The Jewish South*, Jan. 10, 1896, 2. He denied the rumors; *The Jewish Progress*, Jan 31, 1896, 4.

religious groups was the process of happening and wanted to endure that it resulted in the merging of other religious denominations into American Judaism rather than the reverse.

Calisch did not want to make a decision regarding Todd wanted to study, so he wrote to Bernard Bettmann, president of the Board of Governors of the College.³⁶

Bettman had long been on record as having held conservative views on most of the controversial issues of the day. It was not surprising that as a Cincinnati layman his religious views were not nearly as radical as one of the more extreme Reform rabbis. As early as the opening ceremony of the Hebrew Union College on October 3, 1875, Bettmann spoke about the admission of non-Jews to the College and how this policy did not stem from any conversionary spirit.

Let it be plainly and distinctly understood that while it is hoped that from this college will depart the future rabbis and teachers of the American Israel, not only are its doors open, but most cordial welcome is extended to any one that may want to seek its benefits, no matter what may be his or her religion, present position or future purposes in life. The Council at Buffalo has made it a special duty of the Board of Governors to provide in the curriculum a plan of study for those who do not desire to fit themselves for the position of rabbi or teacher, but merely wish to acquire a classical Hebrew education. We shall be happy to have amongst us the followers of other creeds, not for the purpose of making proselytes of them – for that has always been and still is repugnant to the spirit of Judaism, but that they might understand the parent faith from which their own religion sprang, and enjoy a literature equal to that of Greece and Rome. We confidently count upon the attendance of some of the daughters of Israel, so that in a measure at least may be revived the glory of those ancient days when the Keser Torah, the crown of knowledge of the law, encircled many a Jewish woman's brow.³⁷

Bettman's letter to Calisch reads as follows:

The question you put to me a very serious one and I have wrestled with it for several days. Two years ago a Russian apostate from our faith was introduced to me by a rabbi, highly esteemed by me – but cross-examination of the fellow developed the fact that he was a very poorly paid missionary and hungered after a lucrative position as a Jewish rabbi – Of course he was humble opinion, as unfit, though for other causes, for the Jewish pulpit as the other. The fact that he changed once before from Presbyterianism to the Congregational Church, and the general spirit of restlessness, shown in his biography, cause me to fear, that he would not be satisfied with Reform Judaism and would scandalize the public by renouncing it at a future date. He is probably an enthusiast in religious encouragement he would find after his conversion. I do not believe, that any congregation (Jewish) could be induced to elect him as its spiritual guide, and I should under all circumstances consider his being received, upon the terms, stated by himself, as a dangerous and I will say more, surely fatal enterprise.

The fact, that he speaks of being a Parish assistant during his stay at the H.U.C. shows me, how different things look to him, born and raised in the faith. Let him turn Unitarian, which is the next thing to Reform Judaism.

³⁶ Bettmann settled in Cincinnati in 1850 and was one of the founders of the Hebrew Union College in 1875. From that year until 1910 he served as president of its Board of Governors. He was also a member of the executive board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, president of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun of Cincinnati, first president of the United Jewish Charities of Cincinnati, and a board member of the Talmud Yelodim Institute for twenty-two years. He published German poetry in German-language newspapers. None of his papers is on deposit at the American Jewish Archives. On Bettmann, see *Jewish Tribune*, July 2, 1915; memorial number of the *Hebrew Union College Monthly* (November, 1915), 76-88; *Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia*, (New York, 1943): 272; Kerry M. Olitzky, Lance J. Sussman and Malcolm H. Stein, eds., *Reform Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Westport, Connecticut, 1993), 19-20; and also Michael A. Meyer, *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, Samuel E. Karff, ed., (Cincinnati, 1976), 35.

³⁷ W. Gunther Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism* (New York, 1965), 53. The speech reported by David Philpson was originally published as "History of the Hebrew Union College," in *HUC Jubilee Volume* (Cincinnati, 1925).

Of course, it is, as I admit, difficult to judge a man from a biography, written or at least inspired by [himself] and a few letters, and I have the utmost confidence in your judgement, but as you have done me the honor to consult me, I beg to say decidedly, that I am opposed to his coming.

Yours very truly
Bettmann³⁸

Both Hirsch and Bettmann take a somewhat elitist view toward Todd's proposed rabbinical studies. While Todd might not have been an academic success in a German Liberal rabbinical program, at the Hebrew Union College he might have done satisfactorily or even meritoriously. True, after graduation he might have had trouble finding a good pulpit, but he could have done what European-trained rabbis with heavy accents were doing – taking small congregations in out-of-the-way places. Indeed, having been born and raised in the United States, Todd had certain advantages over some of the European-trained rabbis. As a graduate of the Hebrew Union College he also would have had the backing of a well-connected if unofficial rabbinical placement campaign.

Nevertheless, Calisch likely took Bettmann's advice very seriously.³⁹ While Calisch believed that Judaism had the potential to become America's universal religion, he understood that converting others to Judaism was not a religious requirement.⁴⁰ Calisch does not believe that Christians must become Jews at the present time:

Christianity and Judaism are not warring elements. They are like the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, flowing side by side enriching the bosom of humanity wherein they glide. Will they always be separated, or will they, like these streams, unite their water in one channel? For mine own part I say they will unite, though I will not venture to say on what ground or by what method except it be that man, recognizing the unity of the human family, recognizes the inevitable and logical conclusion – the unity of humanity's God. This is but the mission to whose fulfillment Judaism is pledged.⁴¹

Yet Calisch denounced those Jews who were "race proud," those Jews who had a "chauvinistic spirit which causes them to claim kindred spirit with many who have repudiated them."⁴² Thus, Calisch believed that a person born into the Jewish faith who renounced that faith should no longer be considered a part of it. Jews have suffered – even in America – social segregation and worse, but the answer is not to renounce one's faith in order to achieve greater prominence:

Let it be repeated and re-repeated that because of his faith has the Jew been ostracized, and but his faith only will he conquer the world and speed the time when the nations of earth will seize hold of the skirt of Israel and say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."⁴³

³⁸ Calisch Collection, American Jewish Archives, *op. cit.*

³⁹ For Calisch's views on Jewish-gentile relations generally, see the abstract of his sermon, "How Far Shall Neighborliness Go?" *The Jewish South* (November 23, 1894), I; and "Jew and Non-Jew,," *The Jewish South* (Sept. 28, 1894), I.

⁴⁰ See his article "What is Judaism?" *The Reform Advocate* (July 9, 1892), 456.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

⁴² "The Race Proud Jew," *The Reform Advocate* (October 20, 1894), 142.

⁴³ *Ibid.* Elsewhere Calisch wrote that he envisioned an age when difference between Jew and Christian will be merged "into the great temple of the brotherhood of man." Edward Calisch, "The Legacy of Israel," in Edith Linderman Claisch *op. cit.*, 105.

Calisch's views that Judaism is a faith and not the religion of a race should have made him sympathetic to Todd's request, and he certainly was to a degree.⁴⁴ But the practicalities of the situation and the opposition by both Hirsch⁴⁵ and Bettman gave him very little room to maneuver, even if he had wanted to.

Calisch must have informed Todd that Hebrew Union College would not be the appropriate place for him to study religion. Todd meanwhile had become involved in political maneuverings related to his attempt to become postmaster in Tappahannock. Bucking the overwhelming political strength of the local Democrats, Todd used his ownership of the *Rappahannock Times* to have the newspaper endorse the Republicans. Todd did this in order to gain the Republican's support for his anticipated appointment as postmaster. Unfortunately for Todd, this anticipated appointment as postmaster. A later issue of *The Rappahannock Times* states that "The carpet-bag preacher conducted the paper about 12 months, but suddenly changed political faith of the paper and made application for appointment of Post Master at Tappahannock under the Republican administration. He failed in receiving the appointment and thought it advisable to leave town."⁴⁶

Todd's maneuvering and the subsequent Democratic political backlash fit in well with James Tice Moore's characterization of this period as a time that "populist Republican strength waned...[as] antagonisms against political manipulation and corrupt practices began to surface within Democratic ranks."⁴⁷ Not having secured either the postmaster position nor acceptance to rabbinical school, W. E. Todd left Tappahannock, Virginia.

⁴⁴ Jacob Rader Marcus suggests that while German-born lay leaders such as Bettman may have been a little more liberal"; Letter to the author, April 29, 1994. Radical Reformers such as Hirsch would have been in a different category altogether and would have been expected to welcome proselytes warmly.

⁴⁵ Calisch subsequently disavowed Hirsch's radical Reform views, moving his Congregation Beth Ahabah from "conservative" Reform to Classical Reform. While Calisch's Classical Reform was a drastic deviation from traditional Judaism, it fit in well with Richmond's religious environment. Calisch would not have felt at all comfortable with Hirsch's much more bold positions. See Myron Berman, *Shabbat in Shockoe-Richmond's Jewry, 1769-1976, op. cit., 250.*

⁴⁶ *Tappahannock, Virginia: Port of Entry, op. cit., 28*

⁴⁷ James Tice Moore, "Virginia," in John D. Buenker and Edward R. Kantowicz, eds., *Historical Dictionary of the Progressive Era, 1890-1920* (New York, 1988), 495.