

Presentation of the Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk Chair in Jewish Communal Service to

Dr. Steven Windmueller

Response by Dr. Steven Windmueller

As an undergraduate, forty-five years ago, this spring, I requested and received a leave of absence from the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, in order to pursue my political science studies. This nearly half a century disconnect, reminds us all that it is never too late to return to the College-Institute.

For purposes of full disclosure, I would like to reveal that neither the honor being extended to me today by our President nor my appointment to the deanship, some three and a half years ago, are in any way tied to our common Virginia heritage or shared AZA connections, which should put to rest any notions of a Virginia-driven HUC leadership Kabal.

This morning, our thoughts and prayers are with Dr. Alfred Gottschalk in whose name this chair was established. His life serves as a mirror into the second half of the 20th century, just as his career models the success and impact of a generation of new immigrants to this land. It reflects the high levels of achievement that this extraordinary group of men and women would attain in their service to this nation and in their commitment to Jewish life.

Upon the occasion of his inauguration in 1971 as HUC's Sixth President, Rabbi Gottschalk stated:

We must grapple with the burning issues of the totality of the contemporary Jewish world. Despite our internal differences, the world treats us as a single people. Ultimately, for good or ill, one destiny awaits us all. It is a hope to be cherished.... to clear away the debris that bars man from man and prevents us from understanding one another. If we succeed, we have transformed a nightmare into a dream.

For Alfred Gottschalk and for so many others, the Israel-Diaspora connection was the expression of that dream. The ideas of Ahad Ha'Am inspired and directed his Zionist orientation, which also gave shape and form to his actions.

This special relationship with the Jewish state was reflected in his dedication to the training of Israelis for the Reform rabbinate.

Just as we are reminded in this week's Torah portion of the act of ordination, "You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, consecrating them to serve Me as priests," we reflect on Alfred Gottschalk's understanding and appreciation of the post-civil rights era in which his Presidency was situated. The ordination and investiture of the first woman rabbi in 1972 and the first female cantor in 1975 reflects our tradition's emphasis on sacred status.

Similarly, his understanding the importance of the College having a stake in a rapidly changing and expanding Jewish community, prompted Dr. Gottschalk to envision a school of communal service.

On accepting this honor, I am indeed pleased that David Ellenson felt that my body of work and academic and professional contributions covering my career and tenure at HUC-JIR would warrant such recognition.

Present with us this morning are our Governors and members of our LA Board of Overseers, your support and engagement with the College-Institute provides an example of leadership and commitment to our students. I must express to Bob Kopple, our Overseers chairperson, my particular appreciation for your partnership in strengthening this campus.

Over these past fifteen years, Norman Cohen, our Provost, has extended his wise counsel and thoughtful judgment to me, and to so many of my colleagues, for which I and they are most truly appreciative.

I wish to pay tribute to my Los Angeles colleagues whose loyalty, dedication and wisdom are the hallmark of the special environment and collegiality that marks this campus. The presence this morning of USC colleagues is particularly meaningful, reaffirming our academic and institutional partnership.

I am pleased to acknowledge Jerry Bubis, who not only held with distinction this chair but has been consistently supportive of my work, and who in turn became the architect in building our communal service school.

Further, I wish to acknowledge our students who seek not only to understand the text that has sustained and defined the Jewish people but to embrace and to act upon it, so as to ensure the wholeness of this world and to add holiness in the empty spaces of our lives.

I would like to address directly those communal service students who embraced “the Windmueller” during his tenure as their teacher and have been able to make their own creative mark in the reshaping of Jewish institutional and religious life, hopefully drawing upon the seeds and insights we uncovered collectively in our shared educational discoveries.

I am so pleased that family members, personal friends and dear colleagues have joined us this morning. To each of them I am indebted for their abiding friendship, support and inspiration. To my soul mate, Michelle, I am forever grateful for your encouragement and love.

At this moment in time we as members of a larger society and more directly as part of a sacred people, contend with the more urgent and immediate concerns related to

the wellbeing of our global economy, and its immediate and direct implications for our religious and communal systems and the effects on the lives and well being of so many of our fellow citizens. As a result of this economic unraveling, we are facing the greatest institutional challenge of our life time.

Trained as a political scientist, I often draw upon the wisdom of the great political thinkers as well as the legacies of my teachers, who introduced me to the core principles of this discipline. Three ideas seem relevant for our times: understanding the intricacies and uses of power and its sources, uncovering the social environment that defines and shapes the political behavior of its prime actors, and assessing the political and organizational tools that one can creatively and effectively employ in crisis situations.

But the test of managing change and understanding the uses of power may only now be truly in play. How we operate in this time of uncertainty will mark how our generation is measured by those who will follow us.

Again I draw from our own tradition, and more directly, this week's Torah portion, Ki Tissa, where Moses, just as we are, was confronted with a new political reality. The symbolism here of the golden calf could also be extended to the abuse of wealth, the misuse of resources, and the failed policies as represented in our times.

In my work on the "Second American Jewish Revolution", I attempted to examine the global, generational, and financial elements of institutional rebirth that helped to reshape American Judaism over the past quarter century.

In this moment we are confronted with a third, and far more challenging, counterrevolution that appears to be undermining much of what our community had come to signify and represent. What then will be the core sustaining features of the Jewish enterprise in a post-recessionary era?

On a larger scale we, all, will be participants in the re-invention of our economy and the reconstitution of our institutions. Within our community we are likely to be a part of a significant structural transformation and a major redistribution of resources. Here is where the insights of history will offer us certain guideposts as we reach back to examine the impact of prior financial crisis. But we will also have to move beyond the past to fully embrace this new, different, and difficult reality, employing a new entrepreneurial and political spirit framed by the religious values that define us.

The obligation to serve as a social commentator reflecting on this transformational moment and the significance for the Jewish communal order would seem then to fall to the occupant of this chair.

Reaching back into the annals of our march through history, drawing upon the activism and insights that marked Alfred Gottschalk's tenure as an institutional

leader, and carefully evaluating the implications and options of this moment, may I be worthy of this honor, able to offer new insights and being responsive to the trends that mark the communal enterprise.