RABBI THEODORE LEWIS

Rabbi Dr. Theodore Lewis, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Jeshuat Israel (Touro Synagogue), passed away on Tuesday, October 5, 2010, in Brooklyn, NY, at the age of 95. Born in August of 1915 in Dublin, Ireland, to the late Israel Joseph and Minnie Rose Lewis, Rabbi Lewis attended Dublin primary and secondary schools, graduated from Dublin University, and studied for the rabbinate in London, England, and Mir, Poland. He barely escaped from Poland before it was invaded by the Nazis during World War II. He served as the rabbi of the Adelaide Road Synagogue, the largest congregation in Dublin, before immigrating to America. He visited Touro Synagogue in 1949 and never left; he served as the rabbi of the congregation for the next 36 years.

Rabbi Lewis was well known for his thick Irish brogue and sparkling eyes, quick wit, regal bearing, and erudite sermons, which have been compiled and published in two volumes. He instructed and officiated at the life cycle events of two generations of Newporters as well as others who came from far and wide to worship and celebrate at Touro Synagogue, and he played host to such distinguished synagogue visitors as President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the poet Robert Frost. In 1959, Rabbi Lewis appeared on the TV show, "To Tell the Truth," as the "only Irish-born rabbi in the United States." He was arguably one of Newport's most beloved citizens, a familiar fixture in Newport, as he and his dear colleague and friend of over 50 years, Rabbi Ely Katz, strolled around the streets of downtown Newport, a very tall Rabbi Lewis with a very short Rabbi Katz.

Rabbi Lewis was known nationwide as a stimulating speaker and a leader in contemporary Jewish thought, and he was continually invited to speak to civic, Irish, educational, historical, and religious groups. During his tenure at Touro Synagogue, he received many awards and citations, including an honorary doctorate in Sacred Theology from Salve Regina University. Rabbi Lewis retired in October 1985, planning to study, write, and do volunteer work. He lived for a brief time in Israel, where he was able to visit his childhood friend, Chaim Herzog, President of the State of Israel.

Rabbi Lewis led Touro Synagogue through a period in which it was restored, it received worldwide attention, and it was named a national historic site. For twenty-five years he led a campaign to persuade the US Government to issue a postage stamp honoring the synagogue, which was built in 1763 and remains the oldest synagogue building in the country. In 1982, a stamp was indeed issued.

Rabbi Lewis was the brother of the late Barney Lewis and the late

Bess and Rose. He leaves a nephew, Arnold, in Ireland, and a great-nephew in England. Rabbi Lewis's body has been taken to Israel for burial. A memorial service will be held for Rabbi Lewis on Sunday, October 31, at 2:30 PM in the synagogue. Contributions in his memory may be sent to Touro Synagogue, 85 Touro Street, Newport, RI 02840.

