

In defense of orthodoxy

Harold M. Schulweis

If readers of the Jewish press gain their understanding of orthodoxy's view on Jewish religious pluralism in Israel from letters to the editor or an article submitted by an individual orthodox rabbi, they may well be misled. Orthodoxy is not as monolithic in its judgments on the rights of Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist movements to preach and practice their interpretations of Judaism as some ultra-orthodox would have it. It is not fair to Orthodoxy to be represented solely by those who are intent upon denigrating and delegitimizing all non-orthodox ideologies. It is not fair to view advocacy of religious freedom and Jewish harmony as an exclusively non-orthodox concern.

Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, the distinguished orthodox philosopher and author, has written unambiguously: "The claim of what is known as Conservative or Reform Judaism to equality with Orthodoxy is morally irrefutable." His orthodox colleague, Professor Ephraim Urbach, has argued that "any form of coercion in matters of religion is contrary to the concept of Judaism and carries with it no *halachic* authority." Eliezer Goldman, one of the foremost intellectual leaders of the Kibbutz Dati movement, maintains that the very notion of a Torah State is a contradiction in terms.

Against Divisive Insularity

There are disturbing signs of growing denominationalism in Jewry and the increasing self-isolation of important elements within orthodoxy. Here again the concern expressed is not limited to Conservative or Reform or Reconstructionist observers. Orthodox intellectuals such as Rabbi Yitzchak Greenberg are equally worried about the rightward turn towards a separatist community, an "*austritts* *gemeinde*." A beloved orthodox teacher of mine at Yeshiva University, the late former president of

Bar Ilan University, Rabbi Joseph Lookstein, counselled against the raising of barriers between us. "Are we ready to turn against our brothers who differ from us and with whom we differ? Who knows what the future of Reform and Conservative Judaism will be?... Classical Reform is dead. A love of Israel has entered Reform hearts. Reform and Conservative Day schools are sprouting forth. Every such Day school is an entering wedge of Jewish tradition... Is it not wise and Jewish to draw them close to our hearts?"

The twin dangers of the politicization of religion and the religionization of politics in Israel and the call for Jewish religious unity are not the special pleadings of a conservative rabbi. They are presented in the interest of preserving the mutual respect and dignity of all expressions of Jewish life. Politicized religion, whether Orthodox, Reform or Conservative, suffocates all of Jewish life. No one is exempt from the harassments which attend the rise of state-given religious monopoly. Rabbi Norman Lamm, the president of Yeshiva University, expressed his anguish over the disunity within Orthodoxy itself. He warned against the coercive homogeneity of ultra-orthodoxy which "leads to bigotry and shallowness." His caveats were not meant to prevent the antagonisms of ultra-orthodoxy against the non-orthodox but within orthodoxy itself. He sought to protect from ultra-orthodox vilification those orthodox who did not eat *glatt* kosher, who did not deny themselves higher secular education and who did observe *Yom Ha-Atzmauth* with religious joy.

Common Purpose, not Common Halacha

The issues before us must not be seen as pitting the whole of orthodoxy in opposition to the non-orthodox Jewish world. The principle at stake is the ideal of *ahavat Yisroel*, which is the unconditional love of the Jewish people. Love costs. The price for that love nowhere entails surrender of one's principles and practices; but it cannot be truly lived on condition that the other must either conform to my ways or else be excluded from the legitimate Jewish community.

Unity is not uniformity. To reply to the argument that only submission to one mode of *halacha*, to one *halachic* authority will bring the harmony and unity we pray for, one need but observe the tragic and repeated scandals of verbal and physical outbursts among admittedly orthodox groups. The *Belzer chasidim* and the *Edah Haredit*, the vilifications between the Chief Rabbis, the antagonism between the *Satmer* and the *Lubavitcher*, the quarrels between *Mafdal*, *Agudath Yisroel* and the Chief Rabbinate offer little evidence that Orthodox uniformity yields Jewish unity.

The comments of the Orthodox thinker and writer, the

president of Bar Ilan University, Emanuel Rackman, were not offered in joy. As reported in *Yedioth Achronoth* (July 20, 1971), Rabbi Rackman bemoaned the fact that "the religious leaders and rabbis have failed to promote unity. Instead they have promoted antagonism and hatred... Today the love of Israel flows from the State of Israel... The State has succeeded where the *Halacha* has failed."

Dismantling Religious - Secular Barriers

No one except the politically state-empowered can rejoice in this religious situation. The major constituency of Israel remains secular. Presented with the forced option of either/or they have more often than not responded with a neither/nor. They are neither orthodox in accordance with the establishment version nor atheists. They have judged the spirituality within organized religion as irrelevant or worse, amoral. Jewish religious pluralism, institutionalized and legitimated, will offer searching Israelis less reason for apostasy and more opportunity for religiosity.

This is a time for courage from religious leaders on behalf of religious peace. Religious voices from all areas of Jewish life must converge to overcome the polarizations which threaten to fragment our people into separate sects. Muteness from any quarter is tantamount to consent to the schismatic status quo. The rabbis and laity of every movement have an obligation to demand that their spiritual leaders sit down together for the sake of peace. In a democratic society, unity can only grow out of religious pluralism and in the name of the love of Israel. Shall we unite before the enemy without and tear ourselves apart from within? Can our political statesmen exhibit the courage and wisdom to sit down with their enemies at a common table in pursuit of peace, while our religious statesmen refuse to negotiate *mipne darkei shalom*—for the sake of peace? Shall rabbis and laymen stand idly by and observe with embarrassment the throwing of stones and epithets against the other? Our leaders, the heads of religious movements, *yeshivoth* and seminaries, must hear from us the people's mandate to restore civility and mutual respect to the on-going dialogue between us. We are mandated to pursue the paths of Torah whose "ways are ways of pleasantness" which binds us together as a covenanted people.

Nonnegotiable Judaism

Nosson Scherman

For all its apparent sincerity, compassion, and probing, Rabbi Schulweis's article is deeply disappointing — and not primarily because it should more honestly have

been called "An Attack on Mainstream Orthodoxy" rather than the facetious and inaccurate "In Defense of Orthodoxy." That point may seem minor, but it is indicative, I believe, of his failure to deal properly or fairly with his topic. The cleavage among Jews deserves more serious — indeed, more responsible — treatment.

Essentially, Rabbi Schulweis makes three points: Orthodoxy shuts itself off from contact with non-Orthodox Jews; Orthodoxy should recognize the religious equality of other ideologies within Judaism; and Orthodoxy is lacking *Ahavas Yisrael*, the love of fellow Jews. He is wrong on all three counts.

It is essential to differentiate between Jews as people, and individuals or organizations that purport to

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represent Judaism as a religion. Orthodoxy does not discriminate against fellow Jews who are less or even non-observant. The Talmud teaches that a Jew remains a Jew even though he has sinned and the *Halacha* recognizes no differences between the treatment of Jews of greater or lesser religiosity. In my community there are many self-help organizations supported and staffed exclusively by Orthodox volunteers — primarily the sort commonly described by the fashionable pejorative “ultra-Orthodox.” Their help goes to all Jews, and often non-Jews, on an equal basis.

Orthodox Involvement with others

An interesting and inspiring case in point is *Hatzoloh*, a voluntary life-saving organization whose members must receive an intensive hospital-administered course in emergency techniques. Its members all carry beepers and must be on call 24 hours a day, including store and office hours, Sabbath and festival days. It is widely known in the major Jewish neighborhoods that the *Hatzoloh* ambulance and volunteers will always be on the scene before anyone else. The members span the spectrum of all the Chassidic sects and *yeshivos*, more than half wear *shtreimels* on the Sabbath. They take their religion very seriously; it is *because* of that, not in spite of it, that they answer emergency calls on the Sabbath without asking whether or not the victim is observant. I vividly recall summoning *Hatzoloh* to literally save the life of an elderly invalid who had always viewed his bearded Orthodox neighbors with an irrational antipathy. To their dying day, that man and his wife could not believe that the people who dashed up their stairs with an oxygen tank and lovingly carried a dangerously stricken octogenarian down the steps to the hospital-bound station wagon were not well-paid employees of something or other. My daughters are among the hundreds who are up at 6:30 a.m. at least one morning a week, or give up afternoons and evenings, to feed chronically ill patients, few of whom are Orthodox.

It is true, and sad, that a social and cultural gap often keeps us too far apart from our fellow Jews. We don't feel comfortable with one another, unfortunately, but neither do physicists with philosophers. Despite that we remain fellows in Jewishness, if not in observance. Thousands of unobservant, semi-assimilated young men and women come to our homes and communities to spend Sabbaths with us and observe the “Jewish Amish.” and most of them go away respecting Orthodox life, some even return to the faith of their forefathers— but not because we are trying to “spread the faith.” Perhaps we should, but truthfully all we do is open our homes and act ourselves. We are available. We don't agree that “love costs.”

Why then can Orthodox religious leaders and organizations not join their Reform and Conservative counterparts around the table? There, an unbridgeable cleavage does and must exist. There is a basic difference between Jews as people and Jews as representatives of Judaic thought, religion and worship.

Reaching out Personally, not Religiously

Orthodox people can and do work with non-Orthodox individuals and secular organizations for the advancement of Jewish interests. (As a matter of historical fact, the pinching shoe has been on the other foot: the “establishment American Jewish organizations and federations have disdained Orthodoxy and been most reluctant to give its leaders and institutions a voice on their boards and in their councils. Only recently has this policy begun to change, and grudgingly at that). But *religious* recognition is quite another matter.

Let me illustrate. Lawyers, accountants, doctors, builders, and pants manufacturers can rub shoulders comfortably and equally in country clubs, synagogues, and community and political organizations — but they cannot belong to the same *professional* organization. The chairman of General Motors buys lawyers and company doctors by the dozen, but he cannot buy a membership in the American Bar Association or the American Medical Association. And that is how it should be.

The question is not whether Reform or Conservatism are entitled to religious freedom. They are. But that does not make them legitimate expressions of historic, authentic Judaism. For people who take their Judaism seriously, it is unconscionable to confer Jewish religious legitimacy on people who espouse a Judaism without belief in the Divine origin and immutable nature of both the Written and Oral Torah. That is no less a matter of principle and conscience than the maintenance of professional standards by the legal and medical fraternities.

Protecting Authentic Judaism

A recent Jewish quarterly profiles a rabbinical student at a non-Orthodox seminary. His belief is described as “see[ing] G-d not as a supreme personage but as an ideal which sets a pattern for morality and behavior which has given rise to Jewish civilization.” He believes that “G-d is a goal, an inspiration and a process that develops out of a community of people, making for good, for ethics, and for the Jewish way of living.” The article says that “this is the G-d he says he prays to.”

Rabbi Schulweis feels that our refusal to recognize such a belief as “Judaism” is akin to what he calls coercion, refusal of the right to preach and practice, and

denigration. I am appalled and personally offended by such characterizations; they tar with a wide and slanderous brush. Orthodoxy does not seek to strike down the First Amendment, but it is grossly unfair to ask one who believes in a Judaism based on the existence of G-d, His omniscience and divine providence, and the divine origin of the entire Torah, to grant Jewish religious validity to movements denying any or all of those principles. Truth in labeling does not end at the supermarket.

Judaism was defined undisputedly by the above basic beliefs from Abraham's day to modern times. Sadducees, Christians, and Karaites deviated and fell away, never to be recognized seriously as coequal strains of Judaism. Nor did anyone challenge classical Judaism for not sitting with them around a common altar. Reform, Enlightenment, Conservatism and other movements have succeeded in breaking down the barriers that protected Orthodoxy. They have also succeeded in spawning unparalleled assimilation and intermarriage. Now they seek even to gain recognition as authentic forms of Judaism. They *are* expressions of religious belief, but someone who believes in the traditional principles of faith cannot acknowledge them as legitimate streams of Judaism.

Rabbi Schulweis cites a number of Orthodox rabbis and scholars, but a careful reading of their remarks as quoted by him — I do not know whether they are taken out of context — does not disclose a basic challenge to the above thesis. Surely no one believes that the president of Yeshiva University, for example, would agree with those who claim that Orthodoxy is no more valid than any other credo calling itself Judaism. Rabbi Lookstein's remark questioning the future of Reform and Conservatism and categorically declaring the death of classical Reform can hardly comfort members of those groups who draw the cloak of legitimacy snugly over themselves.

Retaining Judaism with Ahavas Yisrael

More illustrative than the people Rabbi Schulweis cites — generally to the left of the Orthodox mainstream — are those he cannot cite. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik is nowhere found in his thesis, nor are the rabbis of Lubavitch, Satmar, Ger, Belz, Vizhnitz or such venerable *roshei hayeshiva* as Rabbis Moshe Feinstein, Yaakov Kaminetzky, Eliezer Schach, Shneur Kotler, Mordechai Gifter and others. It is certainly fair to say that the above Chassidic and Yeshiva leaders, individually and in combination, have had far more influence within Orthodoxy and in revivifying Jewish pride and identity than any other group of Jewish leaders.

Ahavas Yisrael? Indeed, we need much more of it, within Orthodoxy and without. We are not pleased with the state of Orthodox life in many, many areas, and we are self-critical, though probably not enough. Indeed, self-criticism too is a religious requirement. But "*Ahavas Yisrael*" is too often used as a bludgeon to intimidate Orthodoxy into renouncing its religious principles. Modern society has watered down religion to the point where hardly anything has been left it but the pap of love, tolerance, and the espousal of fashionable (if important) causes. The pages of *Sh'ma*, for example, are regularly filled with essays preaching a "Judaism" of environmentalism, anti-Reaganism, feminism, keep-the-West Bank, give-away-the-West Bank, have babies, don't have babies, and so on. Often these legitimate expressions of political or social opinion are wafted into a celestial sphere as "new *mitzvos*," or at least religious requirements. I submit that not every liberal, conservative, or moderate stand is an expression of Judaism. Love is one of the 613 commandments, but it is not the *only* one, and when it is used to subvert the other 612, it becomes just another four-letter word.

Orthodox families who bear the crushing burden of supporting boys' and girls' schools and numerous religious charities would welcome some *Ahavas Yisrael* in the form of moral and financial support of Torah causes and institutions, by the way.

Necessary Role of Religion in Politics

Rabbi Schulweis properly bemoans the corrosive effects of politics mixed with religion. It should be recognized, however, that the atrocious over-politization of Israeli society has thrust political involvement upon religious movements. Orthodox leaders and academics often debate the question of divorcing religion from party politics; most of them conclude sadly that there is no practical alternative to going to the political mat if important rights and interests are to be safeguarded. As a case in point, *Agudath Israel* had to become an indispensable member of Mr. Begin's parliamentary coalition before it could achieve legislation giving families the same rights routinely enjoyed by Americans and almost every other nationality to prevent unauthorized and unneeded autopsies. The anti-Orthodox press to the contrary, religious parties of Israel do not infringe on the rights of others. And it is noteworthy that major decisions on politics and principle are decided for *Agudath Israel* by its Council of Torah Sages who frequently put sharp brakes on the politicians. Too few American Jews know that the Council would not permit *Agudath Israel* to accept cabinet portfolios, those hotly sought "pots of gold" filled with power, prestige and patronage. The party

lent its *votes* to the government but would not join an executive branch where it would be bound by oath to administer laws contrary to its religious beliefs.

In conclusion, let me emphasize that this is no whitewash of Orthodox life. All is not idyllic on our street. We have an uncontrollable lunatic fringe that engages in acts not sanctioned by their leaders or *Halacha*. We have too much friction and too much carping among ourselves. Thoughtful and conscientious people should and do address these concerns, but just as we make no claims to perfection we decry the unfairness of "defending Orthodoxy" by misrepresenting our stands and pointing only to our warts in an imperfect world.*

On religious pluralism

Walter S. Wurzburger

Rabbi Schulweis's moving plea for "restoration of civility and mutual respect" between the various religious "denominations," strikes a responsive chord within the overwhelming majority of the Orthodox community. No group is immune to the debilitating effects of *sinat chinam* (unfounded hatred). We all suffer from the excessive politicization, narrow institutionalism and myopic sectarianism that plague contemporary Jewry. Engaged as we are in a bitter struggle for our very survival, we can ill-afford the growing polarization that threatens to fragmentize the Jewish community.

But it is one thing to agree with Rabbi Schulweis's diagnosis of the current malaise, and another to be prepared to accept his prescription of "religious pluralism" as the remedy for our ailments.

To begin with, Jewish unity does not really depend upon our respective attitudes towards the belief-systems held by our fellow Jews. Hitler has taught us that, irrespective of all theological convictions, we form one people. However divergent our articles of faith may be, we constitute a community of fate. From the Orthodox perspective, all Jews are included in the Covenant, regardless of whether we consciously affirm it, whether we identify as ethnic secular Jews, or whether we are indifferent to our Jewishness. Christians may require an ecumenical movement in order to achieve a sense of unity. But for us Jews, the situation is different. To paraphrase Franz Rosenzweig, Christians may be "on the way" toward unity. We Jews, however, are already there. We form a people— not just a set of "denominations" related to each other by a shared set of common core-beliefs.

Religious Ethnicism or Pluralism

Since in Judaism ethnic and religious factors combine to form an organic unity, "religious ethnicism"— to borrow Yehezkel Kaufmann's term— engenders a sense of solidarity that transcends all religious, cultural or socio-economic differences. Identification with the Jewish community and concern for its welfare constitutes a religious imperative. Hence, Orthodox Jews, however separatist their orientation, regard themselves as responsible for the welfare of other Jews, be they "secular" or "religious." Rejection of the legitimacy of *non-Halachic* ideologies is fully compatible with the loving concern for the adherents of such ideologies. For this reason, even "ultra-Orthodox" Jews are ready and eager to cooperate with non-Orthodox Jews in areas where the common interest of the Jewish community are at stake.

But to return to the issue of "religious pluralism," I am not sure that I understand the sense in which Rabbi Schulweis employs the term. If he merely intends by it that non-Orthodox Jews should have every right to live in accordance with the dictates of their conscience, he can rest assured that the bulk of the Orthodox Jewish Community shares his point of view and opposes any infringement upon freedom of religion. But in recent years, the term "religious pluralism" has acquired another connotation. It does not merely refer to the right of individuals to exercise their freedom of religion without interference on the part of others, but calls upon religious groups to renounce any claims to superiority. Accordingly, all religious groups are expected to accord each other equal validity, since religious truth allegedly, is always relative to a particular faith. It is this meaning of "religious pluralism" which is involved when Jews protest against Christian missionary activities on the ground that they are incompatible with "religious pluralism."

In Defense of Orthodox Principles

However appealing such a pluralism may be to the modern mind which eschews all dogmatism, Orthodox Judaism cannot accept this canon of modernity. Just as Judaism cannot legitimize the belief in paganism, be it in its ancient brand or the more modern version of communism, so Orthodox Judaism is bound to reject (and declare as illegitimate) any deviation from *Halacha*. For Orthodox Jews, *Halacha* represents the unconditional demand of God to which all other considerations must be subordinated. Rabbi Schulweis deplores that "religious statesmen refuse to negotiate— *mipnay darkei shalom*— for the sake of peace." But does *Halacha* lend itself to negotiation? Negotiation is the proper procedure for the settlement of conflicting claims, rights and interests. But *Halacha* is a subject for

interpretation- *not* negotiation. Religious truth is non-negotiable. From an Orthodox position, the meaning of the *Halacha* must be ascertained by the procedures that govern the evolution of *Halachic* opinions. Hence, those rejecting this particular methodology cannot possibly be assigned a role in determining *Halachic* requirements.

This has nothing to do with *ahavat yisrael*. I love all my fellow Jews. For a variety of sociological or cultural reasons, I may have stronger bonds of friendship with some Reform Jews than with Satmer Hassidim. Moreover, I thoroughly reject the attitude of Satmer Hassidim towards the state of Israel. But I would not hesitate for one moment to accept the validity of the conversion performed by a Satmar *beit din*, while on *Halachic* grounds, I couldn't possibly recognize a conversion conducted in accordance with Reform standards. Hence, I would have no choice but to exclude from the Jewish community anyone who, according to *Halachic* standards, has not satisfied the minimum requirement for admission to the people of the Covenant.

Halachic Marriages Preserve Unity

It is in this context that we should approach the present controversies concerning the so-called Orthodox monopoly in the state of Israel. What prompted even secularists to confer authority on matters of religious status to the Orthodox rabbinate was the conviction that every possible effort must be made to preserve the unity of the Jewish people. Were Israel to institute civil marriage, then the Orthodox community in the course of time, would find itself unable to intermarry with members of the non-Orthodox community. The introduction of *non-Halachic* marriages under Reform auspices would lead to the same consequences.

It is readily understandable that non-Orthodox rabbis may feel quite uncomfortable with the current arrangement. But ultimately this is an issue to be decided by the Israelis. Theirs is the decision whether the state of Israel should pattern itself after the American model or whether it should be a *Jewish* state with special responsibility to serve as an instrumentality for Jewish survival. But no matter what measures the Knesset will adopt, Orthodox Jews will never be able to marry a convert to Judaism whose *gerut* (conversion procedure) does not meet *Halachic* standards. It must be remembered, however, that the problems relating to regulations governing marriages and divorces in Israel have nothing to do with the issue of religious freedom as such. Each country has the right to select whatever methods it deems advisable. In many European countries, no religious group possesses the right to solemnize marriages. This is regarded as the prerogative

of the civil authorities. No one has ever suggested that this represents an abridgement of religious freedom.

Emphasis on Shared Goals

As an Orthodox Jew, I would welcome a large scale *aliyah* from all segments of Jewry. There is no reason why non-Orthodox Jews should not be encouraged to perform the *mitzvah* of *yishuv haaretz* and avail themselves of the already existing opportunities- as evidenced by many flourishing non-Orthodox institutions- to develop their religious potential in the land of Israel.

I, for one, am deeply dismayed that the battle for status or recognition in the state of Israel has poisoned the atmosphere in the United States. It is high time that we defuse the tension and unnecessary friction between the "denominations." While Orthodoxy cannot condone deviations from *Halachic* norms, there is no reason why it should not be able to acknowledge that by providing a religious rationale for identification with the Jewish people, non-Orthodox Jewish groups can make a valuable contribution to the cause of Jewish survival. If Orthodox groups can enter into alliances with avowedly secular groups, why should they not be able to recognize their community of interests with other religious groups in the numerous areas where they share common religious objectives (i.e. support of Israel, an approach to philanthropy rooted in Jewish religious values, the belief that identification with *Kellal Yisrael* (all Israel) constitutes a religious imperative, etc.)? Granted there are irreconcilable theological differences that separate the Orthodox from the non-Orthodox camp, we still have a moral obligation to overcome all unnecessary divisiveness and mobilize our resources in the pursuit of the common goals which unite us all.

Legitimacy, integrity and ahavas yisroel Moshe David Tendler

Religious pluralism is sanctified by Torah tradition. Talmudic disputations concerning the application of Torah principles to daily life are welcomed with a warm greeting of: "*Eilu v'eilu divrei Elokim chaim*" -- "Both opinions are in accord with Divine instructions." Both can claim legitimacy if specific requirements have been met.

The first of these requirements is *integrity*. The second is *commitment*. Intellectual integrity demands "homework." Religious concepts and practices can be evaluated accurately for authenticity only after careful painstaking study often requiring years of assiduous effort. Glib responses are invariably inaccurate and

always dishonest because they lack the intellectual integrity that can only be provided by "laboring in the Torah." The axiom for religious pluralism in Judaism is that the "pluralist" is committed to the survival of Judaism as a unique covenant between Nation Israel and God who created the Universe and gave us a Torah through the prophecy of Moses. If this axiom be denied then the claim to pluralism in Judaism is false, being only a thinly disguised attempt to present secular or Christian concepts as Jewish and thus confuses and confounds the uneducated but still loyal laity.

The Conservative and Reform clergy are militantly demanding legitimacy for their views and practices. They are desperately seeking recognition in Israel. The Reform movement, after decades of active opposition to Zionism and Jewish peoplehood, is now flying the banner of religious pluralism and insisting on recognition of its marriages, divorces, and conversions. Under a thinly disguised threat of a fund-raising boycott and the plea for a display of *ahavas Yisroel* on the part of the Orthodox Jewish establishment, Reform and Conservative leadership seek entry into the legitimate Jewish community.

Non-Orthodox Lack Intellectual Integrity

It is indeed time to respond with integrity and *ahavas Yisroel* by asking, in dismay: Where is *your* integrity? *your ahavas Yisroel?* *your* commitment to the eternity of Judaism? Why do you pervert the title *Rabbi* and perpetrate a cruel hoax on the Jewish people? *Rabbi* means teacher of Torah truths as a disciple of Moses who received the Torah on Mount Sinai. It has no other meaning. With rare exception, the Reform clergy do not observe Torah laws of Sabbath, Kashruth, Family Purity. 40% of its clergy perform marriages between Jew and non-Jew often jointly with a Christian clergyman. 15% admit to being atheist or agnostic and 50% hold a "radical concept" of God. The official Conservative view professed by most of its clergymen is that the Torah was *not* given by Divine decree to Moses, but was man-made, authored by many over many centuries. Thus the Conservative spiritual leader can urge his membership to drive their cars to synagogue on the Sabbath, can permit them to eat non-kosher food such as sturgeon and swordfish, under a "liberal" interpretation of Torah law. If only he had the intellectual integrity to make his beliefs known to his laity and announce, loud and clear, the Torah was not given to us by God on Mount Sinai! But to do so would be to shock and alienate his own congregation.

Religious pluralism presumes the willingness to state beliefs and practices without false disguises. The Orthodox can easily interact with another faith community, be it Muslim, Christian, Conservative or

Reform. But we do not accept a Papal annulment or a court-approved secular divorce in lieu of a Jewish *Get*. Neither can we accept a Conservative or Reform divorce. If they deny God and His Torah, their marriages and divorces have but secular import. If they will declare a non-Jew to be a Jew, it can only be viewed for what it is – a denigration of Judaism and its values. It is a virulent display of Jewish self-hatred. Why should it be greeted with *ahavas Yisroel* open-mindedness, when it is intended as *Sinaas Yisroel*? To legitimize these weddings and divorces is to tear the Jewish people asunder. There would then indeed be two nations or two species of Jew. The test of a species in biology is successful interbreeding. If remarriage after a Conservative and Reform divorce results in adultery and bastardy as prescribed by Torah law, there would no longer be interbreeding between Orthodox and their estranged brethren. We would be two nations never to join again in a common destiny. To plead for *ahavas Yisroel* as a ruse to obtain legitimacy is to ask the Orthodox to deny their faith. Interfaith cooperation cannot be bought at the price of assimilation.

Non-Orthodox Threaten Jewish Survival

In Maimonides' codes (*Tshuva* 3:6) there is a listing of those beliefs and practices that deny a Jew a place "in the world to come" – the ultimate denigration. It reads like a manifesto of Reform-Conservatism.

- (1) He who denies belief in Resurrection.
- (2) He who denies that God actively rules the world.
- (3) He who denies that our Torah, letter for letter was given by God to Moses.
- (4) He who claims that even one Torah law is no longer valid, etc., etc.

To profess the above heretical beliefs is to forfeit the claim to being a Jew in practice. To claim that religious pluralism allows for these modifications of Jewish tradition is to mimic the Christian claim of being the new Hebrews! It is not the Orthodox who sow dissension. It is the Reform-Conservative threat to Jewish survival that sows the seeds of destruction. With their children intermarrying with non-Jews at a preferential rate – 51% – where is *their ahavas Yisroel*? Their only claim to Judaism is that tragic last plea – "a Jewish sinner is still a Jew."

We have much to do within Orthodoxy to overcome *sinaas chinam* (baseless estrangement). We have much to do to reach out to our Conservative and Reform brethren and offer them a hand to yank them back from the abyss of oblivion. We must indeed overcome the ever increasing polarization within the Jewish community. We can do so if we all agree to deal with

each other and with ourselves with honesty, integrity, and a commitment to the Covenant that made us Jews and guaranteed our destiny and eternity.*

Are we one?

Samuel B. Press

The Jewish Community was enraged when Dr. Bailey Smith opined that God does not hear the prayers of Jews.

Certain Jews publicly claim that God does not "hear" the prayers, weddings, conversions, etc., of Conservative and Reform Jews. The Jewish world is silent.

At the U.J.A. Leadership session, a "game" is played where participants discard a list of the least important priorities in their personal life. It is not a game, when we Jews allow the fundamental beliefs of our heritage to be thrown aside; freedom of religion, integrity, sensitivity, love, goodness and justice. The motto of U.J.A. becomes a sham when we allow a segment of our community to act in a manner which belies "WE ARE ONE."

This past *Shabbat* a *Yeshiva* in Chicago refused to allow one of their students to spend *Shabbat* at our home. Calls were made to members on the professional staff of our synagogue to investigate my beliefs and practices. Although I was proclaimed "kosher" by my colleague, to the *Yeshiva* this was not adequate...and thus, not only was there the need of personal embarrassment to me, but anguish thrust upon a family joining to celebrate a *Bar Mitzvah* and finding their close friend and rabbi not having a home suitable for the standards of religiosity (not religion) as decided by the staff of a Chicago *Yeshiva*. A *Yeshiva* supported by monies from all elements of the Jewish Community.

How does one explain this to my three children, all students in a Day School? How does one respond to the uncomfortable mood of a guest, an 83 year old man whose family founded and supports a 600 student *Yeshiva* in Florida? What can we say to my congregants, who find our practice and religious services the same as the "accepted" congregation in Dayton?

It is imperative that prejudicial attitudes and acts which hurt the sensitivities of other people are discussed and resolved.

OUR ANNUAL DEFICIT REDUCTION letters are in the mail. Please respond.

... but others say about work ...

I Enjoy Jewish Communal Service

It is with some regret that I read in Sharon Strassfeld's article (11/207) of her decision several years ago to no longer work for a Jewish communal service agency. As a "Jewish professional" (or, as some blithely dub it, a "professional Jew") myself, I have no doubt that some of her criticism is warranted. I think, however, that, in expecting Jewish professional agencies to be a light unto the secular world, Ms. Strassfeld might think back on the words of the late Zero Mostel who quipped "Jews have just as much right to be obnoxious as anyone else." If Jewish agencies are today mirroring some of the unlikeable behavior of their secular counterparts, then "*al achat kama v'kama*" those of us who disagree with that behavior need to stay within the field to work to change it.

I left a more lucrative position in the secular world to enter the world of Jewish communal service. It's been 4 years since I decided that, if I was to swallow any "*michugas*" it should be that of my own people.

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