

Petuchowski of HUC-JIR, proposed a similar unanimity in American Jewry on questions of personal and marital identity for the sake of *Klal Yisrael* ("Plural Models Within the *Halachah*", JUDAISM, 19.1/Winter, 1970). However, to his chagrin and that of many others outside the Orthodox camp, we have sadly come to learn that the Orthodox establishments in virtually all their varied forms are interested only in compliance with *Halachah* which will give them political hegemony over all of Jewish life. For many of us the call for unity cannot be the same as a call for unconditional surrender! ●

The limits of spero's argument

Harold M. Schulweis

Rabbi Shubert Spero has presented a reasoned argument from an Orthodox viewpoint explaining the logical limits of Jewish ecumenism. He presents the theological premises of Orthodoxy and concludes that it has no option for flexibility in matters of marriage, conversion or divorce "even if Orthodox Rabbis wanted to change certain rituals or modify certain beliefs." Rabbi Spero makes it too easy for Orthodoxy to remain impassive and to pass the theological ball into the court of Reform and Conservative leaders who alone "can, if they so desire," bring about Jewish unity.

Rabbi Spero is willing to adopt a socio-psychological perspective on the condition of Jewish affairs. But it is not enough to acknowledge that non-Orthodox rabbis lead the largest religious constituency of the Jewish world. It is not enough to acknowledge that thousands upon thousands of our people, independent of non-Orthodox rabbinic approval, have remarried with only a civil divorce and without the benefit of a religious *get*, and that their children are therefore regarded by the *halacha* as illegitimate and prohibited from marrying other Jews. It is not enough to immediately acknowledge the thousands of men, women and children who have been converted to Judaism under Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist auspices and that according to the logic of *halacha* their status as Jews is not accepted.

A Call For Halachic Creativity

More than sociological and psychological perspective is required of responsible Orthodoxy. The life of a people is at stake. Orthodoxy cannot wash its hands and declare that the only solution to this

problem is for all other rabbinic branches to accept Orthodox procedures for marriage, divorce and conversion. Such resignation denies the *halachic* creativity and ingenuity of Orthodoxy which has ample antecedents in our tradition. A tradition whose sages introduced legislation, employed hermeneutic skills and amendments in order to "repair the world" and to act "for the sake of peace" cannot be content with a hopeless shrug of the shoulders and a murmured "What can we do? That's the law." Rabbi Spero, better than I, knows that the *halacha* is not so narrowly constrained. The spectrum of *halacha* is broader than the logic he presents and its responsiveness to crises has freed it from the charge that *halachists* don a legalist straitjacket.

While Rabbi Spero calls for non-Orthodox rabbis to fall into line with Orthodox procedures, he says nothing of the position of Orthodoxy towards Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis who, for the sake of the unity of *Klal Israel*, have employed *halachic* procedures. I have seen nowhere any statement by Orthodox leaders openly accepting the orthopractic conduct of non-Orthodox rabbis. All of which leads me to suspect that something other than the logic of *halacha* allows Orthodoxy to exclude the tradition of Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism. ●

Pluralism: the fruit of democracy

Seymour Siegel

I appreciate the ironic tone of Rabbi Spero's statement, though I do not find it completely satisfactory.

Rabbi Spero has the right, of course, to interpret orthodox Judaism as he sees fit to do. However, many of his colleagues have frequently asserted that orthodoxy has within it the power to change. For example, the attitude toward secular education has changed; the attitude toward women's leadership of organizations and synagogue bodies has changed; the attitude toward political Zionism has changed. We are frequently assured that if the *halachic* process were unshackled and the *gedolim* (leaders) would see fit to act, solutions to many problems would be found. A good example of this is the solution to the *aguna* (deserted wife) question. We non-orthodox have right to ask why the changes so frequently promised are not carried through, especially since the failure to bring about change deeply affects our own goals for the Jewish community.

I also find the remark that since we live in imperfect, non-messianic times, Orthodox Judaism does not have the obligation of *hochiach* *ochiach*, of constantly chastizing them and sitting in judgment upon them (the non-orthodox.)" This idea results in an ironic situation. All Jews pray for the speedy coming of the messiah. In the light of what has been said, we should temper the fervor of our prayers since when the *Moshiach* does come, we non-orthodox will then be fair game for abusive "chastisement."

The Meaning of Pluralism

Most of all, Rabbi Spero misunderstands the spirit of pluralism which we non-orthodox Jews are advocating. Pluralism does not mean that it is held that each branch of Judaism "is an equally valid version of Judaism, an equally correct approach to God, an equally correct approach to the Jewish way of life." As a conservative Jew, I do not believe that orthodoxy is correct (either historically, theologically, or morally). Nor do I believe that Reform Judaism is correct. What distinguishes us from the orthodox is that, in spite of the fact that I believe that orthodoxy is wrong in important respects, this error does not remove orthodoxy from participation in the ongoing life of the community. This is in much the same way that *Bet Hillel* believed that *Bet Shammai* was incorrect, but showed respect, even deference, to their opponents. It is the democratic view that when we all adhere to a basic, overarching set of commitments, we can differ in the application of these principles without risking delegitimation. This may be a newer concept in traditional Judaism, but it is the fruit of our democratic spirit. I am, for example, a fervent Republican. I do not believe, however, that Democrats are not entitled to respectful and courteous consideration.

Since many in orthodoxy adhere to the ancient Catholic doctrine "error has no rights," they cannot adhere to Voltaire's famous aphorism: "I do not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Orthodoxy Seeks A Monopoly

Rabbi Spero is disingenuous when he speaks about non-orthodox conversions. The logic of his assertion would make it possible to accept Conservative conversions since they are done according to the *halacha*. The fact that the orthodox establishment refuses to honor conservative or reform conversions done according to the *halacha* means that it is not principle which is at stake, but the retention of the orthodox monopoly, especially in Israel.

Therefore Rabbi Spero's pleas to the reform and conservative movements to "bring their procedures for marriage, divorce, and conversions in line with the Orthodox" is belied by the fact that when conservative rabbis and some reform rabbis follow the *halacha* in their ritual actions, there is no positive response. The orthodox establishment is not so much interested in the *halacha* being observed as they are in preserving their hegemony.

I believe, taking a leaf from Rabbi Spero, that we non-orthodox should lay down some ground rules:

- 1) we will not work with orthodox groups or leaders unless the elementary rules of courtesy and good manners are followed. We will not cooperate with those who will not call our rabbis, rabbis; our synagogues, synagogues; our scholars, scholars.
- 2) we will not support orthodox institutions which propagate a sense of delegitimation of the religious leaders of fellow Jews.
- 3) we will not invite orthodox leaders to speak to our groups or synagogues unless we are granted the same courtesy by them.
- 4) we will not tolerate the disqualification of our ritual actions when they are done according to the *halacha*, just because we are not orthodox.

Roger Klein (*Sh'ma*, December 10, 1982) strikes an important note in the ongoing battle against fundamentalism and a self-righteous orthodoxy. Theologically speaking all statements about God are true *and* false, except negative statements. Thus to say that God lives is only partially true since life is a word derived from our own experience. However, to say that God is dead is wrong. This is, of course, Maimonidean theology. As Franz Rosenzweig said: "Truth is a noun only for God. For us it is an adverb: we try to live authentically and truthfully." Roger Klein is right. ●

...but others also say about spero...

Once again an article on Jewish ecumenism misses the point. Rabbi Shubert Spero presumes that if only the non-Orthodox would embrace an Orthodox approach to Jewish practices, divisiveness in the Jewish world would end. He claims, "Reform and Conservative can accept Orthodox procedures without violating principle while Orthodox cannot accept Reform and Conservative procedures without violating their religious and legal commitments." As a conservative Jew, I am

dedicated to the full participation of women in Jewish life. I cannot accept Orthodox procedures and remain true to this ideal.

Andrew M. Sacks
Penn Valley, PA.

...but others say about handicapped...

I feel that peoples' attitudes toward the disabled do not know any racial or religious barriers—these attitudes are widespread— non-sectarian, as it were. Problems that I would hope would be minimal in the Jewish community unfortunately are not— there are just as many problems among Jews as among those not of the faith. I do think it is terribly important to voice these problems and to be heard, because if we are not, nothing can be accomplished.

My own experiences have been similar to those you mention, especially where attitudes are concerned. Unfortunately, the architects of Jewish places of worship, or for any place of worship, for that matter, are preoccupied with stairs and forget that worshippers are not all able-bodied. I feel that Jews as the chosen people should set an example to others in breaking down both attitudinal and architectural barriers.

Itzhak Perlman
New York, N.Y.

As a physically handicapped person, I have found myself faced with a major problem of getting in and out of most synagogues and community centers. In part, this is because of architectural styles from the nineteenth century through the 1960's. While external styles changed often in the past century, one thing has remained constant—the positioning of stairs at virtually every point of access, stairs which are serious barriers to the physically handicapped (and, for that matter, to many elderly citizens). Pre-World War I institutions tend to have very steep steps in entryways. Synagogues built in the inter-war period tend to have their main sanctuaries on the second floor,

but rarely have elevators, although in many cases, elevators could be installed.

The worst offenders are the buildings built in the post-World War II period, when split-level construction was the norm. In those buildings, there are steps, steps, and more steps everywhere, only a few in each place, but each is a barrier in its own right. Moreover, under such conditions, there is little possibility for the use of elevators or the minimizing of walking from place to place.

Before we start quoting chapter and verse about how considerate Judaism is of the handicapped, we ought to reflect on how inconsiderate Jews were in designing our institutions. Then every institution ought to appoint a joint committee of handicapped people and architects to look at its particular situation and devise remedies so as to make it accessible to all Jews.

Daniel J. Elazar
Philadelphia, PA.

Send us your purim pranks

The day is short, the task is great, the workers are sluggish, the Editor is impatient. You are not required to complete the work but if you miss the deadline you will be out of luck.

You may submit pieces of original humor of any length and in any form (letter, fable, limerick, song, ad, commentary, prayer, review, article, responsa).

And/or you may send us famous quotations distorted, contorted or scrambled such as:

1) Eve gave Adam some of the fruit and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they discovered that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and they quilted them.

Send your Purim contributions as soon as possible but no later than January 26th, to *Sh'ma*, Box 567, Port Washington, NY. 11050.

OS011
PORT WASHINGTON N Y
19 REID AVE
RABBI EUGENE B BOROWITZ
C