

## THE THEOLOGY OF JEWISH POLITICAL CONSERVATISM

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There is a new mood, a new vocabulary, a new ethic emerging among American Jews; and the temptation to dismiss it as a passing fad is short-sighted. It has become increasingly clear that in the rise of Jewish conservatism we are dealing with a sociological phenomenon which has gained considerable popular momentum in recent years. The political ethic of Jewish conservatism is supported by leaders of consequence, intellectuals in Jewish theological seminaries, universities and prestigious magazines and journals. These new opinion makers seek to redirect the liberal stance that has long been associated with Jewish social ethics in America. The traditional enthusiasms of liberalism are disavowed. The ideals of civil libertarianism, the concern for the freedom of speech, for the protection of the minorities, the separation of church and state, the general belief that somehow it is necessary for the public sector of society to intervene on behalf of the disadvantaged, the sick and the poor, and the minorities - all these are seen as no longer, if they were ever, in the true interest of Jews. Much of the conservative argument traces Jewish contemporary liberalism to the enlightenment period; to the period of Mendelssohn, and the myths of the eighteenth century in which progress and equality were held as sacred fidelities. Those sancta, it is contended, are no longer viable.

In recent years, Jewish political conservatism has been crystallized into identifiable, organizational structures. There is, for example, the formation of a Jewish Rights Council based in New York, and the publication of a journal on contemporary Jewish thought, Ideas first published in August, 1968.

An overall judgement of the editorials and articles in Ideas would lead to the safe conclusion that the magazine is unqualifiedly conservative, with an unusual fidelity to Mr. Nixon through thick and thin. The January issue of the National B'nai B'rith Monthly includes an article by Seymour Siegel, one of Ideas editors, in which he calls upon Jews to accept Mr. Nixon as one of the "Chasidei Umoth Ha-Olam" (one of the righteous gentiles of the world) along with Cyrus, King of Persia, and Lord Balfour. In recent issues of Ideas, he and others have insisted that the issue of the impeachment and resignation of Mr. Nixon is of paramount concern to the Jewish community and that Jews ought to do everything in their power to discourage his impeachment or resignation. Will Herberg, in the current issue of Ideas, dismisses Watergate as a political donnybrook of minor consequence. Mr. Nixon, he asserts "is a victim of the licentiousness of the liberal press, the victim of the shameless orgy of the Ervin committee". The break-ins and other shennanigans are part of "libidine dominande", the natural lust for ruling inherent in politics. Such doings then are as true of Golda as they are of Richard.

The Ideas endorsement of Mr. Nixon extends far beyond his benevolent posture towards the State of Israel. The editors admire Mr. Nixon for his emphasis on Law and Order, and find Mayor Daley's order to shoot or cripple looters in Chicago praiseworthy. They support Mr. Nixon's escalation of the bombings in North Vietnam, his policies calling for the invasion of Cambodia, his opposition to the granting of amnesty. They endorse the administration's policy of the benign neglect of the minorities.

As far as economics is concerned, while the magazine favors Nixon's

impounding of the anti-poverty funds and his total dismantling of the Office of Economic opportunity, they are critical of his budget for retaining one hundred twenty five billion dollars for human resources, including some 3 billion dollars earmarked for civil rights activity. The magazine's articles it publishes are highly sympathetic to Generalissimo Franco, justify Ian Smith's racist policy in Rhodesia - the rule of 225,000 whites over 4 million blacks.

Many of the same editors and writers appearing in Ideas organized the Jewish Rights Council. The stated purposes of the organization are threefold; to raise the level of political and social consciousness of Jews in America; to protect and preserve Jewish communities; to cooperate with other groups who are dedicated to similar aims. Unquestionably, the cause celebre that triggered the formation of this organization was the Forest Hills affair, which grew out of the decision of the city to build low-income housing there for elderly people and others. These would include black and white elements; people generally from lower socioeconomic strata than the resident of Forest Hills. The Queens Jewish Community Council opposed the project with unparalleled rage and threat. Notable exceptions to the council's position were Rabbi Ben-Zion Bokser and Rabbi Usher Kirshblum. Opposition to this incursion of low-income housing into Forest Hills has been variously defended, disavowing racism. Milton Himmelfarb suggests in a Commentary article that to understand Jewish antagonism to low-housing we ought to consider the posture of other ethnics. Take, for example, the Italian-Americans. The Italian-American considers his neighborhood as his village. He does not object to the other fellow's having a desirable place to live in, he just doesn't want him, by moving in, to make his neighborhood less of a home. This, explains Himmelfarb,

is not a question of racism. It is a matter of group self-determination. What the Italian is opposing is the incursion of the elements which disturb the "family coziness of the neighborhood". Analogously, Jews in Forest Hills, are not racists; they simply seek to protect the character of their neighborhood.

Some of the contributors to Ideas argue further that political wisdom will lead intelligent Jews to cooperate with other white ethnic groups who likewise oppose the destruction of their homogeons neighborhood. Arthur J. Finkelstein, one of the contributing editors of Ideas, proposes in a 1973 issue, a new political alliance between Jews and other ethnic groups. He discovers a new commonality among white ethnics. "Our friend Archie Bunker considers Catholics outsiders in his neighborhood." And so, too, the Jewish people when it comes to the choice of neighbors in their shtetl. In the Polish section of Southwest Chicago and in the Italian section of St. Louis, anyone who is not a Catholic is regarded as a foreigner. But all these people have something in common. They all of them oppose low-income projects "which threaten the cohesiveness of their areas". We are now "All In The Family".

The issue, it is repeatedly explained, is not racist but socioeconomic. Jews must be rid of the guilt foisted upon them by liberals who make them feel conscience-stricken for "making it". It so happens that most Jews are middle class; and for Jews of the middle class, the values of capitalism, free enterprise, private property, happen to coincide with Jewish self-interest. Support is drawn from Nathan Glazer, the Harvard sociologist, who cites the case of the Castro Revolution in which the Jewish middle-class, the Jewish businessmen, doctors and lawyers were ousted from their pre-

revolutionary economic advantage. Seymour Siegel concludes from this that Jews ought to defend free enterprise, capitalism, and those institutions which sustain and support the middle class.

A good number of the new Jewish conservatives are unhappy with "welfarism". In a Commentary symposium (August, 1966) Professor Jacob J. Petuchowski flatly declares that Judaism "opposes preferential treatment, even if the recipient of such preferential treatment is one of the underprivileged". Elsewhere he argues that social welfare, "welfare handouts", penalizes success and rewards indolence. He cites the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 28, "He who tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread, but who followeth after vain things shall have poverty enough." Jews have no obligation to take an active part in bringing economic change, "to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others". (Jewish Rights Council pamphlet) Who sacrifices for Jews? For Judaic support Petuchowski calls upon rabbinic principle of reciprocity, and cites the following as illustration: The Bible teaches that while you may not lend money on interest to your brother, you may certainly do so to a foreign trader, to a non-Jew on grounds of reciprocity; i.e. since the foreign trader also charges you interest, you have no obligation to lend him without interest. Based on the principle of reciprocity, he concludes it makes no sense for Jews to fight for others who dont or won't fight for us. "Those others" refers to those who "deny our rights" and who "demand to be placed at the top of the ladder" without struggling, as did our recent ancestors, to get there.

Generalizing from the articles I have read, I conclude that the new Jewish conservatives, in contrast to Jewish liberals, appear to favor private philanthropy over government welfare, an explanation of

human behavior in terms of heredity and will as opposed to environment, favor prayer in the public school systems; and federal aid to parochial schools in opposition to the liberal's traditional insistence on separation of state and church. If there is some theological grand overview, some theological superstructure that hovers over this conservative political ideology, it is expressed by both Petuchowski and Siegel in terms of a general caveat. Not all problems are solvable. The poor and the suffering will always be with us. Therefore, the Jew ought to learn to accept the limitations and the realities of history. That modesty is echoed by a professor of philosophy at City College, Michael Wyschogrod, who in explaining the Orthodox silence on the moral issue of Vietnam, responds in Rosenzweigian fashion that the role of the Jew is to witness, to wait rather than to transform. The Jew is a meta-historical witness whose destiny is beyond history.

#### THE COALESCENCE OF "JEWISH INTEREST" FORCES

These thinkers reflect a serious swing of the Jewish pendulum to the right. Charles Leibman feels that the future of Jewish liberalism is a bleak one. Prognostications aside, liberalism is no longer the American Jew's lay religion. The new direction is a significant sociological phenomenon that may well affect the character of Jewish behavior in socio-political affairs. The trend is not a momentary backlash nor can it be explained on Marxist terms. The people who are attracted to its "redism" have not sold their birthright for a mess of pottage or for a pot of message. Melvin Tumin, the Princeton sociologist, back in 1964, sensed the embourgeoisement of the

American Jews, but I think his explanations were too facile. There is a convergence of diverse interests rallying around the flag of "Jewish self-interest", from lower middle class Jews, blue collar working class Jews, disillusioned ex-marxists, Lubavitcher, JDL'ers, and celebrators of ethnic particularism.

While the motivations for Jewish self-interest are varied, one event haunts them all. One single event colors their perception of reality: the Holocaust. Jews are not done with the Holocaust. An earthquake, as we Californians quite well know, doesn't happen and then go away. Years after, we experience its aftershocks. The Shoah, which swallowed up 2 out of every 5 Jews in the world, left a huge gaping hole in the Jewish psyche. Left alone, I suspect that even this wound could have healed. Jews are great healers, and the therapy of Israel promised that kind of healing. But the unrelieved assaults upon the body of Israel have over and over again ripped off the healing scab, exposing the raw nerve of Jewish genocidal fears. A glance at the newspaper is sufficient to confirm Israel's and the Jew's sense of abandonment and isolation.

The repeatedly traumatized conscience of the Jewish psyche is not simply traceable to the genocidal intention of our enemies; it includes the callous inattention of our friends. Adolph Hitler died a Roman Catholic and an annual mass is still recited for him in Spain. Hermann Goering died a Lutheran, and at the Nuremberg trials, Goering explained that he regarded himself as a Christian and so did the church which performed the marriages, christenings and burials of his family. No Nazi was excommunicated by the church.

Moreover, the coolness of the churches of Christendom during the two and a half decades of Israel's existence indicated that no great moral lessons were learned from the conspiracy of silence during the Nazi era.

The myth of Roosevelt's humanitarianism was punctured by the ugly fact that while these shores were open to English children because of the threat of the bombings of England, they remained closed to Jewish children threatened by the crematoria. A million Jewish children died of Jewishness.

A mood of suspicion hangs over Jews and extends over three tenses. Jews were betrayed, Jews are being betrayed, Jews will be betrayed again. Symptomatic of this Jewish resentment are new post-holocaust soundings. Eliezer Berkovitz, a distinguished Orthodox Jewish theologian, will have nothing to do with talk of "dialogue" (a term now rarely heard in the 70's) He writes in anger, "All we want of Christians is that they keep their hands off us and off our children". The Jewish philosopher and theologian Emil Fackenheim can not contain his anger and despair over the fact that the original design of the international monument erected at Bergen-Belsen, contained inscriptions in all sorts of languages except Yiddish and Hebrew. Were there no Jews destroyed at Bergen-Belsen? The disillusionment is reflected in the galgen-humor of one of my teachers who sadly reported that in his experience there were two kinds of gentiles. One believes that Jesus was a historical figure. The other believes that Jesus never existed. But both believe that the Jews killed him.

Jews live with an expectation of the undelivered punch. Nathan Glazer, in 1971, warned that Jews would be the scapegoats of Vietnam. He argued convincingly that Americans suffered the loss of three



hundred thousand Americans killed or maimed in Vietnam. Generals don't lose wars, they find scapegoats. And the most credible and natural scapegoat is the Jew. The protesting Jewish college student and faculty member, and the Rabbis make vulnerable and identifiable targets for American rage. It so happens that Glazer was wrong. But that's beside the point. What is important is that for Jews his expectation was thoroughly believable. Again, a considerable number of Jews agreed that Americans were not going to tolerate the oil embargo, the long lines at the gas station and that Israel will be blamed and Jews in America made the scapegoat. Once again the prediction failed. But again, what is important is that the expectation of recrimination was for Jews absolutely believable. Jews are suspicious and after Auschwitz it's difficult to convince them that they should not be. But as Delmore Schwartz sadly reports, "After all, even paranoids have enemies."

#### THE SELF BETRAYAL OF THE RADICAL JEW

History alters its face in accordance with the fortunes of the present. The enlightenment vision of a constantly progressing universal society calling for Jews to involve themselves in the battle for social justice is now interpreted as suicidal. The Jewish conservatives point to the "idealism" of the Jewish radical whose universalism led him to repudiate his own Jewish interests. They cite the shocking words of Rosa Luxemburg, answering a letter from a friend as to why she was so unresponsive to the plight of the Jew. Rosa Luxemburg answered "Why do you persist in pestering me with your peculiar Judenschmerz? I feel more deeply for the wretches on the rubber plantations of Puto-Mayo and for the Negroes of Africa whose bodies

are footballs for Europe's colonial exploitation." Twenty five years later the town of Zamoscz in which she was born was destroyed as far as the Jewish community was concerned. Could she spare no tears for Jews? Is this the lot of Jewish involvement in universal causes?

Jacob Talman and Judd Teller offer countless illustrations of such self-betrayal. Pavel Axelrod, along with other radical Jews, joined the Narodnaya Volna in the 1870's and 1880's. They would live with the Muzhiks, with the Russian peasants, determined to help them organize against the tyranny of the Czars. But since the Muzhiks didn't accept them because they were Jewish, a number of them converted to Christianity, not out of faith but so that they be credible in the eyes of the peasants. In the wake of the Czarist programs of the 1880's, however, Ukranian peasants organized programs of their own against the Jews. Their actions were greeted with this statement by the executive committee of the Narodnaya Volna, dated August 30, 1881. "Good people. Honest Ukranian people. The damned police beat you. The Yids, the dirty Jews and Jewesses rob you. People of the Ukraine suffer, most from the Yids. Who has seized the land, the wood mills and taverns? The Yids. And who does the peasant beg with tears in his eyes to let him near to his land? The Yids."

Talman sums up the self-betrayal of Jewish radicalism as a sort of Shakesperian tragedy with bodies strewn all over the stage. Leon Trotsky had his skull split by the ax of a Stalinist agent; Rosa Luxembourg's torn, battered body is dragged out of the river; Kurt Eisner and George Landauer fall victim to assassin's bullets. Others are hanged in the small hours in small cellars. Slansky

perishes as a traitor. The Paukers and the Bermans are dying in oblivion. Such is Jewish fate. Damned by the right and damned by the left. Damned if you do and damned if you don't. The Jew demonized by the world is caught upon the horns of his own dilemma.

They tell a story about a Jewish boy caught in Belfast, caught by Protestant and the Catholic gangs. They ask him: "Are you Catholic or are you Protestant?" The Jewish boy confidently replies: "I'm a Jew." "All right, then, but what kind of a Jew? - Catholic or Protestant?"

Liberalism, universalism, progress, enlightenment have turned sour in the agony of post-holocaust reflection. Pulpits and pews in the 70's resonate to different messages than those of the 50's and 60's. The voice of the liberal is muted. The ground-shaking of the holocaust has caused a new look backwards. The innocent conceits of enlightenment appear more sinister. The failures of Jewish radicalism cast their shadow onto the contemporary scene. Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans slip into the old variables occupied by the Muzhiks.

Can Jews be expected to stand at the vanguard of the minorities' revolution? Can they be called upon to throw themselves into the battle knowing that they will be exploited, then rejected and spat upon by those who once spoke of the kinship of suffering? Are Jews self-fated to corporate masochism?

#### SOME REACTIONS TO THE NADIR OF JEWISH LIBERALISM

The call to Jewish conservatism, to Jewish self-interest and hard-nosed realism has its roots in the holocaust. It has turned non-zionists into defenders of ethnic survival; it has turned Jewish

theologians away from the prophetic ideal towards a new veneration of the priestly function; it has transformed theologians who once spoke the language of the suffering servant and Jewish chosenness into proponents for the shaping of Israel in the image of the other nations of the world.

Twenty five years ago, for example, Will Herberg debated the chosenness of Israel. Jews, he wrote, were "chosen for a mission and for suffering", to be a light unto the nations and bring "moral law to the people of the world". Chosenness means Jews must be willing to "undergo persecution, humiliation, agonies of pain and death". Chosenness places a claim upon Jews for "greater obligation, heavier responsibility, harder destiny".

What has happened to that altruistic passion? How easily the image of the suffering servant crumbled before the threats of affirmative action.

How ironic that those who struggled against the chosen-people claims and against the imposition of the suffering-servant idea in the name of Jewish "normalcy" should call for greater Jewish responsibility towards the disenfranchised of the non-Jews; while those whose theology once insisted on transcending native and cultural boundaries should now defend the coziness of neighborhoods.

There are no villains and no saints behind the rightward swing of the Jewish pendulum. The pendulum oscillates in response to the needs of the people. But the oscillation is not automatic; it is moved by responsive and responsible Jewish judgement.

I am, myself apprehensive of the shift to the kind of conservatism I have described, and I should like to explain wherein my

uneasiness lies.

A. A SHOCK OF RECOGNITION

It is, I think, not a matter of knee-jerk liberalism that causes me to reject the rationalizations of the new conservatives. I sense at the bottom-line of their arguements for self-interest a shameless double standard. Where, for example, did I first hear the defense for protecting the character of neighborhoods? When I grew up as a boy in the East Bronx, the borough of Queens was popularly acknowledged to be off-limits to Jews. Forest Hills was "judenrein". No Jew could rent or buy a house, or find lodging in its one hotel. Was the exclusion of Jews a sympton of anti-semitism? No respectable gentile would admit to such a canard. It simply expressed the right for communities to define their own character. I never for a moment bought that arguement. It does not go down easier when it is articulated by Jews against "incompatible" elements who seek entrance into predominantly Jewish populaces. I experience a tragic shock of recognition in the pronouncements of the Jewish Rights Council. My opposition stems from no a priori ideological commitment. It derives from a most natural fidelity to personal memory. Was it a liberal who said, "What is hateful to thee do not do to thy fellow man"?

Personal memories are more powerful than abstract ideologies. In the spring of 1965 I was in Germand, and among other interviews, I had a meeting with the Bishop of Berlin-Brandenberg, D. Otto Dibelius, a former president of the World Council of Churches. I asked him why he, who had such a respected position with the Church, had done nothing on behalf of the oppressed Jewish community. He responded with frightening candor. As Pastor he had a responsibility

to protect the well-being of the Church, the interests of the baptised, the "getauft". To become embroiled with the Nazis over the Jewish issue was to endanger the Church. I asked him where was Christian conscience, the figure of the suffering Christ, the defense of one's brother? He remained adamant, convinced that Christian self-interest could not be compromised. The sound of German "obrigkeit" echoed in the Church.

I was revolted by the smugness of his posture. Am I to respond differently to the justification for Jewish corporate selfishness? Is Jewish moral isolationism grounded in the rationale of exclusive self-interest, moreover, in political circumstances far less sinister than those of Nazi Germany, excusable? Does the change in accent allow for double standards?

Senator James Mclure of Idaho argues American self-interest, in terms of geo-political, economic and military considerations, and thus advocates altering United States foreign policy in favor of the Arab States. What indeed if he and Senator Fullbright were correct? Would we not, I think properly, appeal to America's larger self, to her humanitarian interests which ought to weigh heavier than her narrower interests in determining its support of Israel? But can we argue altruism for the other, while justifying self-interest for ourselves?

#### B. THE NEED FOR DISTINCTIONS

It is misleading to lump liberalism and radicalism together. Jewish liberalism, as Judd Teller, Jacob Talman and Werner Cohn have argued, was and is opposed to the violence and anarchy associated with radicalism. It is wrong then to cite Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev as biographical illustrations of the failures of Jewish

liberalism. They cannot be thrown together with the positions of Lasker, Rathenau, Cremieux and Leon Blum.

It is equally misleading to trace the self-betrayal of the Jew to his commitment to universalism by pointing to Rosa Luxemborg or Pavel Axelrod. Did Abrahm Joshua Heschel betray his Jewishness by marching with Martin Luther King Jr and by protesting a cruel and immoral war in Vietnam? One must draw distinctions between the pseudo-universalism of self-hating Jews who embrace humanity in order to escape the claims of the Jewish community, and those whose concern for other submerged communities grows out of their Jewish experience and Jewish value-system. Buber, Magnes, Kaplan, Wise, Heschel-all understood that charity begins at home. They also knew and acted upon the wisdom that to begin and end charity in the home is to suffocate its inhabitants through provincialism.

The dangers of pseudo-universalism must not blind Jews to the peril of pseudo-particularism. For the latter offers up a loaded option for Jewish choice: chose Judaism or Humanity: chose to be a Jew or chose to be a man; Chose Jewish interest or interest of humanity. It presents false and ultimately self-defeating disjunctions. For it so trivialities Jewish ethic and so shrivels the horizon of Jewish vision that it makes meaningless Jewish suffering and striving. To survive only for the sake of survival, to survive only to become another ethnic group with indigenous dances, songs, food and its own economic and political interests is not purpose enough to place life and death claims upon our people. To travel the long trek for the sake of onions, leeks and cucumbers is a waste.

The issue is not whether Jews should act out of self-interest. The critical question is over the perception of the Jewish self. How large or small we see the Jewish self will help determine the character of our interest. It is perfectly proper to ask "Is this good for Jews", but only after we are clear as to what Judaism means by goodness. The short and narrow view of self-interest tends to vitiate the long-range and larger interests of a community. Nothing will turn our people away from lasting identification with the Jewish community more than its tribalization and trivialization. What good is it to survive if you lose all reason to exist? The tendency to exploit the agony of the holocaust, to "Cry Auschwitz" for any and every cause of alleged Jewish self-interest, only cheapens our martyrdom. Like "crying wolf", the abuse of the survivor's cry "never again", will destroy the urgency and sanctity of our major concerns. Distinctions need to be drawn. Forest Hill is not the Warsaw Ghetto. Affirmative action is not Bergen-Belsen.

#### THE NEW JEWISH REALISM

Let us put aside moral arguments for a moment and play the game of political realism. Jewish liberals, its adversaries claim, have made Jews visible targets of anti-semitism because of their involvement in causes not their own. Professor Abe Duker of Yeshiva University warned Jewish liberals that the black revolution may turn into an anti-jewish pogromist drive. Jewish participants in the civil rights movement, he argued in 1965, should be sensitive to such problems. Jews ought not supply our enemies with added ammunition. The future of Jews "depends on the majority's good will".

Writing in Midstream, Rabbi Herbert Weiner offers similar



strictures and concludes that "the fight for civil liberties can get along without Judaism". Rabbis Petuchowski, Siegel and Jakobovits are critical of the Jewish liberal's opposition to prayer in public schools and federal aid to parochial schools because, among other arguments, such liberal positions create "theological anti-semitism", and associate Jews with atheists, agnostics and secularists.

But surely the sword cuts both ways. For Jews as a corporate body to oppose scatter-site low income housing, as the Jewish Rights Council does; for Jews to organize opposition to legislators who favor affirmative action, as Siegel proposes, is to expose Jews as identifiable enemies of the poor and the minorities. To urge Jews to oppose Castro's and Allende's radical reforms because they threaten the interest of the middle class to which many Jews belong, is to make Jews vulnerable and visible targets of the "oppressed". In terms of political shrewdness, is it any wiser for Jews to become visible on behalf of conservative causes than it was for them to become conspicuous for liberal ends? Will the conservative non-Jew embrace the Jew in a manner other than that with which the non-Jewish liberal welcomed the Jewish liberal?

Is it politically wise to convert economic conflicts between haves and have-nots into Jewish-poor conflicts? Is it politically wise to interpret every black-white conflict which happens to involve Jewish whites into a Jewish-black confrontation? Is it politically wise to allow trade-union conflicts with blacks to turn into Jewish-black enmities? Surely, affirmative action affects non-Jewish whites in unions, industries and colleges. Why do we not find Episcopalian, Methodist or Catholic institutions rushing in to act as "amicus curiae" on behalf of the white majority? Is the Church more sensitive

to the oppression of the minorities than we are, or is the Church wiser in refusing to be associated with the "suppressors" of equality?

The drift of the conservative argument tends to identify Jewish interest with middle-class interest. It may well be that for middle-class Jews capitalism, private property and parsimony in social welfare are to its advantage. But if Judaism is "de facto" equated with middle-classism, what interest does it hold for Jews of lower economic interests who may find in liberal or radical social reform greater self-interest? Are we to submit to a cynical marxist interpretation of Judaism which asserts that the religious and ethical superstructure is secondary to the economic substructure?

Whatever the limits of Jewish liberalism, its ideology and political practice transcended economic self-interest. Unlike other ethnic groups and other religious groups, Jews did not respond to political candidates with knee-jerk ethnism or vote unqualifiedly for their co-religionist a fact to which Robert Morgenthau, Arthur Levitt and Louis Lefkowitz in New York can give painful testimony. To the consternation of pollsters and political scientists Jews did not vote their pockets. Misguided or not, they did not accommodate what they understood to be Jewish values i.e. Zedakah, Rachmanuth, Yosher, to their economic class advantage.

#### LIBERALISM, CONSERVATISM - OR JUDAISM

Discussion of the traditional close relation of Judaism to liberalism frequently ends in a peculiar form of pseudo-particularism. In the search for the uniquely Jewish, there is a tendency to remove those elements in Judaism which are shared by others outside the Jewish circle. Thus, following Mendelssohn and Spinoza, reason and ethics, since they are not exclusively Jewish, are somehow relegated

to the non-Jewish realm; and it is a short way from the "non-Jewish" to the "un-Jewish". What remains uniquely Jewish is ritual legislation and concerns which immediately affect the Jewish community. The result of such a search for Jewish differentia yields a shirvelled Judaism in which ethics is surrendered to the public domain. Thus, reference to universalism, humanitarianism, the passion for social justice is attributed to non-Jewish sources e.g. the enlightenment, deism, socialism. But did Judaism discover the ethic associated with liberalism from Locke or Voltaire, from Lessing or Kant? What is it that Jews have been doing for thousands of years, reading on their most sacred day, the book of Jonah, which affirms God's interest in creation. The God of Israel is concerned with the idolators of Ninveh. His interests are larger than Jonah's narrow concern with his gourd. Did Abraham's contention with God on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah (not Jewish cities) stem from the reading of John Toland? Is the rabbinic formulation of the classic benediction which affirms the sovereignty of God over all the universe derived from 18th century enlightenment? Is the interpretation of Leviticus 19:18 to include more than Jewish neighbors alien to the rabbinic world view? Was Jacob Emden caught up in the web of foreign universalism when, in his Passover Hagaadah Commentary, he insisted that the call to feed the hungry is addressed to non-Jews and has priority over the invitation to Jews to celebrate the Passover at our tables? Did the Talmud Gitin 61 not call upon Jews to feed the hungry gentile, visit the gentile sick, comfort the gentile bereaved together with the hungry, sick and bereaved Jew? Was the rabbinic principle of "mipnei darkei shalom" (in the interest of promoting peace), a sign of Jewish

assimilation to liberalism? And why, indeed, did the rabbis not employ the principle of reciprocity to their relationship with the non-Jew? Later rabbinic authorities such as Sherira Gaon, Maimonides, Judah He-Hasid and Joseph Karo repudiated the double standard which treated gentiles in one fashion and Jews in the other because they would not polarize the world between "them" and "us". "Jew and non-Jew are to be treated alike", Maimonides wrote in his Hilchoth Mechirah. "It is wrong to deceive any person in words even without causing him a financial loss". Beyond the principle of reciprocity, Rabbi Israel Lipschutz taught that when a Jew is tempted to discriminate against a gentile, let him say with Joseph "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God" (Genesis 39:9)

#### UNFINISHED AGENDA

I do not wish to give the impression that Jewish ethics is automatically and universally on the side of liberalism, nor that the specific issues Jews in the 70's are confronting are easily resolved. There are, for example, genuine ethical dilemmas in the theory and practice of affirmative action. My plea, however, is that the Jewish community not content itself with pointing out the flaws of liberal proposals. It is not enough to say "no" to affirmative action.

What do we as Jews say beyond our negations? What do we as Jews propose to do with the society in which we live? Are we as Jews content to withdraw, to turn inwards and deny our responsibilities to the larger community? Such Jewish exhaustion would be tragic in a democratic society. We are not "second-class" citizens devoid of rights and powers to affect the larger society in which we live. If we accept the premise that Jews as members of a major religious

civilization have a responsibility towards the community, we will struggle against the xenophobia which leads us down the path of of privatism and irrelevance. After Auschwitz, we cannot emulate those who sought escape from responsibility through the safety-hatch of insular "self-interest". After Auschwitz, we must live beyond despair. After Auschwitz, what is required of us is acts of moral statesmanship. I cannot believe that the Jewish institutions of learning and action, including seminaries and rabbinic associations, cannot mobilize its scholars and laity to contribute to the solution of our national problems. I cannot, for example, believe that we cannot appeal to Jewish doctors, lawyers and businessmen in our midst to so help prepare the disadvantaged segments of the minorities that they may find easier and fairer entrance into jobs, businesses and colleges.

I believe that Jewish affirmative thinking and action can well affect the quality of life in America and can help regain the lost credibility in the institutions which mean to transmit Jewish wisdom and ethics. What I fear most in the negations of the new Jewish political conservatism is not "mah yomru hagogim", what will the gentiles say, but "mah yomru ha-ivrim", what will our own say.