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Box 44, Folder 9, Religious pluralism, 1981-1984.

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memorandum

To: M. Tannenbaum

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date February 9, 1981
to Abe Karlikow
from M. Bernard Resnikoff
subject February 1st Symposium on Religious Pluralism

A departmental report on the national consultation on religious pluralism will follow in due course. Meanwhile, as a part of that report, I enclose the following:

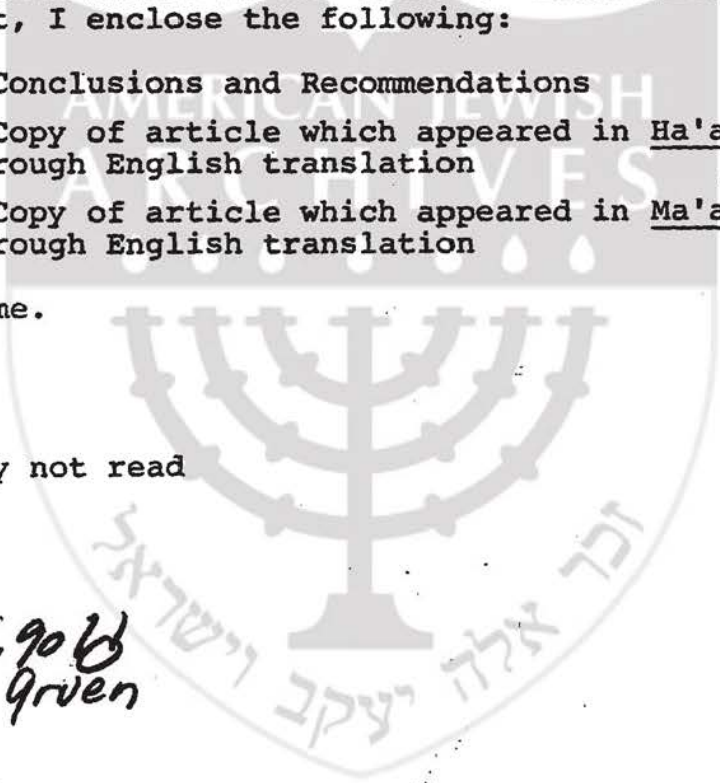
- 1) Conclusions and Recommendations
- 2) Copy of article which appeared in Ha'aretz and rough English translation
- 3) Copy of article which appeared in Ma'ariv and rough English translation

More to come.

MBR/sw
Encl.

dictated by not read

cc: B. Gold
G. Gruen





REPORT

From the Israel Office of the American Jewish Committee

Rehov Ethiopia 9, Jerusalem 95 149 Tel. 228862, 233551 Cable: Wishom, Jerusalem

Symposium on

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN ISRAEL AND IN THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Purpose and Framework of the Symposium

a. The purpose of the symposium that took place on February 1, 1981 in Jerusalem was to convene a selected group of concerned and influential individuals from all walks of life, including orthodox, conservative, reform and secular, to discuss if, what and how to promote religious pluralism in Israel, and if and what can be learned from the experience of the American Jewish community. In particular, the goal was to see how the issue can be addressed from the legal, legislative, educational and political aspects.

b. The basic premise was that it is impossible, at least at the present, to convince the orthodox establishment to accept religious pluralism in the Jewish life in Israel. Since the purpose of the symposium was to discuss and think how to promote religious pluralism in Israel, and not to become a platform for a debate between the orthodox establishment and the representatives of the conservative and reform congregations in Israel, it was decided not to invite at this stage representatives of the orthodox establishment. However, influential orthodox Jews with an open mind to the issue were invited and participated (such as Professor A. Auerbach, Professor Z. Falk, etc.). The question is: what policy should be adopted regarding the involvement of the orthodox establishment in the future?

c. The American Jewish Committee took the initiative in convening the symposium in order to provide a framework which is not identified with the three Jewish denominations and can attract the "seculars" as well. The question now is: if and to what extent can and should the AJC get involved in any further steps to be taken?

d. Petahim: The initiative to involve Petahim as a partner was designed to give to the project an Israeli dimension and to get the involvement of high level Israeli intellectuals who are involved in Jewish thinking and Jewish life.

2. Evaluation of the Symposium

a. Participation

1. The number and level of participation was very good. The 45 participants (that were carefully selected) were of a very high intellectual level. Many of them are influential in Israel's political, legal and cultural life. Among them were Members of Knesset Wirshubsky and Gideon Hausner, former Member of Knesset S. Zalman Abramov, former Supreme Court Justice Zvi Berenson, Professor Uhrbach, Mr. Mordechai Bar-On, educator Moshe Kerem, Professor and former Member of Knesset Haim Klinghoffer, etc.

2. The orthodox, reform, conservative and "seculars" were all represented. However, more orthodox participation would have been helpful. The representatives of the Labor Movement were busy at the Labor Party convention and therefore did not attend. This should be corrected in the future. It should be mentioned that the kibbutz movement was ably represented.

b. The Discussions

The level of the discussions was very high and very deep. It constituted a good basis for continued ideological and practical deliberations. Petahim plans to devote a special issue to sum up the discussions. This should promote a continued discussion and dialogue possibly also with the orthodox establishment.

In part of the symposium, the participants carried on with monologues, but this was corrected in the latter part of the discussions.

c. No Consensus on Legislation

All of the participants agreed that the conservative and reform movements have the right to equal existence in Israel. There was no agreement whether legislation by the Knesset and political moves through the parties are desirable. Professors A. Uhrbach, and Z. Falk, and Ms. A. Aderet (of Kibbutz Ayelet HaShahar) did not think legislation will help the cause of pluralism and may even hurt it "Because the conservative and reform movements may then be blamed for politicizing religion the same way the orthodox establishment is blamed today." (Quote by Prof. A. Uhrbach). Members of Knesset Hausner and Wirshubsky, former Member of Knesset Abramov, Justice Berenson and many others voiced the opinion that only legislation and political action will provide religious pluralism with a real chance to survive and develop in Israel.

d. Conclusions

It was decided:

1. That there must be a continuation of the AJC's and Petahim's initiative and that the symposium should not remain a one-time event.
2. That the organizers of the symposium will analyse the deliberations of the symposium and decide how to proceed.
3. That if and when a subsequent symposium will be convened it should focus on more specific issues (since the broader aspects of religious pluralism in Israel were addressed in the present symposium).

e. Publicity

The symposium received fairly good publicity. Two articles appeared in the leading Israeli newspapers Ha'aretz and Ma'ariv.

3. Recommendations

a. Continuing the Momentum

The success of the symposium should serve as a leverage to continue the momentum that was started. A meeting of a small number of influential and concerned individuals should be convened in the very near future to discuss further steps. The meeting should include some of the participants in the symposium and others who were invited but could not come. They should represent the orthodox, conservative, reform, "secular," labor and kibbutz movement, the academia, the business community, etc. I recommend inviting, among others: Member of Knesset Wirshubsky, S. Zalman Abramov, Mordechai Bar-On, Zvi Berenson, Ari Rath, Dr. Jack Cohen, Dr. Ray Artz, Dr. Lee Levine, Mike Rosnak, Rabbi Moshe Tutnauer, Haim Weiler, Rabbi Michael Klein, Saadia Gelb, Moshe Kerem, Z. Zamerer, Joseph Bentwich and Yosef Emanuel. It is recommended to invite Haim Zadok as well.

b. The Agenda

The meeting should concern itself with the following agenda:

1. Political action

In view of the forthcoming elections is it desirable to approach the parties in order to assure that their platforms will include a clause supporting religious pluralism in Israel, including legislation by the Knesset. If the meeting will decide that political actions are desirable, a plan of practical steps should be adopted.

2. Legislation

What is the best way to support the bill that was recently brought before the Knesset?

3. Education

How to promote the establishment of more "mesorati" schools, similar to the one on French Hill in Jerusalem. The recent actions of Minister of Education Zevulun Hammer supporting such schools should serve as an encouragement for further actions.

4. Information

A scheme for spreading information to the general public should be discussed. It should aim at creating an understanding of the issue among the public in order to generate support for the forthcoming legislation, political actions, educational programs and to promote a national debate. This can be done through the media, seminars and an intensive program of lectures all over the country, before and after the elections.

5. The Framework

It should be decided whether or not the AJC can and should be directly involved or should a special committee be established outside of the AJC with the AJC as a participant or as a silent supporter.

translation from the Hebrew

Ha'aretz February 3, 1981

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST JEWS IN ISRAEL

Christians, Moslems, and the other religious groups have a separate existence and full religious freedom, says Justice Zvi Berenson, at a symposium in Jerusalem on religious pluralism.

by Amos Ben-Vered

Aside from the three official religions in Israel -- Judaism, Islam, and Christianity -- there are people of other faiths and smaller sects such as Druze, Bahai, Buddhist and others, who have a separate existence and full religious freedom. Not so the Jews, says Supreme Court Justice Zvi Berenson.

Mr. Berenson spoke at a symposium on Religious Pluralism sponsored by The American Jewish Committee and the Ptahim quarterly at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, on Sunday. About forty people who are involved with the subject, from all three major streams of Judaism, as well as some defining themselves as secular, participated in the seminar.

Apart from the former justice's remarks, the following opinions were voiced:

Mr. Moshe Kerem (educator, former principal of Oranim Seminary, secular): Politics has taken the place of faith, and it is now permissible in the name of party or organization to do negative things out of a manipulative kind of pragmatism.

Professor Ze'ev Falk (jurist, Orthodox): Tolerance is founded either in relativism -- i.e., that no one can claim truth is completely on his side -- or on a broad base of common belief.

Dr. Pinhas Rosenblatt (educator, Orthodox): Judaism is not a matter of truth but rather a way of life. One must find the lowest common denominator while remaining aware of differences.

Mr. Amnon Hadari (editor of a Conservative weekly): Judaism is neither tolerant nor authoritative. The contradiction which is the reason for this discussion is between a generally liberal world view and Jewish tradition.

Professor Yitzhak Englehard (jurist, Orthodox): There is a price for unifying the nation, and conversion according to halacha is part of the price that must be paid.

Mr. Avraham Aderet (kibbutz member, secular): A terrible spiritual blight afflicted the first Zionist Congresses -- Judaism had no place in the Zionist utopia of those days. No one is preventing us from educating our youth as we like. Legal recognition will not help: the Conservative congregation in Safed can't even manage to get a minyan on Shabbat.

Dr. Menachem Hartom (Orthodox): There are those who think that halacha is binding. Some think part of it is binding. And some think it is not binding. That is not religious pluralism, it is pluralism within the nation.

Professor Efraim Orbach (lecturer, Orthodox): The goal of the Zionist movement was for Zionism -- not Judaism -- to unite the Jews. Zionist Jews stood for secularism and were proud of it.

Twenty Members of Knesset Dictate

Dr. Michael Korinaldi (jurist, Orthodox): The Karaites have a separate Bet Din which has no legal status, yet the government pays the salaries of the dayanim, and the Ministry of Interior records its decisions. Even among Jews it is possible to arrive at a compromise.

Mr. Zvi Tzameret (principal, Kiryat Shmona High School, secular): It is not good that all general schools are made secular. The kind of education that is brought in for my students is not suitable for them, because they are traditional, familiar with prayer, and respect their heritage.

Mr. S. Zalman Abramov (jurist): The previous generation advocated secularism with religious fervor. This has now dissolved, and a crisis has been created, which motivates secular Jews to see nice things in religion.

M.K. Mordechai Wurshubsky (jurist, secular): Religion in Israel is a dividing force. Religious Judaism has never had any consideration for the feelings of secular Jews. Twenty out of 120 members of Knesset have dictated a way of life which most of the people do not want. A law guaranteeing equality to other streams would at least halt the polarization between religious and secular Jews.

In his opening speech, Mr. Berenson pointed out that no legislation or declaration (such as the Declaration of Independence) has constitutional status. Therefore, the Knesset has the power to change them. But instead, the Knesset has restricted religious freedom of Jews, and Jews in congregations which are not Orthodox are not recognized as religious Jews. The solution, in his opinion, will come about only with mass immigration of non-Orthodox Jews to Israel.

Mr. Moshe Kerem (who is a member of Kibbutz Gesher Haziv), expanded his comments about politics, saying that Zionism was based on the idea of optimistic rational secularism. But it has gone through a process well known in sociology from a charismatic movement to an establishment and from there to barren bureaucracy. Today, when a kibbutz volunteer wants to convert in order to marry a kibbutznik, she is advised to lie -- this was said by the official government representative. This is one of the consequences of leaving fundamental values in the hands of politicians.

Other speakers referred to the many facets of Judaism: the wide range of mitzvot between man and fellow man, the beauty of the tradition, the yearning for values, and more. The speakers remained divided on possible solutions to the problem of pluralism. Some reasoned, with Professor Orbach, that "It's best to continue to live with the problems." Others agreed with M.K. Wurshubsky, claiming that from the point of view of Judaism, the present situation cannot stay as it is: if any other country in the world dared to recognize only one stream of Judaism, the entire Jewish world -- including Israel -- would rise up as one man against discrimination.



יהודים - העדה המקופחת בישראל

לנוצרים, למוסלמים ולבני שאר
העדות, יש קיום נפרד וחופש
דתי מלא, אומר השופט בדימוס,
צבי ברנזון, בסימפוזיון בנושא
פלורליזם דתי שנערך בירושלים

מאת עמוס בן-ורד

שאנה מתייבשת, זה אינו פילד
רליג' דתי, זה פלורליזם בעם.
פרופ' א"א אורבך מרצה
(אורתודוקסי): מה סרצו שיאחד
את היהודים בהגדרה הציונית
היתה הציונית ולא היהדות. הן
יהדות הציונית דגלה בחילוניות
והיתה גאה בה.

20 ח"כים מתרבים

ר"ר מיכאל קרינגלד (משפ)
סן, אורתודוקסי: לקראת יש
בית דין נפרד, שאין לו מעמד
בדיוק, אך את משפחות הדתיים
משלמת המדינה ומשרד הפנים
רושם את תולדותיו. גם בין
יהודים אפשר להגיע לפשרות.
כר צבי צמרת (מנהל ב"ס
תיכון בקריית שמונה, חילוני):
לא טוב שהופכים את כל בחרי
הספר הכלליים לחילוניים. לתלמי
מידים שלי מייבאים חינוך שאינו
מתאים להם, כי הם מסורתיים
יודעים תפילה ומכבדים את מורי
רשתם.

מר ש"י אברמוב (משפטן):
בדור הקודם התמידו בחילוניות
בהתלהבות דתית. עכשיו היא
פגה ונוצר משבר, הכוונה מן
החילוניים לראות את היהיה ב"ד
דת.

ח"כ מרדכי וירשובסקי (משפ)
פטן, חילוני: היה בישראל
היא גורם מפרד ומסכסך. הן
הדתות הדתיות בעולם לא התי
חשבה ברגישות החילוניים. 20
מתוך 120 חברי כנסת הכתירו
אורתודוקסים שרוב הציבור אינו
רוצה בהן. חוק שיטתית שוויון
לדורים האחרים לפחות יצבור
את הקוטב שבין דתיים לתר
לונים.

בהוצאת הפתוחה עכד מר
ברנזון על כך, שלכל התחיקה
וההצעות (כמו הכרזת העצ
כאות) אין מעמד של חוקה. לכן
יכולה הכנסת לשנותן, אך, דו"ר
קא את התופש הדתי של היהודי
דום היא צימצמה והיהודים ב"י
קהילות שאינן אורתודוקסיות
אינם מוכרים כיהודים דתיים.
הפיתרון, לדעתו, יושב רק עם
עליה הבונית של יהודים לא-
אורתודוקסים לארץ.

מר משה כרם, שהיה חבר ק"ר
בזר גשר-החץ, נרחב את הגדר
רומיו לגבי הפליטיקה, האמר
שהציונות היתה מבוססת על
רעיון של חילוניות אופטימית
ורציונלית. אך היא עברה את
התהליך הידוע במציאות מ"י
תנועה בעלת כריזמה למסוד
ומכנה לבירוקרטיה עקרה. עתה
כאשר מייצגים למערכת, הן
רוצה להתגבר כדי להגשם לבין
קרבן, איברים לה לשקר, תחת
עלפי דברי הנציג הרשמי של
המדינה, זו אתה התוצאות של
השארות ערכי-היסוד בידו פר
ליטיקאים.

דוברים אחרים עמד על פניה
הרבות של היהדות: ההיבט ה-
נרחב של מצוות בין אדם ל-
חברו, הופי שבסורות, הכפיה
לערכים ועוד. ביחס לפיתוחות
אפשריים לפלורליזם נשארו הן
דעות חלוקות. הן סבבור, עם
פרופ' אורבך, כי, רצוי להמשיך
לחיות עם הבחינה, והן סה"כ
כימו עם ח"כ וירשובסקי, וטענו
כי מבחינה יהודית אין להטאיר
את ההבדל הבוסחי: אילו העזה
כל בדיקה אחרת בעולם להכיר
רק בורם אחד ביהדות היה כל
החילום היהודי - וישראל בתוכו
- מתקדם כאיש אחד כנגד
הגורלה.

מלבד בני שלוש הדתות הראי
שיות במדינה - יהודים, מוסל
מים ונוצרים - יש כאמורים
נוספים ודעות קטנות, כגון דרור
יום בהאים, בודהיסטים ועוד,
ולתם יש קיום נפרד וחופש דתי
מלא, אך לא כן ליהודים, אמר
ביום א' השופט בדימוס מבית
המשפט העליון מר צבי ברנזון.
מר ברנזון דיבר בסימפוזיון
בנושא, "פלורליזם דתי" מטעם
הוועד הלאומי האמריקאי ורבעון
ה"חיים", שנערך במוסק וא"י
ליר בירושלים, והשתתפו בו כ-40
אנשים הפעילים בנושא, כולל
שני הורמים העיקריים ביהדות,
וכן אנשים שהגדירו את עצמם
כחילוניים.

מלבד דבריו אלה של השופט
לשעבר הושמעו בפגשה העצומה
הבאות:
מר משה כרם (מנהל, וכעבר
מנהל סמינר אורנים, חילוני):
הפוליטיקה באה במקומה של ה-
אמונה, ועתה מותר לעשות ב"י
שם מפלגה או בשם חברה, דבר
רם שליליים, תוך פרגמטיות
מאניפולטיביות.
פרופ' זאב פלד (משפטן, אור
תדוקסי): סיבלות מוסתתת
או על רלוונטיות, כלומר שאף



צבי ברנזון

אחד לא יטען שהאמת כולה אצ
לו, או על בסיס רחב של אמונה
משותפת.
ד"ר פנחס רוזנבלט (מנהל,
אורתודוקסי): היהדות אינה עניין
של אמת אלא של אורח חיים.
יש לכבד את המינוסום המסור
תף תוך הכרה בשוני.
מר אצמון חרדי (עורך ספר
עון קונסטרקטיוו): היהדות היא
בלתי סובלנית וסבסותית. הן
היתה שבגללה מתקיים דיון זה
היא בין תפיסה ליברלית כל-
לית בעולם לבין המסורת היהודי
דית.

פרופ' יצחק אנגלרד (משפ)
סן, אורתודוקסי: יש סכור לי
אחרות העם, וגורר כהלכה הוא
חלק מן המחיר שיש לשלם.
מר אברהם אדרת (חבר ק"ר
בזר, חילוני): בקונגרסים הן
ציונים הראשונים היה שידפון
רוחני איום, ולהירות לא היה
מקום באוטופיה הציונית של אז.
איש אינו מפרש לנו להגן היום
את הגורש שלנו על-פי דרכנו.
הכרה מסעם החוק לא תצוד:
הקהילה הקונסטרקטיווית בעצמ
אינה מצליחה לגייס אפילו מניין
בטבתות.
ד"ר נגיה הרטום (אורתודוק
סי): יש התרסבים שהחלטה
מתייבשת יש התרסבים שהא
מתייבשת בחלקה ויש התרסבים

translation from the Hebrew

Ma'ariv February 2, 1981

In a discussion on the subject of Religion and State at the
Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem

PROFESSOR ORBACH: "BECAUSE OF NATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS,
BEN-GURION DECIDED THAT MATTERS PERTAINING TO MARRIAGE
WOULD BE CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO HALACHA"

Justice Zvi Berenson: "The right to freedom of religion
is not fully guaranteed to Jews in Israel"

by Yosef Tzuriel

"The right to freedom of religion is not fully guaranteed to Jews in Israel," said Supreme Court Justice Zvi Berenson in a discussion on the subject of Religion and State which took place last night at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. In the same discussion, Professor Efraim Orbach stated that for national and Zionist reasons, David Ben-Gurion decided that marriage matters in Israel would be determined according to halacha.

Former M.K. S. Zalman Abramov, Chairman of the World Jewish Congress in Israel, opened the meeting. He claimed that Israel stands before two blocs which on the outside appear clearly defined: one religious and the other secular. But the truth is that there are no such blocs. Pluralism exists first of all in the religious camps where it ranges from Professor Orbach to Neturei Karta's Uri Blau.

Justice Zvi Berenson claimed that the right to freedom of religion and conscience is defective in various ways, and anyone wanting to establish religious pluralism in Israel should see to it that masses of Jews who are not defined as orthodox will come on aliya and change things.

Educator and public figure Moshe Kerem, former Principal of Oranim Seminar, summed up the crucial need for pluralism in Israel by saying that the youth who are defined as secular must be "fired up". In his words: "We've stopped teaching the history of Israel. Religious pluralism is essential for our younger generation, whose mission it is to continue the Zionist vision."

The word "pluralism" doesn't bother Professor Ze'ev Falk, but as a religious Jew he poses questions: "What do we mean by the Jewish character of the country? How do we relate to the definition of 'Who is a Jew?'" And regarding the status quo he says: "It has been and remains the basis upon which the Zionist movement was founded and the State of Israel established."

Professor Yitzhak Englehard, also religious, pointed out other difficulties. He said: "Those who demand religious pluralism are demanding something destructive. The problem is, what will replace those signs of unity among the segments of the Jewish people, and worse, if we turn to the State and demand that it suggest legislative solutions to the problems raised here, we will have laid the foundation for a final split in the nation."

Avraham Aderet, of Kibbutz Ayelet Hashahar, asked: "What will we do the day after the law permitting pluralism in Judaism is passed in the Knesset? The truth is, neither the Rabbinat nor the Knesset is preventing us from acting. We ourselves have revealed weakness and an inability to act. We, who boast of trailblazing, have not done what we should in the spiritual sphere. It seems to me that this protracted discussion of the need for religious pluralism just conceals our spiritual impotence. Who prevents us from praying, from creating a festive atmosphere on holidays, from bringing the younger generation closer to Jewish values? Did non-Orthodox Zionism, at the beginning of the road, think about integrating religious values into the life of the Jewish people in its land?"

Professor Efraim Orbach said: "Zionism had a problem with Judaism, but the biggest discussion was within Judaism, where the question of whether to join the Zionist camp came up everywhere. The fact that the question was raised created splits and divisions among Jews. And it must be said that the big break-away from religious values in that period came from those who took pride in their irreligiousness and saw it as a value in itself."

Professor Orbach said that by agreeing that marriage and divorce be conducted according to halacha, Ben-Gurion and his friends were not yielding or compromising, but were rather making a decision for national -- not religious -- reasons. There was no capitulation to religious Judaism. It must be said, therefore, that Zionism has weakened and is now aware of the Judaism problem. And what is bothering it now is: "How to solve the problem of the existence of a Jewish State within the framework of halacha."

בדיון על נושא דת ומדינה במוסד ואיליר בירושלים

פרופ' אורבך: ב"ג החלים מתוך חשבון לאומי שענייני אישות יהיו לפי ההלכה

השופט צבי ברנזון: „הזכות לחופש הדת אינה מובטחת במלואה ליהודים בישראל“

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„הזכות לחופש הדת אינה מובטחת במלואה ליהודים בישראל“ — אמר אתמול שופט בית-המשפט העליון ישעיה ברנזון, בדיון על הנושא דת ומדינה, שנערך אמש במוסד ואיליר בירושלים. באומי דיון קבע פרופ' אריה אורבך, כי מתוך חשבון לאומי וציוני החליט דור הציונים, שענייני האישות בארץ ייקבעו על-פי ההלכה.

את הדיון פתח ה"ח"כ לש" עבר ש. אברמוב, יו"ר ה"קונגרס היהודי-העילמי בארץ. הוא טען, כי המדינה ניצבת בפני שני גושים, שכלפי חוץ נראים מגובשים, אחד דתי ו"אחד חילוני. אבל האמת היא, שאין גושים כאלה. הפלוראליזם מצוי קודם כל במחנה הדתי, והוא משהרע מפרופ' אפרים אורבך ועד אורי בלוי, איש „גטורי קרתא“.

השופט צבי ברנזון טען, כי הזכות לחופש דת ומצפון כבר נפגמה בתחומים שונים, ומי שרצה לקיים פלוראליזם דתי

המלה פלוראליזם אינה מט-רידה את פרופ' זאב פאלק, אך כיהודי דתי הוא מציב שאלות: מה משמעות אופיה היהודי של המדינה? מהו ה"יחס שלנו לגבי ההגדרה „מדינה יהודית“? ובאשר למושג סטטוס קוו הוא קובע: הוא היה ונשאר הבסיס, שעליו נוסדה התנועה הציונית וקמה מדינת ישראל.

קושיות ממין אחר העלה פרופ' יצחק אנגלרד, שגם הוא דתי. הוא קבע: מי ש"תובע פלוראליזם דתי תובע דבר הרסני. הבעיה היא היכן להציב אותם סימני אזהרה בין פלגי העם היהודי, חמור מזה: אם נפנה למדינה ו"נבצע ממנה, שתציע פתרונות תחוקתיים לבעיות המועלות כאן — הרי אז הצבנו יסודות אברהם אדיר. מקיבוץ איי-

לת השחר, שאל: „מה נעשה למחרת אישור החוק בכנסת, המאפשר פלוראליזם ביהדות? האמת היא, שלא הרבנות ולא הכנסת אינן מפריעות לנו לפ"ע. אנו צריכים בעצמנו גילוי חולשה וחוסר יכולת לפעול. אנו, שמתיימרים להתוות דרך, לא עשינו את המוטל עלינו בתחום הרוח. נדמה לי שהדיון הממושך על הצורך בפלוראליזם דתי מחפה על חוסר האונים הרוחני שלנו. מי מפריע לנו להתפלל, ליצור מסגרת רעננה לחג, לקרב את הדור הצעיר לערכי היהדות? האם הציונות הלא-אורתודוקסית חשבה בתחילת דרכה על שילוב ערכי הדת בחיי העם היהודי בארצו?“

פרופ' אפרים אורבך אמר: „לציונות הייתה בעיה עם ה"יהדות, אבל המחלוקת הג"דולה ביותר הייתה ביהדות,

ובכל מקום עלתה השאלה הי"אם מותר להצטרף למחנה הי"ציוני. עצם העלאת השאלה יצר רע פירוד ומחלוקת בעם. וצריך לומר, כי הניתוק הג"דול מערכי הדת באותה תקר"פה בא מצד אלה, שהתנאו ב"אי-דתיזם וראו בעובדה זו ערך“.

להלן אמר פרופ' אורבך, כי בן גוריון וחבריו, בהסכימם שגישואין וגירושין ייעשו על פי ההלכה, לא עשו זאת מ"תוך ותרנות או פשרנות, אלא מתוך חשבון לאומי ולא דתי. לא הייתה כאן כניעה ליהדות הדתית. צריך איפוא לומר, שהציונות נחלשה והיא כעת מודעת לבעיית היהדות. ומה שמטריד אותה הוא: „איך לפתור את הבעיות של קיום מדינה יהודית במסגרת הה"לכה“.



REPORT

From the Israel Office of the American Jewish Committee

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Marc Tarenbaum

HOW TOLERANT IS ISRAELI SOCIETY?

"How tolerant is Israeli society?" is a question that many may find worth pondering. Is the recent murder of an Israeli peace demonstrator by a yet-unknown assailant a case in point, or is this the single act of a social misfit? Such thoughts were perhaps on the minds of almost all who attended a four-hour long discussion on tolerance at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem last week. But the subject was not political tolerance, as could be expected in a country torn by dissension over the war in Lebanon. Instead, more than 100 people had accepted an invitation issued by a group calling itself "Toleration" in order to discuss relationships between religious and secular Jews in Israel.¹

Judging by the behavior of the participants, there was anything but tolerance in the auditorium where the meeting took place. This may have been a result of the attendance. No more than six *kipot* (skull-caps worn by religious male Jews) were evident, and these were worn by four students and two elderly gentlemen. Almost half of all the participants were women, leaving it reasonably clear that only six to twelve percent could be described as religious Jews. The total audience consisted of many college-age people and no small number of middle-aged to elderly men and women. The invitations, it was noted by the organizers, were distributed to the public at large. There was no explanation why religious Jews had shown less interest in the discussions than those present.

The discussions were divided into two parts. The first half was intended to provide a description of the relationships between secular and religious Jews which are factors in measuring the tolerance of Israeli society. The second half was to include a discussion of the ways and means of achieving tolerance, if indeed such is lacking.

The program, however, did not live up to the expectations of the organizers. Fault, if any, lies with the choice of the two journalists who described the situation between secular and religious Jews. Without a doubt, Akiva Elder of Ha'aretz and Ya'akov Edelshtein of Hatzofeh (published by the National Religious Party) were mismatched and not suited to the task. The subject was meant for historians or philosophers rather than journalists or politicians.

Mr. Edelshtein attempted to describe the relationships between secular and religious Jews from the vantage point of his own experience as a veteran journalist for a religious-oriented newspaper,

and as an active observer. His message was totally lost on his audience, who were not interested in any historical episodes indicating the extent of intolerance for the religious Jew in the formative days of the State of Israel and latter years. Although he cited numerous examples, laced with anecdotes, he was unable to penetrate the bias of his audience. His greatest shortcoming was his inability to compete with a sophisticated audience which was justified in rejecting some of the conclusions that Mr. Edelshtein assumed were "facts" in his vocabulary.

On the other hand, Akiva Elder appeared to have the necessary credentials to deal evenly with the issue, both as a journalist who "covers" the ultra-orthodox scene in Jerusalem and one who attends a course on Judaism entitled "Shorashim" (roots), although otherwise a secular Jew. His credentials, however, served no useful purpose. He chose to concentrate on the intolerance practiced by ultra-orthodox extremists towards secular Jews, including emphasis on the stone throwers from Mea Shearim who have occasionally clashed with the police over Sabbath traffic in observant neighborhoods. He also cited examples of tendencies among Orthodox Jews to segregate themselves from secular Jews. He did not deal with the broader issue of secular and religious Jewish relationships from the perspective of modern religious and secular Jews for whom tolerance is one of the foundations of twentieth-century society.

Nearly two hours of lecturing by both journalists, accompanied by comments from the audience, did no more than stress the sentiment that secular Jews obviously feel threatened by their religious counterparts. The question of tolerance for the religious Jew did not occur to the audience as an important aspect in the relationship between both sides. The silent demand they made was that religious Jews must practice tolerance towards their neighbors, and this means equal civil obligations on the one hand, and freedom to conduct one's lifestyle according to one's own conscience, on the other. How this is to be accomplished in a Jewish State became the subject of the second half of the program at the Van Leer Institute.

The three lecturers invited to lead the second half of the discussions were a better choice than the two that preceded them. No representative of the ultra-orthodox was present, and presumably none were invited. The three, all academicians, included two political figures and a theologian. Noticably absent was a representative of Israel's Sephardi community, at a time when tension has been growing among ethnic groups in Israel at both the political and street level. Dr. Yehuda Ben Meir, a member of the National Religious Party and Deputy Foreign Minister in the Likud coalition government, represented the views of so-called religious-national Jewry, while Dr. Amnon Rubenstein, a leading member of the Shinui Party and an advocate of civil rights, represented secular Jewish concerns. Somewhere in between was Dr. Pinhas Peli, a liberal rabbi and author-scholar, who could have been expected to preach moderation.

There was a lack of intellectual integrity in the fact that none of the three lecturers had attended the first half of the discussions. As such, they could not have been aware of the tension in the audience generated by the two journalists nor anticipated the attitude of those present. Had they witnessed the total proceedings, their point of departure could have focused on issues closer to home. Instead, what was said appeared to underscore known positions. Interestingly, Dr. Rubenstein, who is a jurist, does not advocate separation of synagogue and state but believes that religious observances in the public domain cannot be legislated. On the other hand, Dr. Ben Meir argued that all legislation is a form of coercion and exists, primarily, for the public good. The question of tolerance was not resolved.

February 21, 1983

¹"Sovlanut" (Toleration), headed by Michael Cohen, wife of former Justice of the Supreme Court Haim Cohen, and an active community leader in her own right, is a movement of volunteers, without political pretensions, that attempts to cultivate mutual tolerance among people with different political, ideological, religious or cultural points of view, and seeks to promote non-violent ways of conflict resolution.

IJCIC-WCCC Consultation

Harvard, 26-28 November, 1984

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: ITS MEANING AND LIMITS IN THE WORLD TODAY

MONDAY, 26 NOVEMBER

9.30 Opening of Consultation
Paper 1: "Is religious pluralism necessary?
If so, is it possible?" - Michael Rosenack

Questions and discussion

12.30 Lunch

15.30 Paper 2: "Are there limits to religious
pluralism? If so, why?" - George Lindbeck

Questions and discussion

18.30 Dinner

20.30 General discussion

TUESDAY, 27 NOVEMBER

9.00 "Religious pluralism: Political
science perspectives" - Roger Fisher

Questions and discussion

- David L. Rosenack

10.30 Coffee

11.00 "How does religious pluralism work?"
Brief summaries of papers prepared by a Jew and a Christian
from each of three countries: Great Britain, USA and Israel

12.30 Lunch

15.30 General discussion

18.30 Dinner

20.30 General discussion

WEDNESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER

9.00 Presentation of draft joint statement and discussion

10.00 Coffee

10.30 Discussion continued

11.30 Break

12.30 Lunch (distribution of revised joint statement)