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Speeches, 1986.

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Schindler: Convention Address
Southern Pacific Council
Ocean Beach, Cal., 1986

I am delighted to be here, I always am.

I feared that I might not make it, that I might not be able to return to you and to my tasks in full strength.

Baruch rofeh choleem... blessed be they who bring healing to the sick

not just because its climate warms the bones,
but because its people brace the spirit.

my colleagues of the rabbinate.

The national Board members who are represented here:

Lenny Thal, that mischiev-loving, impish genius
who is really responsible for everything good that happens here.

and feel bound to him as David was to Jonathan.

All of us were deeply moved by the Outreach picture
which we have just seen.

It is but one example of the extra-ordinary work which has been
accomplished in this sphere by Lydia Kukoff and her associates.
I am proud of having projected the outreach idea, as well as the
resolution on Patrilineal descent which our Outreach program
spawned.

But the toilsome task of implementing these ideas fell on Lydia's
shoulders.

Under her marvelously able leadership the conversion curricula were
revised;
congregations were stimulated to integrate Jew-by-choice more
effectively into their synagogual lives;
and together with Lenny Thal Lydia designed and carefully
tested a program called "Times and Seasons" intended primarily
for interfaith couples with unconverted partners,
which has been remakable effective
and of which the movie which we have seen is but a
dim if moving reflection.

Yet our peerformance cannot be measured solely by specific programs
or even the number of families we have helped individually
and regained for our people.

It must be measured by the impact which we have had on the larger
American Jewish community.

Here our success has been stunning.

We have transformed American Jewry's mindscape.

The subject of intermarriage is no longer taboo,

and the concept of outreach, even conversionary outreach,

is no longer a heresy within the American Jewish community.

We have taken the discussion of intermarriage out of the house

of mourning and into the house of study

-- indeed, into the sanctuary itself.

Without condoning intermarriage, we have recognized its reality

and have begun to grapple with it.

hob nit kaym moire wen du host nit kayn andered breyre,

-- holds a yiddish proverb --

"Don't be afraid if, when you have no other choice."

Thus we have counselled, and the Jewish community listened.

Indeed, not long ago, the last bastion of opposition to the Outreach

idea began to topple.

Rav Soloveitchik, the most respected voice of mainline Orthodoxy,

in a recently published HADOAR interview, voiced what he himself

described as an opinion of revolutionary significance, one that

would surely draw the ire and fire of his own traditional

colleagues.

And this is what he said:

"Regarding the plague of intermarriage, from which the Orthodox have not been saved, it is necessary to do what the Reform Jews are doing -- with, of course, an orthodox content."

Bravo!

And so everybody is doing it

-- the conservatives, the reconstructionists, liberal orthodox groupings, communal organizations, fund raising agencies -- all have accepted our fundamental approach, each in his own way, nonetheless joined in a kind of Jewish patchwork quilt of outreach which has forever altered the landscape and the mindscape of American Jewry.

* * *

Despite this wider acceptance of the outreach idea, the concept remains a cause of considerable misunderstanding between Orthodoxy and Reform.

The impression persists, that Reform is somehow encouraging of intermarriage that we embrace anyone and everyone as a Jew without restraint or requirement.

This is simply not the truth.

It is an unwarranted accusation.

Reform is unalterably opposed to intermarriage, even as are the Orthodox and Conservative religious communities. The full resources and program of the Reform movement are devoted to building Jewish identity and literacy in the hope of forestalling intermarriage.

But the reality is that our best efforts do not suffice, nor do those of the other branches of Judaism. We live in an open society and intermarriage is the sting which comes to us with the honey of our freedom.

More than ever before our young people go to school and work
and live alongside non-Jews.

Ultimately many determine to choose them as life-partners --
not to escape from being Jews,
but simply because they have fallen in love.

When they do, what should our policy be?

It is here that Reform diverges from the pattern of the past,
for we have determined not to sit shiva over our children.
We refuse to reject them.

On the contrary we have resolved to love them all the more.
to draw them closer to us
to involve them in Jewish life,
in the hope of bringing the non-Jewish partner to Judaism
or at least to make certain that the children issuing from
these marriages,
our children's children and their children in turn
will, in fact, be reared as Jews and share the destiny
of this people Israel.

We believe this to be the wiser course.

And we believe that this course in no way violates the
Jewish tradition,

indeed, that it is in harmony with tradition's more compassionate
strain as it is exemplified in the Chassidic story of the father
who came to his rebbe with the plaint that his son is a wastrel.
"What should I do with my son," asked the father in his despair,
and the Rebbe enjoined: "Just love him all the more."

* * *

Let me say, in this context, -- and I now go to the heart of my subject
the subject of Jewish unity --
that I am not nearly as alarmed as some people appear to be,
that these religious issues will tear Jewish life asunder,
that there is danger of a schism in our midst.
I hold a different judgment about the imminence of such a breach.
First of all, I would observe that our disputations, such as they
are, are limited almost solely to the professional class
-- rabbi vs. rabbi --
and have not truly inflamed the passions of our people.
Second, I would remind us that feuding is hardly new to Jewish life.
So much of the present-day foreboding is predicated on the erroneous
assumption that all was sweetness and light in the past
that before these latest altercations between Orthodoxy
and Reform, harmony prevailed,
that there was then in that golden and peaceful past
a universal ideological consensus uniting the Jewish world
That is a gross misreading of Jewish history, of course.
At no time did such an ideological consensus obtain.
In virtually every era of our people's past
there were sharp ideological disputations setting Jews
in opposition to one another
not just on political and social issues, but in the religious
realm as well -- especially in the latter --
yet the Jewish world did not fracture.

Remember the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees,
or the contentions between Saadya Gaon and Ben Meir
when their respective followers celebrated Rosh Hashono
and Pessach on different dates.

Or think of the refusal of the Sephardim to heed the Cherem of
Rabbeinu Gershon on polygamy.

Or recall more recent times when the Chassidim opposed the Misnagdim.
Both opposed the Maskilim, who split into Zionists left and right,
secular and religious, as well as Bundists.

And in every age there were Halachik authorities
who rejected one another.

Despite all of these conflicts and many more
the center of the Jewish world held.

Let it be noted , moreover, that some of these conflicts were infinitely
more fierce and even violent than are today's argumentations.

The strife between the misnagdim and the chassidim was
the most brutal of all.

These antagonists did not limit themselves to occasional rhetorical
outbursts, as we do today.

They attacked one another physically,
denounced their opponents to the authorities
and had them imprisoned.

Perhaps even more to the point, not a few times before our own time,
did the extremists of one camp refuse to give their
children permission to marry the sons and daughters
of the opposing camp.

But cooler heads prevailed, and the Jewish world remained intact.

If such insistence on ethnic exclusivity and ideological purity
did not work in the past
it certainly will not work in our day.

Our children will insist on making that decision themselves.

If two Jews fall in love and wish to marry, they are going to marry.
Who will stop them?

They will scarcely be put off by the fear of not being
halakhically pure,
nor will their parents.

Most of them will thank their lucky stars that their children have
chosen a Jew as a life mate.

In the final analysis, the laity, the people, will shape the terms
of communal interaction, and a sane and sensitive rabbinate
will respond to its will,
yea, even an Orthodox rabbinate which, I am confident,
will find a halachic remedy as it always has.

After all, the reluctance to exclude Jews from the family fellowship of
Israel is a dominant motif which permeates tradition
along with its more restrictive strains.

Be that as it may, time and again through our long and stormy past
we have seen the chasm stretch,
in peaceful contemplation and violent conflict,
over that most elusive definition of Jewishness: are we a religion?
a people? a nation? do we constitute a national minority
or perhaps a religious civilization?

Without ever agreeing on one answer, we have nonetheless defined
ourselves as one.

Moreover we share a living history which is partner to the Torah
in defining Jewish identity.

In our own day, for instance, all but the most extreme forces of the
right and left -- such as the Satmer Chassidim or the
fading relics of the American Council for Judaism --
have adjusted their perspectives on Jewish life to admit
to the influence of history.

And thus the struggle to secure the safety of Israel, or in behalf of
Soviet Jewry, or against anti-Semitism, continues to unite us.
Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews, yes even the very people
who are most fierce in voicing their disagreements
on the theological level,
nonetheless stand shoulder to shoulder
-- as brothers and sister should --
when it comes to these and kindred issues.

The fact remains that the evolving historical identity of the Jewish
people will continue to grow, for Jewish history, like the Torah,
belongs to no one single person or movement, but to all Jews,
to all who share the destiny of this people Israel.

All this is not to minimize our differences,

to discount those divergences of view which obtain

between orthodoxy and non-Orthodoxy, in our day.

These differences are real enough.

They involve such pivotal issues as the religious divorce and conversion and patrilineal descent.

They cannot easily be resolved.

Indeed, they are not likely ever to be resolved.

But if they cannot be resolved, we will simply have to live with them.

And we can live with them as we have in the past,

provided we accord each other mutual respect

and refrain from questioning the integrity and intentions

of those whose views we do not share.

I speak here, in the first instance, self critically; mark that.

In my volleys with Orthodoxy I have in the heat of response

to what I saw as attack more than once indulged in the anger of

the outcast, using words and evoking images and bitter analogies

which I now regret.

I confess too, that there were times when I did not take fully into

account the halakhick difficulties that certain Reform innovations

present to Orthodox Jews.

I have responded in kind to the intransigence and zeal of Orthodoxy's

most extreme spokespersons,

using their scorn as an excuse for not truly striving

to lessen the pain of others.

This is not to say that I retreat from any of the steps taken by Reform Judaism this past decade -- only that these steps might have seemed less precipitous and threatening had we achieved a higher level of dialogue in advance of public pronouncement.

But the Orthodox, on their part, must realize how very deeply their intolerance wounds us, how we feel, for instance, when a leading halakhik authority rules that a Reform Jew's aliyah is not an aliyah and his blessing is not a blessing because we don't believe in God and hence God does not hear the prayer of Reform Jews.

Does that not have a chilling resonance?

And I plead with the Orthodox to feel how we feel, when the graveside of a revered Reform Rabbi who made aliyah some years ago after a distinguished career in Chicago is violated as it was in Israel some weeks ago when Orthodox extremists built a stone wall around his final resting place to segregate him from the other Jews who are buried there.

Aye, and they must understand how deeply pained we are when another "posek", another decisor of halacha, ordained as he did earlier this year, that if a Jew must escape impending danger and he can find refuge in a church or a Conservative and a Reform synagogue, the church is to be preferred.

Lema'an Hashem, is it fair to ask us to remain silent
in the face of all this and much more?

Can we really be expected to interpret these things as anything other
than an effort to delegitimize us,
to read us all out of the Jewish fold?

Oh, I know that Orthodoxy sings the praises of ahavat yisrael
as a foremost virtue,
and yet these excesses, let it be recognized,
convey just the opposite message.

And so does the eloquent silence from the overwhelming majority
of Orthodox leaders.

And what shall we say about the persistent efforts to amend the
Law of Return -
spear-headed as they are by Chabad, the Lubavitcher movement,
and endorsed, at least publicly, by all of mainline Orthodoxy?
How are we to read that?

We are told that such an amendment will affect only a scant few,
since only non-orthodox converts are intended to be excluded,
and how many of them choose to go on aliyah?

Well, to begin with, the number of such converts and their
children is scarcely insignificant.

They number in the hundreds of thousands by now, in America alone,
and their children exceed the half-million mark by far..

True enough, few of these Jews-by-Choice plan to go on aliyah -- today.
But was Israel created only for a time such as this?

Israel was established as a haven of refuge for all who are
potentially victimized because of their Jewishness.

The attempt to narrow its definition, therefore, is unacceptable,
indeed, it is morally reprehensible.

Safe harbor for Jews,

the unreserved embrace of K'lal Yisrael for its persecuted children
-- that is what the Law of Return represents.

It is a life preserver in a world that asks not

"What kind of a Jew are you?,"

before drowning us in hatred, intolerance and oppression.

To tamper with the Law of Return

is to tamper with Jewish life and flesh and bone and heart
and soul.

Shall we not cry out in pain?

Shall we not bend every effort to resist this amendment?

And we will.

We will not be read out of the Jewish fold:

not in Israel, nor in Europe, nor anywhere else
on this God's earth.

Let me note in this connection that while I have on occasion
been guilty of hyperbole in defending Reform against the
onslaughts of the politicized Orthodox establishment

I have never been guilty of attacking

either Orthodox Jews, or Orthodox Judaism per se.

Indeed, I deem Orthodoxy essential to Jewish life.

I was raised by parents who taught me to respect Orthodoxy
and those who practice it.

But that Orthodoxy which I was taught to revere, as a young man,
manifested a good deal of modesty.

It did not lay claim to an all-exclusive authenticity.

It did not presume to know with a certainty what the Holy One Blessed
be He demanded, and whom He deemed acceptable in His eyes.

It did not wear armor in the name of righteousness
or wield the sword to trim the beards of other Jews.

Religious triumphalism must be banished from our table.

Simply put -- though not simply achieved, I know --

what is required is the emergence and amplification

of Jewish voices -- be they Orthodox, Conservative or Reform --

who are determined to build bridges

and not citadels of intolerance.

We need to see them strengthen their hand,

vie more actively for influence,

reach out especially to the laity who I believe

would welcome the refreshing breeze of dialogue among Jews.

Aye, we must learn to dialogue with one another, we Jews,
building as many channels of discourse as are humanly possible.
We, on our part, must reach beyond the four cubits of our Reform Temples
to Jews from Conservative and Rweform congregations
in a sincere effort to understand each other,
to learn from one another.

In a word, we must return the synat chinam, the unreasoned hatred
of orthodox extremism
with a ahavat chinam, with an illogiocal love that embraces
even our detractors.

This does not mean, of course, that we Reform Jews must give up our
principles,
that we must alter our essential way
on Outreach, on Patrileaneal descent, on the equality of
men and women in the religious life.

All that is asked is that we approach one another in mutual respect.

Indeed, we cannot flatter ourselves into the good graces of the Orthodox
establishment by becoming more adaptive in our religious
practices, more halachically conforming, if you will.

This is but an illusory quest.

There is no accomodation in their arena.

Only surrender will gain full acceptance.

Adaptive change is alien to the spirit of Reform.

It substitutes political for religious judgmernts and does violence to
our essential nature.

Let us not become sycophants,

truckling for favor by becoming what we are not.

It will not avail us.

We will only demean ourselves and lose our distinctive character.

Our forebears did not forge Reform Judaism to have us trade it in

for a tinseltown imitation of Orthodoxy.

We owe halacha a vote not a veto.

And we owe ourselves that self respect and integrity

that holds fast to our finest values and most cherished beliefs.

And let us stop romanticizing Orthodoxy ever comparing their best with
our worst.

Yes, Orthodoxy is rich and beautiful and meaningful in many ways.

But it has its blemishes too.

Orthodoxy in practice is also fanatics hurling stones on fellow Jews
or defacing bus stops.

Orthodoxy in practice is also the placement of full page ads
in the New York Times to defame Israel.

Politicized Orthodoxy is also an Israeli Interior Minister
who maligns his fellow Jews and defies Israeli law.

No my friends, theirs is not the way to preserve Judaism.

Judaism has survived best when pluralism is the rhythm of Israeli society.

Where Orthodoxy alone prevails, stale repression,

fossilized tradition and ethical corruption often hold sway.

This is the danger in Israel itself and in many parts of the world.

But where Reform is free to challenge,

to compel thought

to affirm the power of Jewish ethics,

to throw change against the rusted fortresses of pilpulism & habit

there can be found new energy, new life, healthy competition

and a new vitality

not just for the Reform Jewish community but for all of Israel.

Let me end as I began with the assertion of our essential unity
which has persisted and will continue to persist,
please God, despite our divergences.

We allowed for such a diversity even in times when we were endangered
and embattled.

Shall we not do so today when we are so very much more secure?

We have become a people who need not hunker down into conformity
for survival's sake.

We can afford to proliferate and to evolve.

Indeed, we must, if we are to survive and grow in creative continuity.

Let us therefore view those words which denote us in our many-splendored
diversity

-- words like Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, secular, and
and what not --

let us regard those qualifying words for what they really are:
adjectives and not nouns.

The noun is Jew.

Woz mi zennen zennen mir...ober yiden zennen mir

Whatever we may be, we may be, but this above all, we are, we are Jews.

Richard Cohen Associates

PUBLIC RELATIONS COUNSEL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JEWISH GROUPS, IN COALITION WITH FARM ORGANIZATIONS, LAUNCHING
NATIONWIDE CAMPAIGN TO ALLEVIATE PROBLEMS OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP,
FAMILY BREAKDOWN AND ANTI-SEMITISM ASSOCIATED WITH FARM CRISIS

NEW YORK -- A nationwide drive to alleviate problems of economic hardship, family breakdown and anti-Semitism associated with the nation's deepening farm crisis was announced today (Wednesday, Oct. 22) by a coalition of farmers' and Jewish organizations.

Appearing together at a news conference were:

Cy Carpenter, president of the National Farmers Union.

David H. Goldstein, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Bureau of Kansas City, Mo.

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

David Senter, executive director of the American Agricultural Movement.

Gertrude White, national president of Women's American ORT.

The news conference took place at the offices of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 838 Fifth Avenue, in a sukkah -- the traditional temporary shelter erected during Sukkoth, the Jewish festival that celebrates the agricultural roots of the Jewish people. Speaking for the UAHC, Rabbi Schindler declared:

"Judaism teaches a respect for the land and those who till it. It reminds us that the earth is the Lord's and that those who make it yield its increase are priests, partners of God in the act of creation.

"We must revere the farmer as much as the scholar, for both do the Lord's work. It is our solemn obligation to make certain that they will not be denied the fruits of their labor. We owe them so very much, and our Sukkoth festival, which we celebrate this week, reminds us of our dependence on them."

In welcoming the efforts of the Jewish groups, Mr. Senter of the American Agricultural Movement stated: "The involvement of coalitions is essential if there is to be any hope for the future of family farmers. By standing together we move one step closer to solving this crisis."

Mr. Carpenter of the National Farmers Union praised the Jewish community for "undertaking to help us correct the injustice that is being imposed on American farmers. We look forward," he said, "to working very closely and effectively together on this and any other issues where people's rights and dignity are being denied."

How the Jewish Community Became Involved

Mr. Goldstein, whose agency in Kansas City was among the first Jewish groups to help family farmers, told the news conference: "Initially it was our alarm over anti-Semitic propaganda intended to exploit the frustrations and anxieties of farmers facing economic devastation that led us to examine rural conditions. In doing so, we learned that thousands of family farmers -- 300 a day -- were being stripped of their land and their livelihood. We also learned of social instability linked to economic stress -- suicides, alcoholism and violence within families.

"For the security of the Jewish community, we felt it necessary to combat this flaring up of anti-Semitism. And in keeping with our religious tradition and social values, we determined that we must come to the aid of our rural brothers."

Million-Signature Petition Drive Launched

Mr. White of ORT and Mr. Goldstein announced the launching of a national petition campaign to Congress calling for an immediate moratorium on foreclosures, which have claimed 300,000

(more)

farms in nine Midwestern states since 1980. The petition -- copies of which were made public at the news conference -- also calls for fair prices for farm products and an emergency assistance program for victims of farm bankruptcies, foreclosures, rural unemployment and business failures stemming from the farm crisis.

The petition drive will seek one million signatures and will be conducted by the 800 Reform synagogues of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and by the 145,000 members of Women's American ORT's 1,200 chapters, most of them in large urban centers.

Mrs. White explained that, "as the vocational and technical training arm of the Jewish people, ORT appreciates the importance of productive labor, both as a means of livelihood and because it cannot be separated from the dignity of the individual or the wealth of society.

"We feel a tremendous affinity for these farm families," she said.

A Model Program

Women's American ORT, which funded the Kansas City farm crisis project, "sought to create a model program that could be emulated and joined by other organizations across the country," Mrs. White said.

In addition to the petition to Congress, the Kansas City project has included programs to re-train farmers who have lost their farms, visits to rural areas so that Jewish community leaders could learn farmers' problems at first hand and letter-writing campaigns to support legislation aimed at alleviating the farm crisis, she said.

The Women's American ORT leader added: "The anti-Semitic, racist and extremist groups exploiting the farm crisis are still relatively small, but their activities are spreading and are having serious and destructive consequences."

Mr. Goldstein reported some extremist groups in the Midwest were advocating violence against Jews, blacks, law enforcement officers and public officials. He said such organizations as Posse Comitatus, Christian Identity, the Populist Party and a group that calls itself The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord were "aggressively spreading their propaganda in dozens of farm states."

The National Farmers Union president, Mr. Carpenter, noting that federal legislation has been introduced "to restore economic justice" to farmers, warned that "if fairness and equity are not provided through government, people in despair will turn to whatever they see as a necessary course of action." He added: "History has demonstrated the damage that can result."

UAHC Mobilizing to Help Farmers

Rabbi Schindler, the UAHC president, noted that the organization's forthcoming nationwide effort grew out of a resolution by the Reform movement's Commission on Social Action in April supporting steps to alleviate the plight of family farmers. The resolution, terming the rural economic crisis "the most severe since the Great Depression," urged passage of emergency legislation "that would stem the tide of farm foreclosures, offer reasonable and immediate debt relief to farmers in severe economic crisis and address the ongoing social service needs of farm and rural populations."

The Reform resolution also calls for a "re-examination of United States food and farm policies to bring about constructive changes that will result in the continued viability of family farms and rural communities, including a fair market price for farm products."

Noting that Reform synagogues in Kansas, Minnesota and Ohio had already involved their members in legislative campaigns and person-to-person meetings with farm groups, Rabbi Schindler said the UAHC would urge other Reform congregations across the country to join in this effort. Toward this end, he said, the UAHC has retained the services of a consultant on farm issues who is now preparing a manual outlining a Jewish response to the farm crisis.

The Reform leader also reported that the UAHC planned to hold a two-day meeting of synagogues and other Jewish groups in St. Louis early next year to mobilize action on behalf of family farmers.

Mr. Senter of the American Agricultural Movement declared: "The farm crisis has become a national crisis affecting everyone -- not just rural families. I am honored to be here with leaders of the Jewish community as they offer their help and support."

Schindler: Save the Family Farm
News Conference
UAHC, October 22, 1986

To begin with and since I am host here as it were
would like to welcome you to this place

Headquarters of Reform Jewry...800 congregations
over 1 million members through length and breadth

I welcome you particularly to this our chapel decorated as it is
with the symbols of Succot, the festival which Jews
all over the world celebrate this week

Succot celebrates the agricultural roots of Jewish people

A dominant theme of this festival is our dependence on
God, and the interdependence of humankind.

None of us can survive alone.

We depend on the fruitage which many have planted and harvested.

And therefore it is our duty to give thanks
and to lend our strength to one another.

My presence on this podium is not just as a dispassionate observer

May come as news to many of my colleagues, but for two years
of my life I was a farmer.

I know what it is to toil day in day out without surcease.

I know what it is when disease ravages ^{a flood} ~~life stock~~
and the labors and dreams of years go down the drain.

And I know what it is to be badgered ^{for payment} ~~by grain merchants~~
and to worry about meeting the monthly mortgage and loan
payments.

I ~~FEEL ALL THIS~~ ~~LOST IN MY HEAD~~ ∴

~~BUT IN THE HEART - SOUL~~

W HATE

ALL THIS FOLLOWS IN AVOID OF MY
SOUL BY LIFE

Of course I stand here also as a rabbi responding to the admonitions of our faith.

Judaism teaches a respect for the land and those who till it.

It reminds us that the earth is the Lord's and that those who make it yield its increase are priests, partners of God in the act of creation.

It enjoins us to revere the farmer as much as the scholar or both do the Lord's work.

And so it is our solemn obligation to stand at the side of farmers and make certain that they will not be denied the fruitage of their arduous labor.

We owe them so very much, and our festival of Booths reminds us of our dependance on them.

As a religious community we are saddened by the devastation which has come to the farmers of this land and we are resolved to do everything in our power to alleviate their plight.

We mean to help with more than words.

Our congregations in the Mid West have already enlisted in the effort to seek remedial legislation in their states.

^{OBTAIN - SERIC}
We have employed a special consultant on Farm issues to advise us what else we might do help, and to stimulate our congregations on grass-roots level

^{from in}
We have resolved to initiate a national petition campaign calling on our government to order an immediate moratorium on farm foreclosures. It is our determination to have 1 million signatures for this campaign.

^{COOPERATION}
Rpe agency & ^{cooperation} rural representatives to work together on farm policy.

In this manner we hope that we can meet in some small measure our indebtedness to the farmers of our land as well as our duty as Jews and human beings.

Let me conclude by reciting from the liturgy of this festive season.

On this day we give thanks for the creative power that pours forth its bounty in grass and grain.

The earth and its fulness is yours, O God. You are the seed within the seed giving it life.

For this we give praise and pledge that more than words shall show our thankfulness.

We shall cherish the good earth you have placed in our keeping.

We shall share with others the food we have gathered.

We shall help them to harvest the crop ^{they} ~~we~~ have planted.

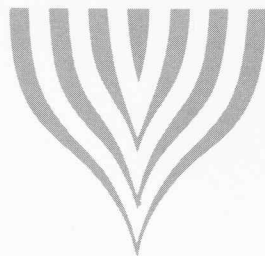
And we shall labor to make this a world where only good is sown, so that our harvest may be contentment and peace.

REPORT OF
RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

PRESIDENT
OF THE
UNION OF AMERICAN
HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

December 5, 1986
White Plains, New York



איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Needless to say, I am overjoyed to be here, to be with you, to re-embrace you. For a while there, some months ago, I feared that I might not make it, at least, that I might not be able to return to you and to my tasks in full strength. But God was good to me and so was Rhea, the mate of my soul, whose resoluteness and abounding love literally willed me to my present place and state. *Boruch rofe choleem* . . . blessed be they who bring healing to the sick.

I am grateful to those who kept our communal home in order during the days of my illness: to Edie Miller, who managed my office so faithfully, and to that troika of Rothschild, Vorspan and Syme who assumed responsibilities beyond their many own. They did exceedingly well. I was discomfited by the knowledge that I am not indispensable, even as I was reassured to know that leadership reins of the Union are in superior hands.

Of course I am grateful to all the members of this Board of Trustees, for gathering around me during my illness, for helping to inspire my recovery, and for taking concrete steps to show kindness to me and my family. We reciprocate your friendship with a full and grateful heart.

This Board meeting is devoted to the theme of Outreach: Retrospect and Prospect. But before I delve into this theme, I feel compelled to make brief comment concerning those startling events of the day, events that touch us not just as Americans but as Jews. I refer of course to the Iranian fiasco, Israel's involvement in it, and the risk that the Jewish State will be scapegoated for these misadventures.

Our country's outreach to Iran's political moderates might well be justified on geopolitical grounds, and it demonstrated a compassion for the hostages. But by paying the extortionist's price in weaponry, two essential principles of American foreign policy were squandered: neutrality in the Gulf War and a hard line against terrorism and against the states that sponsor it.

It was a foolhardy gamble . . . the stakes were too high. And the moment the game was over, the Iranian players went into hiding, but not before they had pulled the wool over the eyes of *our* players: three new Americans were quickly taken hostage to replace the three that had been released. Some players! Some game!

But if all this was sheer folly, and a dealing in deception, the endeavor to divert the Iranian arms-sale profits to the contras was a moral abomination which cannot be mitigated by the claims of a greater compassion or of a more sophisticated geopolitical understanding. It was but an imperious seizure of power by the President's men, who arrogantly assumed that they were above the law.

The wisdom of Israel's involvement can also be questioned, although its response is more plausibly justifiable. To begin with, America asked Israel to send these arms to Iran, and the requests of so faithful an ally can scarcely be refused. Israel also hoped to buy safety for Iran's still substantial and endangered Jewish community. Lastly, Israel, too, has long-term geopolitical considerations at play; it calculates that the Persian nation distant from Israel, yet hostile to the Arabs, is not as great a threat to its security as Iraq. Nonetheless, Israel was tainted by the blunder of this multi-nation gamble, and the moral authority of its own stance against state-sponsored terrorism was severely impaired.

Various attempts are now being made to scapegoat Israel for this misadventure. Early on, as the fiasco unfolded, a White House official declared that dealing with Iran had been Israel's idea in the first instance. At his first press conference on the subject, President Reagan claimed ignorance of any arms being shipped by a "third country." And in an interview which appears in the current issue of *TIME* magazine, he declared:

Another country was facilitating those sales of weapons systems. They then were overcharging and were apparently putting the money into bank accounts of the leaders of the contras. It wasn't us funneling money to them. This was another country.

True enough, the President didn't say it was Israel—just maybe he had Saudi Arabia in mind—but everyone else assumed that he meant Israel, and columns and editorials are appearing across the land demanding to know just why Israel is given arms by America, when it but turns around to sell them for gain.

What a base canard! What a slanderous malignity! It isn't Jerusalem, but Washington, that has an obsession with overturning the Sandinista regime. In the welter of rumor and fantasy surrounding this affair, one fact is clear: Israel acted at the behest, with the knowledge, and with the consent of the Reagan administration. It did so as a faithful ally of our country. To say otherwise is to pervert the truth and to betray a friend.

Alas, our enemies were given further wood for their axes by the several scandals which have been breaking about us: the insider trading cases, and the municipal bribery scandals here in New York. Not unlike many of you, I suppose I found myself turning the pages of newspapers with some desperation, and in the vain hope of finding at least one non-Jewish name in the listing of those who were or were about to be indicted. Whatever has happened to the moral fibre of our co-religionists?

Perhaps I am, we all are, too sensitive about such revelations. Certainly, anti-Semitism will not increase because of them; the anti-Semite victimizes the Jew, and only then finds reason in the Jew's conduct to justify his foul deeds.

We also ought to remember that critical mass has something to do with it all. Jews predominate in New York's municipal government. When I lived in Boston, there was a scandal a week at City Hall and those who were indicted invariably were Irish because so many of the municipal employees were Irish. Similarly, Jews predominate in the investment banking field; better than eighty percent of all such bankers are Jews, so I have been informed. Is there any wonder, then, when crooks are found that Jews should be found among them?

All this does not condone their acts, to be sure, nor does it lessen the shame and the pain I feel when I see our people's moral state suffer such tragic diminution. Forgotten the injunction that we be exemplars of moral behavior. Neglected the demand that Jews conduct themselves in such a way that those who see them will say: behold, the prophets of Israel and their righteousness live in these people, let us come and be like unto them, let us be a part of their community.

* * *

Which brings us full square to the leitmotif of our Board weekend, does it not: Outreach, the enlargement of our fellowship by being inclusive rather than exclusive, the opening of our communal doors to all who wish to enter, especially to the intermarried and their children.

Outreach was launched eight years ago, and it is predicated on the assumption that the intermarried have not *ipso facto* turned their back on our community; that they don't necessarily wish to stop being Jews; and that therefore we need not sit *shiva* over them and regard them as lost to the Jewish people forever. We proposed, rather, that we develop a variety of approaches to reintegrate them into Jewish life, to encourage the conversion of their non-Jewish spouses, and to effect the Jewish socialization of their children.

I am exceedingly proud of having projected this idea, as well as the resolution on patrilineal descent which our Outreach program spawned. I am even more proud that you, the leaders of Reform Judaism, endorsed and institutionalized these ideas. You decided that the standard construction tools of Jewish life were not sufficient for the need, that in order to contend with the very real and the very present danger of Jewish communal enervation by intermarriage, we would have to lay aside our traditional approaches and tolerate, and even encourage, some rather unusual activities: to make ourselves known, to make our faith known, to convert a situation of neglect into one of compassionate embrace.

The toilsome task of implementing these ideas fell to the Commission on Outreach, chaired by our remarkable friend, David Belin, and representing the combined efforts of the UAHC and the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Lydia Kukoff is the director and guiding spirit of this commission, and I could not possibly praise her enough. Under her marvelously able leadership, the conversion curricula were revised to represent Judaism

not only as a set of concepts but as a way of life, as an emotional and not just an intellectual reality. Congregations were stimulated to integrate Jews-by-choice more effectively into their synagogal lives, to break that sense of isolation and alienation that is spurred by the absence of a more genuine communal support.

And with the help of her associates, Lydia designed and carefully tested a program called "Times and Seasons," intended primarily for interfaith couples with unconverted partners. These couples, most of them unaffiliated, felt stigmatized by lingering attitudes of non-acceptance within the Jewish community; they felt misunderstood by their Christian families; they felt challenged by the religious yearnings and cultural confusions of their own children. "Times and Seasons" offers them information, guidance, and a forum for the genuine exploration of conflicts and harmonies.

The outstanding success of this program has been revealed in the outpouring of gratitude, continued involvement, and constructive suggestions from participants. Incandescent in its accomplishments, it is now maturing and reproducing itself; we have forty trained facilitators, a completed manual, and a film that is being readied for Outreach use and which you will have a chance to preview this weekend.

But our performance cannot be measured solely by specific programs, nor even by the number of families we have helped individually and regained for our people. It must be measured by the impact which we have had on the larger American Jewish community.

Here our success has been stunning. We have transformed American Jewry's mindscape. The subject of intermarriage is no longer taboo, and the concept of outreach, even conversionary outreach, is no longer a heresy within the American Jewish community. We have taken the discussion of intermarriage out of the house of mourning and into the house of study—indeed, into the sanctuary itself. Without condoning intermarriage, we have recognized its reality and have begun to grapple with it. *Hob nit kayn moire wen du host nit kayn andere breyre*—holds a Yiddish proverb—"Don't be afraid when you have no other choice." Thus we have counselled, and the Jewish community listened.

Indeed, not long ago, the last bastion of opposition to the Outreach idea began to topple. Rav Soloveitchik, the most respected voice of mainline Orthodoxy, in a recently published HADOAR interview voiced what he himself described as an opinion of revolutionary significance, one that would surely draw the ire and fire of his own traditional colleagues. And this is what he said:

Regarding the plague of intermarriage, from which the Orthodox have not been saved, it is necessary to do what the Reform Jews are doing—with, of course, an Orthodox content.

Bravo!

And so, everybody is doing it—the Conservatives, the Reconstructionists, liberal Orthodox groupings, communal organizations, fund raising agencies—all have accepted our fundamental approach, each in his own way, nonetheless joined in a kind of Jewish patchwork quilt of outreach which has forever altered the landscape and the mindscape of American Jewry.

Not everyone in our midst is pleased by all this. Some feel that our primacy in this sphere has been diminished, that those who emulated us have now outpaced us and that we are lagging. This simply isn't so. Here and there, an individual effort may merit recognition as innovative, but institutionally, we remain in the vanguard. Thus, for instance, the long-heralded JTS Chair on Outreach is still only an idea left aborning. Contrast that with our efforts: a national director, an assistant, ten regional coordinators—one of them full-time—and forty trained facilitators for the "Times and Seasons" programs. And when others seek guidance and ideas, they can find them only in our publications and at those historic national conferences convened by us, but at which every sector of American Jewry is represented.

But what if this weren't so. What if others had bettered our instruction and were now outpacing us. We would still have reason to rejoice. We claim no monopoly on anything we do. Quite the contrary. We want

others to follow those newer directions which we deem needful. We cannot possibly do the job alone. It is our task, rather, to be a prod, a goad to American Jews, ever to spur them on today in Outreach, as we did yesterday in religious action, and before that in liturgical reform, and in the struggle to gain full equality for women in the religious life.

* * *

Now this does not mean that we should ride at anchor and be content to stay where we are. And so I wish to make some modest programmatic suggestions tonight, proposing newer emphases within the realm of Outreach, whose proper implementation will require the approval and the cooperation of this Board.

I would like to see our movement turn with a greater determination towards the children of interfaith families, to try to win them for Jewish life and the Jewish future. There are probably half-a-million such children in the U.S., and far too many are reared in a manner in which two religions are blurred together so that neither comes into focus. "We will expose them to both religions," explain the parents. "Once they grow up they will make their own decision." Such a democratic sentiment usually represents a side-stepping of parental responsibility, a postponement of the parents' own most difficult decision on how to shape their offspring's religious identity. I empathize greatly with these difficulties, especially in cases of devout but separate religious identities within a marriage. We must realize, however, that such indecisiveness or indifference often results not in an open-minded, but a two-headed child, not in one who is versed and comfortable in two traditions, but one who will eventually mutter: "A pox on both your houses."

Perhaps some of you read about an association of such children, now adult, who call themselves "Parveh," neither fish nor fowl, neither Christian nor Jew, and their badge is a medallion emblazoned with a *magen David* on the one side, which, when turned around, becomes a St. Christopher's medal.

Young children crave certainty and a sense of belonging. An uncertain, "mixed" religious upbringing destroys those very elements of the religious life that appeal to young people. Think of it—of your own Jewish identities, without rich childhood memories, memories of belonging deeply embedded in the soul. Where would you be, what would you be, without that original magic, without the memory of Eden?

We must provide those memories for as many children of interfaith couples as we can, that is, if we are serious about retaining or regaining them for our people. Specifically, I would like you to call on our congregations to suspend those rules which restrict religious school to the children of Temple members, and to admit the children of unaffiliated mixed married couples, without charge, provided those children have not been promised to either religion and their parents belong neither to a synagogue nor a church. I do not speak here of an open-ended free service that will somehow deprive our congregants of limited resources. I speak rather of a two-year rule suspension that will reap profits more surely than any other investment.

I know that this proposal will raise many hackles, even more questions. Why pay dues? Why be more concerned about not yet Jewishly committed children than those who are?

Somehow we will have to overcome these objections and lift the vision of our congregants beyond the walls of their own synagogues and to see the wider need. Perhaps we should learn some tricks from our competition—from the drug peddlers and the cultists. They always entice with a free taste; they don't wait first for parental encouragement. We cannot afford to be more ceremonious and more parsimonious in *our* approach to the problems of intermarriage.

More to the point, the approach which I endorse has been tried and it works. Rabbi Steven Foster of Congregation Emanuel of Denver, Colorado has developed and implemented such an 'open door' policy in his superb "Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me" program. Steve is really a remarkable rabbi, unusually gifted and persevering. His is the only congregation in the land that has a full-time outreach worker on the temple staff.

Because I respect him so much, I will not steal his thunder. He will tell us about his program in some detail tomorrow. Suffice it to say, that it is preeminently successful. Close to forty percent of the interfaith families affiliated with the congregation during the first year. It was their entry point into the synagogue, their means to opt into Jewish life. And their children will be Jews. Not so marginally noted, Rabbi Foster made this program a community-wide venture and received funding from the Denver Federation to operate "Stepping Stones."

Be that as it may, there is the program that I want to see extended nationally. This is the success that I want to see reproduced. For as Theodor Herzl wrote of the Chanukah menorah which we will kindle just a few weeks hence:

When there is but one light, all is still dark, and the solitary light looks melancholy. Soon it finds one companion, then another, and another. . .

Herzl also noted that "the light comes first to the young. . ."

I want to see the light kindled as well in our camps and our youth groups. Here, too, we need to provide a "guest pass" to the children of unaffiliated interfaith families.

We ought to open our tours to Israel to children of intermarriage, and raise the scholarship funds required for this purpose.

I ask you to authorize our youth and camp committees to effect these programs. We should not ask of our congregations what we do not first demand of ourselves.

Lastly, I call on our Outreach Commission and its talented staff to devote some thought and develop experimental programs in a still untried, untouched realm. I speak of an approach to "adult" children who are the products of intermarriages of long ago. I speak of the "parvehs" now, of those adults who have not quite recovered from their childhood, from the intense stigmatization and spiritual confusion to which intermarried families were subjected. More than any other group, these survivors of old-fashioned prejudices are lost, deeply alienated from a religious or communal identity. They are therefore deeply isolated, beyond our easy reach, and yet we must strive to reach them. That requires patience, caring, and respect. It demands that we learn to speak our language of outreach simultaneously to the adult, and to the child within that adult. We must be willing to reckon with the hurts of the past, as well as the hopes for the future.

I believe that eight years of creative exploration of the concept of outreach have prepared us practically and emotionally for taking the next step: that we are ready like Jacob in Egypt—when he placed his hands on the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh—to bestow *our* blessing on the children of intermarriage. In so doing, we will come ever closer to the fulfillment of the Outreach idea:

- to be missionaries for Judaism,
- to assist in the active conversion of the unchurched,
- to embrace those seekers after God who come to our door.

* * *

Have we the resources to be so bold? Are we, by going out on a limb, forgetting to nurture the roots and the trunk of Reform Judaism?

Jack Stern, surely one of our generation's most beloved and respected rabbis, sounded this caution in his elegant Rabbinic Conference address last June. "The success of Outreach," he said, "should not deflect us from an essential purpose of our movement, which is to help Jews grow up with a sense of their own Jewish connections and with their own Jewish convictions."

Jack's caution is well taken. We cannot be distorted in our response to the many and disparate needs of our pluralistic community. There must be a balance between those programs which focus on the inner core of Jews, and programs addressed to those who stand at a greater distance.

Right now, just under five percent of the Union's budget is devoted to Outreach. All the rest goes to youth activities and to camping and to religious education and to religious action, and all those many other valuable programs designed to enrich the core. It is a reasonable balance, I think, although, to be sure, our total program including Outreach would be considerably advanced were more material resources made available to us.

Fear not, Jack, "Outreach" is not overwhelming the Union's other vital concerns. "Inreach" is by far our *raison d'être* as an organization. Outreach may be making headlines, but inreach is writing volumes, inscribing a Jewish identity in the hearts of thousands of Jewish children.

Let it be remembered also that the two forms of "reaching" are not in opposition. Almost invariably, when we succeed in touching the non-Jewish partner of an intermarriage, we bring the Jewish partner of that marriage much closer to the core. And by engaging in the process, we transform ourselves. *We* become better Jews.

Harold Schulweis defined the outreach-inreach dynamic perfectly when he wrote:

Something happens to the student who is called upon to teach. Something happens to the Jew who is asked to explain the character of his tradition to one outside the inborn circle. . . knowing how to answer is as important to the Jewish responder as it is to the non-Jewish questioner.

Let us therefore think of this not as an arm-wrestle, but as an embrace of Torah scrolls, not as a tug of war, but as a push-and-pull effort to elevate Reform Judaism, prophetic Judaism, to new heights. Then will we be a visible beacon on this troubled American landscape and in this bewildered, frightened world.



X 89
Schindler:
Milton S. Eisenhower Symposium
Religion and Politics:
The Separation of Church and State
Johns Hopkins University
October, 1986

It is a delight to be here, and to participate in this symposium.
Let me confess to a measure of awe which fills me in this place.
After all, I am only a preacher

and preachers are far more at home in the pulpit
than they are on the lecture platform of a university,
especially when that university is as great and as
illustrious as is Johns Hopkins.

I am also flattered to have my name associated with that of Milton S.
Eisenhower in whose honor this lectureship was established
Dr Eisenhower was a public servant of the first rank,
a statesman of uncommon abilities,
an educator who taught not just as books enable
but also by the example of his life.

* * *

The subject before us, as you know, is

"Religion and Politics: The Separation of Church and State."

I was asked to address this theme from the perspective
of the American Jewish community,
with particular reference to such issues as abortion,
school prayer, and New Right Christian Fundamentalism.

Edie
This is final version
of Johns Hopkins speed
X

I suppose I ought to begin by reminding you that American Jewry
is scarcely a monistic grouping whose adherents are of one
mind ideologically and politically.

We are a pluralistic community holding a wide variety of views.

Indeed, we are well known for our disputatiousness.

We argue with one another passionately.

We even dare argue with God.

Still, on the issue of Church and State a broad
consensus obtains in our midst.

It unites us as few other subjects do, evoking a response as earnest
as is our concern for Israel.

Consider the last Presidential election, if you will.

On the scale of sympathy for Israel, Ronald Reagan ranked much higher
than his opponent Walter Mondale;

the latter carried the double burden of Jesse Jackson and
Jimmy Carter

whilst the President, during his first term in office,

had been singularly supportive of the Jewish State.

In consequence, just prior to the Republican Convention that summer,
polls indicated that for the very first time in history
a majority of the Jewish electorate was prepared to vote
for the Republican incumbent.

But then came Dallas where the President charged that those
who oppose prayer in the school were against religion.
In Dallas, too, the electronic preachers appeared to dominate
the party convention.

They claimed ready access to the oval office, even while they
virtually declared that God Almighty was a Republican.
In the face of all this, American Jews quickly swung 'round
and ran from Reagan.

Church and State, rather than Israel, was the pivotal issue for Jews
in that historic election.

There simply is no doubt about it:

The separation clause is a "gut issue" for American Jews.

We hold this principle to be our fundamental protection, the ultimate
ground of that unique freedom which we Jews have experienced here.
Everywhere else in our wanderings we suffered persecution -- never here
In all other countries there was an established faith;

here there was none,

and here, in this blessed America, we were able to stretch
ourselves to the very limit of our talent and aspiration.

That is why we prize the First Amendment as the very
cornerstone of our liberties in this land.

But note, and note well, that we reverence the Bill of Rights not only
because of our historic experience

but also because of our love for Judaism and its value system.

Our celebration of the separation principle does not stem,

as some have falsely charged,

from a secular humanist antipathy to religion.

On the contrary.

We regard our faith as too precious to be trivialized and vulgarized
as a plaything of politicians.

We believe that strict separation has protected the integrity,
the independence, the vitality of all religions in America
-- even as it left them free to criticize the government
and to speak truth to power.

* * *

Which brings me full square to the very first point I want to make
concerning our attitude to New Right Christian Fundamentalism.

We uphold the right of fundamentalist preachers
to speak out on public policy.

We do not see the First Amendment as precluding a political
involvement by the religious community.

Indeed, the right to such an involvement is secured by the Free
Exercise clause of that Amendment itself.

The constitution may require a high degree of separation between
church and state.

But at the same time it presumes a high degree of interaction
between religious values and the values undergirding
American society.

As Jefferson said,

"The liberties of a nation cannot be secured when we have
removed their only firm basis....a connection in the minds
of the people that their liberties are the gift of God."

We Jews certainly claim the right to speak up on issues of
public concern, and we do so with a passion.

We, therefore, cannot and will not deny that right to others,
however divergent their views.

If Schindler can hold forth on nuclear disarmament and economic justice
why then Pat Robertson has every right to take the stump
for prayer in the public schools
even as Cardinal O'Connor has the right to inveigh against abortion

The public debate is enriched when different groups bring their
divergent moral perspectives to bear on the issues of the day.
Even so has the Christian Right refocused our attention on concerns
we had neglected:

the deterioration of the family,
and the debasement of sex
and the indiscriminate permissiveness of our society.

None of these issues has ever evoked an appropriate moral response
by the liberal Jewish community -- and we might as well admit it.

* * *

If this be so, then what is our problem with the Christian Right?

To begin with, we find the scope of its agenda to be
entirely too narrow,
ethically inadequate
unfaithful to the fullness of religious witness.

Maybe my own conception of religion is at fault,
but I cannot understand how an agenda that calls itself religious
could have opposed our government's ratification of the
Genocide Convention to the very last breath.

I cannot understand how a religious agenda can concern itself
almost exclusively with personal rather than with public morality,
more with what happens in the privacy of the bedroom
than with what happens in our urban ghettos.

I cannot understand how a religious agenda can identify itself
with a particular economic theory
-- clearly secular in its essential nature --
which leaves it up to God to take care of toxic waste dumps
and rent gouging,
and unemployment,
and equal pay for women,
and all those other scarcely self-correcting by-products of the
rigid laissez-faire approach,
the approach that the religious right has elevated into an
article of faith.

And finally, while I will yield to no one in my love for this land
for which I fought and bled

I cannot understand how those who speak in the name of a religion
that claims adherents in every corner of our world
can nonetheless be so narrowly nationalistic
as to attain to a blatant chauvenism.

The embrace of the Christian right is scarcely global.
Its preachemnts opposing nuclear disarmament and favoring the
enlargemnt of America's nuclear capacity,
make it almost impossible for me to believe
that the more traditional Christian quest for peace
-- such as expressed in the Catholic Bishop's Pastoral Letter
on Nuclear Disarmenet --
emerged from the same Holy Scriptures in worship of the same Lord.

Forgotten is the injunction about "turning the other cheek" to
one's enemies.

No inspiration is derived from God's promise to Noah
sealed by the rainbow sign
that God would never again destroy the earth.

Foreign policy decision are made with with an eye toward
an approaching Armageddon.

Every act of every opponent of Soviet influence is justified
including dictatorships and death squads and grinding poverty
and apartheid and even nuclear brinkmanship.

All these appear condoned if not blessed by the Christian right.
It is a puzzlement!

* * *

Now while there may be some or even many Jews in this audience
who disagree with one or another of my views implicit
in this critique,
few here will disagree when I say that the American Jewish community is
most perturbed about the fact that the Christian right has made
"prayer in public school a centerpiece of its national agenda.

We are exceedingly sensitive on this subject

and the reason is not far to seek:

We see the public classroom as the basic element of our democracy,

the prime instrument for making one nation out of many.

It is the public school that has forged those values of self-respect

and respect for others,

that has made our country great and our people strong.

And that is so because every child in that classroom is equal,

because no student is separated from his fellow because he

worships a different God or prays in a different tongue.

Even the slightest chip in that wall separating church and state

evokes our anxious concern, and properly so.

For instance, could there be anything more innocuous than the

"equal access" program adopted by Congress a year or so ago?

It seemed so harmless!

America's secondary schools were to be opened to a wide variety

of religious activities.

Everything was to be voluntary, nothing required.

Yet look at what has happened throughout the land.

In Illinois, the Jews for Jesus established chapters in various

high schools.

In one West Coast community the Moonies asked for equal time and space.

In another it was the American Nazi Party.

On Long Island so many cults and missionary groups competed for available resources that despairing school officials recommended the elimination of all extra-curricular activity, including sports -- just to get out from under.

Next thing you know, Louis Farakkhan will ask for high school space to spew his venom - in the name of his Black Muslim sect.

Thus it is that the American public school system threatens to become a battleground for competing sectarian interests.

And this is why we American Jews will continue most vigorously to resist every effort to breach the separating wall especially in the realm of public education.

We are certainly opposed to the granting of federal aid to parochial schools.

We believe with Jefferson that

"to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical."

We believe with Madison that taxation for religious purposes would

"destroy that moderation and harmony which the forbearance of our laws to intermeddle with religion has produced among its several sects."

And we believe with John F. Kennedy

"in an America where...no church school is granted any public funds or political preference."

These basic principles of American freedom are imperiled today by fundamentalist groups and some government officials whose aim is nothing less than to advance their sectarian purposes by re-writing the laws of this land.

We will counter these aims relentlessly,
even as we are opposed to the teaching of "creationism"
and to the censorship of texts
and to the display of religious symbols on school property
and to the introduction of prayer in the schools
in any of its endless legislative variations.

We will counter such efforts, lest the separating wall crumble and
turn into a moat where the sharks of religious hatred
thrash about and sharpen their teeth for victims.

* * *

Abortion is another centerpiece on the table of the Christian Right,
and on this subject too, the American Jewish community finds
itself substantially on the opposite side of that
soul-searing debate.

Most American Jews hold to the proposition that women or their families
have the right to terminate pregnancy.

It is a right that is not granted casually by our tradition;
Reverence for life is central to Judaism no less than it is
to Christianity.

And so Judaism regrets abortion in most circumstances,
but by no means in all.

It does not demand that the fertilized egg be protected
in every case
even when, for example, it is the result of rape or incest.

Jewish theology, moreover, does not regard the fetus as a being
apart from the mother, but rather as fully a part of her.

Judaism also affirms a kind of principle of development
that assigns a greater worth to that which is actualized
over that which is merely latent or potential.

In other words, the life and health of the mother
takes precedence over the potential life of the fetus.

If I am not mistaken, traces of a like doctrine can be perceived
in Christian theology,
from St. Augustine to Teilhard de Chardin.

They too saw reality in terms of a becoming, assigning an ever
greater worth to that which is more fully realized.

What I am really trying to say is that perhaps the two positions
are really not so far apart as the intensity of the
public debate might lead one to believe.

Certainly no believing Jew

-- given Judaism's solemn commitment to life's sanctity --
can take comfort in the knowledge that we live in a society
in which better than a million abortions take place each year.

Hegel was right: the greatest crises in human history are
not those of right versus wrong,
but those of right versus right.

But that is not the way it is perceived by zealots
with all their fire and fanaticism.

Be all this at it may, abortion remains a current issue
that divides the Christian Right as well as Catholicism
from the American Jewish community.

* * *

Now the fact that we are opposed to this or that aspect
of the Moral Majority manifesto does not really go to the
root of our distrust of the Christian Right.
We oppose many other groupings on a variety of issues.
Yet we don't hold these groupings suspect.
We don't refuse to cooperate with them on issues of common concern.
We don't fret and fume about them as we do with the religious right.
Our alarm is incited not by the substance, but rather by the manner
in which those who seek to inject sectarian values into
the public sector advance their agenda.
There is entirely too much hyperbole.
Everything is cast in apocalyptic terms,
as a struggle between good and evil, between God and satan,
between the forces of light and of darkness.
Thus those who favor the Equal Rights Amendment for Women
are labelled "anti-family."
And those who insist on equal rights for homosexuals
are called "perverts."
And those who oppose school prayer are denounced as "anti-Christ."
And those who believe in abortion are designated "murderers,"
"the Nazi like perpetrators of another holocaust."

This kind of language smacks of a McCarthyism reborn,
now wearing clerical robes.

This kind of language also violates the bounds of a reasonable
democratic discourse.

In effect, it forecloses such a discourse,
for if a political opponent is misguided or even stupid,
he can be dealt with in the market place of ideas.

But when he is labelled immoral and a sinner, the case can be made
that he does not deserve to be in the debate at all.

* * *

There is also too great a tendency among these groups to invoke
the name of God in order to sanctify their positions.
This troubles me on theological grounds.

I realize, of course, that Christian ministers draw on Scripture
for inspiration,
that they believe the Bible to be the revealed word of God.

I respect these beliefs, and I admire the steadfastness with which
they turn to the Bible for guidance to make their life decisions.

But can we really know God's will on all the issues facing our nation?
Can any being of flesh and blood know with a certainty what
God Almighty wills on a particular policy matter?
Surely that is a knowledge which neither Christian nor Jew,
however learned or pious, has the right to claim!

Some time ago, Senator Kenenedy made a similar point when he asked respect "for the independent judgment of conscience."

He said:

"Those who proclaim moral and religous values can offer moral counsel, but they should not casually treat a position on a public issue as a test of fealty to faith."

Illustarting the problem, the Senator quoted Jerry Falwell's own statement to the effect that

"to stand against Israel is to stand against God."

Said Kennedy:

"There is no one in the Senate who has stood more firmly for Israel than I have. Yet I do not doubt the faith of those on the other side. Their error is not one of religion, but of policy."

The senator's example is well chosen.

Many congressional leaders who received extremely high marks on the "morality index" published by the Christian Voice because of their conservative position on such "holy" subjects as gun control and US relations with Zimbabwe, have only mediocre if not poor voting records on Israel.

Where they saints on some issues and sinners on others?

Did their religion lapse on the AWACs vote?

Surely not.

Surely they had other consideraton that came into play, such as the extension of US influence in the Middle East and the dampening of Syrian power, and the need to recapture petro-dollars.

If this be so, it is a confession that the AWACs sale was a complicated matter that involved many considerations all at once.
And if that confession is made, it must apply as well to domestic gun control and to US relations with South Africa and all of those other issues which the Christian Right crowns with the halo of divine approval.

The hazard -- indeed the blasphemy -- of proclaiming "God's will" on specific issues is well demonstrated by Senator Kennedy's illustrative example.

* * *

American Jews are obviously much discomfited by efforts to Christianize America, to make this a republic ruled by Christ.

Early along the way of his political career, Falwell called for a Christian Bill of Rights. He declared:

"America was founded by Godly men who had in mind establishing a republic not only Christian in nature but a republic designed to propagate the gospel worldwide."

And the Rev. Pat Robertson had this to say:

"The Constitution of the United States is a marvelous instrument for self-government by Christian people. But the minute you turn it into the hands of non Christian people... they can use it to destroy the very foundations of our society."

Since then both he and Jerry Falwell have modified their language and they now speak of the need to restore Judeo-Christian values in our society. Still, the suspicion persists that they really wish to promote a Fundamentalist Christian America which will exclude all those who are not "born-again."

Only last summer, just a few months ago, after his initial success in signing up precinct candidates in Michigan, Robertson sent out a letter saying:

"THE CHRISTIANS HAVE WON...What a breakthrough for the Kingdom!"

Subsequently he averred that Christians "feel more strongly about patriotism, love of God, love of country" than any one else.

How shall we interpret all this?

How can we read this as anything other than an endeavor to exclude non-Christians from the political process.

It is in this context that I commented some years ago, in words that were later misinterpreted to imply that I deem the Christian Right to be anti-Semitic.

I said no such thing.

What I did say, and repeat, is this:

...that the extreme and absolutistic language of the Christian Right "creates a climate of opinion which is hostile to religious tolerance. Such a climate...is bad for civil liberties, for human rights, for interfaith understanding, and for mutual respect among Americans...Therefore, it is also bad for Jews.... I do not accuse Jerry Falwell and Bailey Smith of deliberately inciting anti-Semitism. But I do say, that their preachments have an inevitable effect. Jerry Falwell tells us that only one brand of politics is acceptable to God, and Bailey Smith tells us that only one brand of believer is acceptable to God. It is no wonder then that those who hold different political views should be branded 'satan' and those who hold different religious beliefs should become the victims of vandals....."

That's what I said and I stand by every word.

The health of the American process demands civility, temperateness, and a genuine respect for divergent views, even if these views involve a divergent interpretation of Scripture.

* * *

Now I don't believe that there is anyone in the American Jewish community who fears that Pat Robertson will prevail in his ambition to become the chief defender of our Constitution.

But we are concerned that the vision of the Christian Right will become the reality of this nation.

True, throughout our history as a nation, we have heard extremist and nativist voices clamoring for the Christianizing of America.

But never before were these voices amplified by the bully pulpit of the White House.

Far worse, the Bill of Rights, indeed, the entire Constitution is
relentlessly assaulted by the bizarre briefs of the
Justice Department.

Look at what the press reported only this morning.

The Attorney General of the United States has just declared
that the High Court's interpretations of the constitution
are NOT the supreme law of the land
that they are binding only on the parties to the suit
that other people, including government officials
should feel free to be guided by their own reading of the
constitution.

What dangerous nonsense this!

What an invidious perversion of the democratic process!

What an invitation to anarchy and chaos!

Are we to remain a nation under the law, or a nation ruled by
wilful men?

The prattle and the badgering of Attorney General Meese undermines
the very foundation of our society.

And look what is happening to our courts!

Our judiciary

-- traditionally the guardian of the constitution --
is enfeebled by new appointments which reflect
narrow ideological obsessions.

This is what agitates the American Jewish community.

* * *

My friends, we live -- together -- in a breathtaking era.

Daily we gasp in wonder at the potential of our inventiveness;

daily we hold our breath for fear of extinction.

Probing ethical questions press for an answer.

Daily, we are compelled to judge whether this or that technological

invention is a Tower of Babel or a Jacob's ladder,

whether swords or plowshares should be used to break the

chains of human misery around the world;

whether to risk peace or to risk war;

whether to bolster or take apart the boundaries and walls

that both divide and protect us.

The millenium is approaching and we are each holding a stop watch.

The five billionth human being was born on earth this summer,

according to computer estimates

-- and we are each its parent.

This is the religious truth, common to all faiths, that confronts us

at this crossroad of human history:

that we are all one.

This is the truth that we must recognize in life, lest it be imposed

upon us in a grim and total holocaust.

It is less church and state that we need to unite today,

than church and church and state and state.

It is not Scripture set in stone that we need to wheelbarrow

from church to office to school to home.

It is the living, breathing word of God,

with echoes and overtones and constant simultaneous translation

that we need to be carrying in our hearts and minds.

As a religious leader, I should not have to waste precious time

struggling to protect or prove the integrity of my faith

and the faith of my children.

I should be spending that time holding council with other religious

leaders,

each from beneath his own vine and fig tree

in full security and full humility.

Let us acknowledge that we are all petitioners to

rather than spokespeople for the Almighty.

Let us attribute our religious differences to the unknowability

of God's essence

-- or if that evades our common consent, let us attribute

our differences to human fallibility --

and then embrace that fallibility as the seedbed of creativity.

We approach the millenium.

Our country already has one foot in the 21st Century.

It is a century of survival and renewal.

We must be brave now, and secure enough to take the next
progressive step

-- to walk humbly with our God into the future,
not to stumble awkwardly back towards an improbable past
while smashing the institutions of democracy on our way.

If the roof that arches over these United States of America has been
battered by the elements,

if the past three decades of social modernization have produced
a few leaks,

then let us repair the roof with all our sundry tools and skills.

But let us leave the keystones of the house intact.

Let us buttress them

-- our Constitution and our Bill of Rights --

for there is no firmer foundation for social progress
and social harmony in the modern world.

Schindler:
Milton S. Eisenhower Symposium
Religion and Politics:
The Separation of Church and State
Johns Hopkins University
October, 1986

It is a delight to be here, and to participate in this symposium.

Let me confess to a measure of awe which fills me in this place.

After all, I am only a preacher

and preachers are far more at home in the pulpit
than they are on the lecture platform of a university,
especially when that university is as great and as
illustrious as is Johns Hopkins.

I am also flattered to have my name associated with that of Milton S.

Eisenhower in whose honor this lectureship was established

Dr Eisenhower was a public servant of the first rank,

a statesman of uncommon abilities,

an educator who taught not just as books enable

but also by the example of his life.

* * *

The subject before us, as you know, is

"Religion and Politics: The Separation of Church and State."

I was asked to address this theme from the perspective

of the American Jewish community,

with particular reference to such issues as abortion,

school prayer, and New Right Christian Fundamentalism.

But then came Dallas where the President charged that those
who oppose prayer in the school were against religion.
In Dallas, too, the electronic preachers appeared to dominate
the party convention.

They claimed ready access to the oval office, even while they
virtually declared that God Almighty was a Republican.
In the face of all this, American Jews quickly swung 'round
and ran from Reagan.

Church and State, rather than Israel, was the pivotal issue for Jews
in that historic election.

There simply is no doubt about it:

The separation clause is a "gut issue" for American Jews.

We hold this principle to be our fundamental protection, the ultimate
ground of that unique freedom which we Jews have experienced here.
Everywhere else in our wanderings we suffered persecution -- never here
In all other countries there was an established faith;

here there was none,

and here, in this blessed America, we were able to stretch
ourselves to the very limit of our talent and aspiration.

That is why we prize the First Amendment as the very
cornerstone of our liberties in this land.

But note, and note well, that we reverence the Bill of Rights not only
because of our historic experience
but also because of our love for Judaism and its value system.
Our celebration of the separation principle does not stem,
as some have falsely charged,
from a secular humanist antipathy to religion.

We Jews certainly claim the right to speak up on issues of public concern, and we do so with a passion.

We, therefore, cannot and will not deny that right to others, however divergent their views.

If Schindler can hold forth on nuclear disarmament and economic justice why then Pat Robertson has every right to take the stump for prayer in the public schools even as Cardinal O'Connor has the right to inveigh against abortion

The public debate is enriched when different groups bring their divergent moral perspectives to bear on the issues of the day. Even so has the Christian Right refocused our attention on concerns we had neglected:

the deterioration of the family,
and the debasement of sex
and the indiscriminate permissiveness of our society.

None of these issues has ever evoked an appropriate moral response by the liberal Jewish community -- and we might as well admit it.

* * *

If this be so, then what is our problem with the Christian Right?

To begin with, we find the scope of its agenda to be entirely too narrow, ethically inadequate, and unfaithful to the fullness of religious witness.

The embrace of the Christian right is scarcely global.
Its preachemnts opposing nuclear disarmament and favoring the
enlargemnt of America's nuclear capacity,
make it almost impossible for me to believe
that the more traditional Christian quest for peace
-- such as expressed in the Catholic Bishop's Pastoral Letter
on Nuclear Disarment --
emerged from the same Holy Scriptures in worship of the same Lord.
Forgotten is the injunction about 'turning the other cheek' to
one's enemies.
No inspiration is derived from God's promise to Noah
sealed by the rainbow sign
that God would never again destroy the earth.
Foreign policy decision are made with with an eye toward
an approaching Armageddon.
Every act of every opponent of Soviet influence is justified
including dictatorships and death squads and grinding poverty
and apartheid and even nuclear brinkmanship.
All these appear condoned if not blessed by the Christian right.
It is a puzzlement!

* * *

Now while there may be some or even many Jews in this audience
who disagree with one or another of my views implicit
in this critique,
few here will disagree when I say that the American Jewish community is
most perturbed about the fact that the Christian right has made
"prayer in public school a centerpiece of its national agenda.

On Long Island so many cults and missionary groups competed for available resources that despairing school officials recommended the elimination of all extra-curricular activity, including sports -- just to get out from under.

Next thing you know, Louis Farakkhan will ask for high school space to spew his venom - in the name of his Black Muslim sect.

Thus it is that the American public school system threatens to become a battleground for competing sectarian interests.

And this is why we American Jews will continue most vigorously to resist every effort to breach the separating wall especially in the realm of public education.

We are certainly opposed to the granting of federal aid to parochial schools.

We believe with Jefferson that

"to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical."

We believe with Madison that taxation for religious purposes would

"destroy that moderation and harmony which the forbearance of our laws to intermeddle with religion has produced among its several sects."

And we believe with John F. Kennedy

"in an America where...no church school is granted any public funds or political preference."

These basic principles of American freedom are imperiled today by fundamentalist groups and some government officials whose aim is nothing less than to advance their sectarian purposes by re-writing the laws of this land.

Jewish theology, moreover, does not regard the fetus as a being apart from the mother, but rather as fully a part of her.

Judaism also affirms a kind of principle of development that assigns a greater worth to that which is actualized over that which is merely latent or potential.

In other words, the life and health of the mother takes precedence over the potential life of the fetus.

If I am not mistaken, traces of a like doctrine can be perceived in Christian theology, from St. Augustine to Teilhard de Chardin.

They too saw reality in terms of a becoming, assigning an ever greater worth to that which is more fully realized.

What I am really trying to say is that perhaps the two positions are really not so far apart as the intensity of the public debate might lead one to believe.

Certainly no believing Jew

-- given Judaism's solemn commitment to life's sanctity -- can take comfort in the knowledge that we live in a society in which better than a million abortions take place each year.

Hegel was right: the greatest crises in human history are not those of right versus wrong, but those of right versus right.

But that is not the way it is perceived by zealots with all their fire and fanaticism.

This kind of language smacks of a McCarthyism reborn,
now wearing clerical robes.

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democratic discourse.

In effect, it forecloses such a discourse,

for if a political opponent is misguided or even stupid,
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But never before were these voices amplified by the bully pulpit of the White House.

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Probing ethical questions press for an answer.

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invention is a Tower of Babel or a Jacob's ladder,

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for there is no firmer foundation for social progress
and social harmony in the modern world.

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

October 22, 1986

Charles J. Rothschild

Enclosed is the statment that I made today. Please
note that I carefully eschewed using the name of the
Union even for I.D. purposes.

STATEMENT OF RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

ENDORISING MARK GREEN FOR U.S. SENATE

October 22, 1986

I am today contributing my full and enthusiastic personal support to Mark Green's effort to become United States Senator from New York.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to know many political leaders. Few have demonstrated such outstanding qualities of intelligence and integrity that I have been moved to issue a public endorsement.

Mark Green will be a pillar of strength and principle in the United States Senate. On the important challenges facing America, the Jewish community and Israel, including the struggle to preserve and protect our Constitutional rights, Senator Mark Green will serve in the tradition of excellence epitomized by such leaders as Jacob Javits and Robert F. Kennedy.

I have endorsed only two other candidates for public office: Senator Edward Kennedy and Senator Lowell Weicker. Like them, Mark Green is a person of dedication and vision.

A vote for Mark Green is a vote for Israel's security. As someone who lost relatives in the Holocaust and who has spent his entire professional career in the struggle for justice, Mark Green has a deep understanding of and commitment to our friend and ally Israel as a nation that shares America's democratic values. He recognizes that a strong and secure Israel is vital to America's strategic interests.

A vote for Mark Green is a vote for the defense of American liberties. He has a deep understanding that American Jews have survived and flourished in this country because of the freedoms and opportunities that our Constitution affords, and the tolerance and decency it breeds.

As a public interest lawyer building upon the legacy of such great American reformers as Louis Brandeis, Thurgood Marshall and Ralph Nader, Mark Green is uniquely qualified to help lead the United States Senate into the third century of the American Constitution.

Schindler Statement
Page Two

Senator Mark Green would not vote to approve a Chief Justice of the United States who has shown insensitivity to Jews and other minorities.

Senator Mark Green will oppose, not sponsor, a Constitutional amendment to allow organized prayer in the public schools.

Senator Mark Green will be a leader in enhancing enforcement of the civil rights laws that make our Constitution a living protector of democracy.

We in the Jewish community care deeply about Israel and about our people's tradition of compassion and justice. Senator Mark Green will provide New York with courage and leadership for Israel and for justice. His voice and vision are needed in the United State Senate.

Richard Cohen Associates

PUBLIC RELATIONS COUNSEL

NEWS ALERT -- "SAVE THE FAMILY FARM"

You are invited to a news conference at which spokesmen for farmers' organizations and national Jewish groups will announce steps being taken by the Jewish community to (1) help owners of family farms faced with bankruptcy and foreclosure; and (2) counter efforts by right-wing hate groups to exploit the farm crisis by promoting anti-Semitism in rural areas.

WHEN: 2:15 P.M. WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22

WHERE: CHAPEL OF THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS, 838 Fifth Avenue (at 65th St.) (The chapel, on the street floor, will contain a sukkah, the traditional temporary shelter erected during Sukkoth, the Jewish festival that celebrates the agricultural roots of the Jewish people. Photographic coverage is welcome.)

SPEAKERS: Cy Carpenter, president, National Farmers Union

David H. Goldstein, executive director, Jewish Community Relations Bureau,
Kansas City, Mo.

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, president, Union of American Hebrew Congregations

David Senter, executive director, American Agricultural Movement

Gertrude White, national president, Women's American ORT

BACKGROUND HIGHLIGHTS

America's family farms and small towns are being devastated by economic conditions that have reached the crisis stage: since 1980, nine Midwestern states have lost 300,000 farms through bankruptcy and foreclosure. It is estimated that within the coming year the epidemic will worsen, with 300 farms a day being lost.

In addition to the economic hardships they are suffering, farm areas are experiencing a dramatic increase in social instability -- suicides, alcoholism and family violence.

Groups such as the Posse Comitatus, the Populist Party, the National Agricultural Press Association and The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord, publicly blaming Jews for the farmers' plight, are actively spreading anti-Semitic propaganda in affected rural communities.

###

10/15/86

Schindler: Save the Family Farm
News Conference
UAHC, October 22, 1986

To begin with and since I am host here as it were
would like to welcome you to this place

Headquarters of Reform Jewry...800 congregations
over 1 million members through length and breadth

I welcome you particularly to this our chapel decorated as it is
with the symbols of Succot, the festival which Jews
all over the world celebrate this week

Sukkot celebrates the agricultural roots of Jewish people

A dominant theme of this festival is our dependence on
God, and the interdependence of humankind.

None of us can survive alone.

We depend on the fruitage which many have planted and harvested.

And therefore it is our duty to give thanks
and to lend our strength to one another.

My presence on this podium is not just as a dispassionate observer

May come as news to many of my colleagues, but for two years
of my life I was a farmer.

I know what it is to toil day in day out without surcease.

I know what it is when disease ravages life stock
and the labors and dreams of years go down the drain.

And I know what it is to be badgered ^{for paper} by grain merchants
and to worry about meeting the monthly mortgage and loan
payments ^{obligation for farm modernization}

Of course I stand here also as a rabbi responding to the admonitions of our faith.

Judaism teaches a respect for the land and those who till it.

It reminds us that the earth is the Lord's and that those who make it yield its increase are priests, partners of God in the act of creation.

It enjoins us to revere the farmer as much as the scholar or both do the Lord's work.

And so it is our solemn obligation to stand at the side of farmers and make certain that they will not be denied the fruitage of their arduous labor.

We owe them so very much, and our festival of Booths reminds us of our dependance on them.

As a religious community we are saddened by the devastation which has come to the farmers of this land and we are resolved to do everything in our power to alleviate their plight.

We mean to help with more than words.

Our congregations in the Mid West have already enlisted in the effort to seek remedial legislation in their states.

We have employed a special consultant on Farm issues to advise us what else we might to do help, and to stimulate our congregations on grass-roots level

We have resolved to initiate a national petition campaign calling on our government to order an immediate moratorium on farm foreclosures. It is our determination to have 1 million signatures for this campaign.

out of phase
RAC - action

In this manner we hope that we can meet in some small measure our indebtedness to the farmers of our land as well as our duty as Jews and human beings.

Let me conclude by reciting from the liturgy of this festive season.

On this day we give thanks for the creative power that pours forth its bounty in grass and grain.

The earth and its fulness is yours, O God. You are the seed within the seed giving it life.

For this we give praise and pledge that more than words shall show our thankfulness.

We shall cherish the good earth you have placed in our keeping.

We shall share with others the food we have gathered.

We shall help them to harvest the crop we have planted.

And we shall labor to make this a world where only good is sown, so that our harvest may be contentment and peace.

WILL THERE BE ONE JEWISH PEOPLE BY THE YEAR 2000?

—Address by—

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations

CLAL CONFERENCE ON JEWISH UNITY

March 16, 1986
Princeton, New Jersey

Let me begin by thanking Rabbi [Irving] Greenberg for bringing us all together. He fears a schism in our midst, a rift so large that it will tear the Jewish people asunder. And he has resolved to do something about it. Indeed, he has bent all his energies to the task of averting the dangers he perceives. For this he has my respect and my affection, my ear and my active participation. I salute him and I avow that, if there is even the remotest danger of such a schism within Jewish life, we ought—all of us—to labor to prevent it.

But having said that, I must quickly add that I am not nearly as alarmed as Yitz Greenberg and some others appear to be. I hold a different judgment about the imminence of such a breach.

First of all, I would observe that our disputations, such as they are, are almost solely limited to the professional class—rabbi vs. rabbi—and have not truly inflamed the passions of our people. True, our various synagogue affiliations tend to separate us one from the other on the Sabbath and the weekdays—some will go to Orthodox shuls and some to Conservative synagogues and some to Reform congregations. And many, far too many, of our people go to no Jewish places of worship at all. This, my friends, is the great problem that all of us here, in all our denominations, must address—but that's for another day. Today we are gathered to discuss the differences among those who do believe in the synagogue, and I say to you that these differences are as naught compared with the gulf that divides Jews who observe the mitzvot in whatever fashion and those who ignore them in their entirety. Yes, there are differences, but my travels across this land tell me that they are more often a matter of happenstance than of ideological fervor, more frequently a question of how convenient a synagogue is or how friendly the rabbi than of any strong commitment to one branch of Judaism over another.

Perhaps this is a testament to the democratic currents within American Jewish life. Perhaps, on the other hand, it indicates a weakness in synagogue life, an arbitrariness to Jewish patterns of affiliation. However we interpret it, let us be humbled by the fact that our so-called schism is consciously that only at leadership levels, and only among some leaders. Truly, the greatest danger arising from our wranglings is, not that the Orthodox refuse to recognize Reform conversions or Conservative shofar blowing, but rather that the great mass of unaffiliated Jews will be so put off by what they see as *pilpul* that they will say "a plague on all your houses."

Second, I would remind us that feuding is hardly new to Jewish life. So much of the present day foreboding is predicated on the erroneous assumption that all was sweetness and light in the past, that, before these latest altercations between Orthodoxy and Reform, harmony prevailed, that there was then, in that golden and peaceful

past, a universal consensus uniting the Jewish world.

That is a gross misreading of Jewish history, of course. At no time did such an ideological consensus obtain. In virtually every era of our people's past, there were sharp ideological disputations setting Jews in opposition to one another, not just on political and social issues, but in the religious realm as well, especially in the latter. Yet the Jewish world did not fracture.

Remember the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees or the contentions between Saadya Gaon and Ben Meir when their respective followers celebrated Rosh Hashanah and Pesach on different dates. Or think of the refusal of the Sephardim to heed the Cherem of Rabbenu Gershom on polygamy. Or recall more recent times when the Chasidim opposed the Mitnagdim. Both opposed the Maskilim, who split into Zionists left and right, secular and religious, as well as Bundists. And in every age there were halachic authorities who rejected one another. Despite all of these conflicts and more, the center of the Jewish world held.

Let it be noted, moreover, that some of these conflicts were infinitely more fierce—and even violent—than are today's argumentations. The strife between the Mitnagdim and the Chasidim was the most brutal of all. These antagonists did not limit themselves to occasional rhetorical outbursts as we do today. They attacked one another physically, denounced their opponents to the authorities, and had them imprisoned.

Perhaps even more to the point, not a few times before our own time did the extremists of one camp refuse to give their children permission to marry the sons and daughters of the opposing camp. But cooler heads prevailed, and the Jewish world remained intact.

If such insistence on ethnic exclusivity and ideological purity did not work in the *past*, it will not work in *our* day. Our children will insist on making that decision themselves. If two Jews fall in love and wish to marry, they are going to marry. Who will stop them? They will scarcely be put off by the fear of not being halachically pure—nor will their parents. Most of them will thank their lucky stars that their children have chosen a Jew as a life mate. In the final analysis, the laity, the people, will shape the terms of communal interaction, and a sane and sensitive rabbinate will respond to its will, yea even an Orthodox rabbinate, which, I am confident, will find a halachic remedy as it always has. After all, the reluctance to exclude Jews from the family fellowship of Israel is a dominant motif which permeates the halachah along with its more restrictive strains.

Be that as it may, time and again through our long and stormy past, we have seen the chasm stretch in peaceful contemplation and

violent conflict over the most elusive definition of Jewishness: religion? people? nation? national minority? religious civilization? Without ever agreeing on one answer, we have nonetheless defined ourselves as One.

Moreover, we share a living history which is partner to the Torah in defining our Jewish identity. In our day, for instance, all but the most extreme forces of the right and left—such as the Satmar Chasidim or the fading relics of the American Council for Judaism—have adjusted their perspectives on Jewish life to admit to the influence of history. And thus the struggle to secure the safety of Israel, or in behalf of Soviet Jewry, or against anti-Semitism or an international terrorism whose primary target is the Jews continues to unite us—Conservative and Orthodox and Reform Jews. Yes, even the very people who are most fierce in voicing their disagreements on the theological level stand shoulder to shoulder—as brothers and sisters should—when it comes to these and kindred issues (e.g., when the presidents and executives of rabbinic associations meet regularly, Louis Bernstein of the Mizrachi and I usually are on the same side at meetings of the Zionist Executive; at the White House and in the State Department, Moshe Sherer of the Agudah refers to me as rabbi though he may not do so in his shul).

The fact remains that the evolving historical identity of the Jewish people will continue to grow, for Jewish history, like the Torah, belongs to no one single person or movement but to all Jews—to all who share the destiny of this people Israel.

All this is not to minimize our differences, to discount those divergences of view which obtain between Orthodoxy and non-Orthodoxy in our day. These differences are real enough. They involve such pivotal issues as the religious divorce and conversion and patrilineal descent. They cannot easily be resolved. Indeed, they are not likely to be resolved. But, if they cannot be resolved, we will simply have to live with them. And we *can* live with them as we have in the past, provided we accord each other mutual respect and refrain from questioning the integrity and intentions of those whose views we do not share.

I speak here, in the first instance, self-critically; mark that. In my volleys with Orthodoxy I have, in the heat of response to what I saw as attack, more than once indulged in the anger of the outcast, using words and invoking images and bitter analogies which I now regret. I confess too that there were times when I did not take into account the halachic difficulties that certain Reform innovations present to Orthodox Jews. I have responded in kind to the intransigence and zeal of Orthodoxy's most extreme spokespersons, using their scorn as an excuse for not truly striving to lessen the pain of others.

This is not to say that I retreat from any of the steps taken by Reform Judaism this past decade—only that these steps may have seemed less precipitous and threatening had we achieved a higher level of dialogue in advance of public pronouncement.

But the Orthodox, on their part, must realize how very deeply their intolerance wounds us, how we feel, for instance, when a leading halachic authority rules that a Reform Jew's aliyah is not an aliyah and his blessing is not a blessing because we don't believe in God and hence God does not hear the prayers of a Reform Jew. Does that not have a chilling resonance? I plead with my Orthodox colleagues to understand how hurt we are when the graveside of a revered Reform rabbi who made aliyah some years ago, after a distinguished career in Chicago, is violated—as it was in Israel only a few weeks ago when Orthodox extremists built a stone wall around his final resting place to segregate him from the other Jews who are buried there. Aye, and they must understand how deeply pained we are when another "*posek*," still another decisor of halachah, ordained, as he did earlier this year, that, if a Jew must escape impending disaster and he can find refuge in a church or a Conservative or Reform synagogue, the church is to be preferred.

Lema'an Hashem, is it fair to ask us to remain silent in the face of all this and much more? Can we really be expected to interpret these things as anything other than an effort to delegitimize us, to read us all out of the Jewish fold? Oh, I know that Orthodoxy sings the praises of *ahavat Yisrael* as a foremost virtue, and yet these excesses, let it be recognized, convey just the opposite message. And so does the eloquent silence from the overwhelming majority of Orthodox leaders.

And what shall we say about the persistent efforts to amend the Law of Return—spearheaded as they are by Chabad, by the Lubavitcher movement, and endorsed, at least publicly, by all of mainline Orthodoxy? How are we to read that? We are told that such an amendment will affect only a scant few, since only non-Orthodox converts are intended to be excluded and how many of them choose to go on aliyah? Well, to begin with, the number of such converts and their children is scarcely insignificant. They number in the hundreds of thousands by now in America alone, and their children exceed the half-million mark by far.

True enough, few of these Jews-by-choice plan to go on aliyah—today. But was Israel created only for such a time as this? Israel was established as a haven of refuge for all who are potentially victimized because of their Jewishness. The attempt to narrow its definition, therefore, is unacceptable; indeed, it is morally reprehensible. Safe harbor for Jews, the unreserved embrace of Klal Yisrael for its persecuted children—that is what the Law of Return

represents. It is a life preserver in a world that asks not, "What kind of a Jew are you?" before drowning us in hatred, intolerance, and oppression. To tamper with the Law of Return is to tamper with Jewish life and flesh and bone and heart and soul.

Let me note in this connection that, while I have on occasion been guilty of hyperbole in defending Reform against the onslaughts of the politicized Orthodox establishment, I have never been guilty of attacking either Orthodox Jews or Orthodox Judaism per se. Indeed, I deem Orthodoxy essential to Jewish life. I was raised by parents who taught me to respect Orthodoxy and those who practice it.

But that Orthodoxy which I was taught to revere, as a young man, manifested a good deal of modesty. It did not lay claim to an all-exclusive authenticity. It did not presume to know with a certainty what the Holy One, blessed be He, demanded and whom He deemed acceptable in His eyes. It did not wear armor in the name of righteousness or wield the sword to trim the beards of other Jews.

Religious triumphalism must be banished from our table. Simply put, though not simply achieved. I know what is required is the emergence and amplification of more Orthodox voices such as those of Yitz Greenberg and Emanuel Rackman and Eliezer Berkovitz. The genius of these men is in building bridges, not citadels of intolerance. We need to see them strengthen their hand, vie more actively for influence, reach out especially to the Orthodox laity who I believe would welcome the refreshing breeze of dialogue among Jews.

Let us then earnestly dialogue, building as many channels of discourse as are humanly possible. Concretely, I propose the following:

- ... exchange of pulpits, wherever feasible.
- ... positive reportage and attitudes in our publications.
- ... a review of our Jewish educational materials in order to make certain that the views of those who differ from us are presented without bias.
- ... exchanges on a lay level, especially for our youth, through joint meetings, retreats, and summer camp experiences. Our youth, alas, is already a victim of our differences.
- ... joint studies involving the faculty members of our various seminaries. We might be able to evolve a transdenominational approach to such vexing, divisive issues as intermarriage and conversion. But, even if we don't, even if we start with less controversial subjects, such a process of joint study will be unifying.
- ... we ought to jointly establish a regular, no less than quarterly, forum or some kind of instrumentality to air differences and ex-

plore possible compromises—not binding on any one, but at least with the imprimatur of various schools of thought. Such a forum could also help define issues of common cause and strengthen our sense of alliance.

Such a multifaceted dialogue is possible if all of us appropriate the resources necessary for it—above all, if we accord each other respect and if the "what" and not the "who" becomes the object of our quest—by which I mean, for example, that we will endeavor to determine *what* the requirements for conversion should be, not *who* is doing the converting. Indeed, many Reform rabbis insist on extensive preparatory study and many require that the minutiae of halachah regarding conversion—including *milah* and *tevilah*—are observed. Yet these conversions are disqualified by the Orthodox, not because of what is done, but because the officiants are not Orthodox.

In his excellent article in last December's issue of *Moment*, that giant of the spirit, Harold Schulweis, points to the historic, passionate dialogue between the Houses of Hillel and Shammai as the prime example of respectful Jewish conflict.

Between the two schools, "so Harold reminds us," a spirit of trust and respect prevailed. Each informed the other when practices contrary to the rulings of the other school were being enacted. . . . And if. . . the House of Hillel was entitled to have the halachah fixed in agreement with its rulings, that was. . . due to the kindness and modesty of the House of Hillel. For the House of Hillel studied the arguments of its opponents and even mentioned the words of Shammai before its own.

It is in this spirit that I would like now to discuss most briefly two issues which are the cause of much misunderstanding between Orthodox and Reform: (1) Inter-marriage-conversion and (2) patrilineal descent.

On the first issue there is the wide impression, indeed it is a charge frequently leveled against Reform, that we are somehow encouraging of intermarriage and that we embrace anyone and everyone as a Jew without restraint or requirement. This is simply not the truth. It is an unwarranted accusation.

Reform is unalterably opposed to intermarriage, even as are the Orthodox and Conservative religious communities. We oppose such marriages on human grounds because they are more likely to founder and end in divorce, as the statistics indeed attest. But, above all, we oppose intermarriage on Jewish religious grounds because there is the ever present danger of the attenuation of our identity and a decline in our numeric strength. And so we resist intermarriage

with every resource at our command. The resources and programs of the Reform movement are devoted to building Jewish identity and literacy in the hope of forestalling intermarriage.

But the reality is that our best efforts do not suffice, nor do those of the other branches of Judaism. We live in an open society and intermarriage is the sting which comes to us with the honey of our freedom. More than ever before, our young people meet and go to school, work, and live alongside non-Jews. Ultimately, many determine to choose them as life partners, not to escape from being Jews, but simply because they have fallen in love.

When they do, what should our policy be? It is here that Reform diverges from the pattern of the past, for we have determined not to sit shivah over our children. Though persisting in our rejection of intermarriage, we refuse to reject the intermarried. On the contrary, we have resolved to love them all the more. We do everything we humanly can to draw them closer to us. We try to involve them in Jewish life and in the life of our community, in the hope of bringing the non-Jewish partner to Judaism or at least to make certain that the children issuing from these marriages, our children's children, and their children in turn—*ledor vador*—will, in fact, be reared as Jews and share the destiny of this people Israel. We believe this is the wiser course. We believe that this course in no way violates the Jewish tradition and that it is more in harmony with its more compassionate strain as it is exemplified in the chasidic story of the father who came to his rebbe with the plaint that his son was a wastrel. "What should I do," he asked in his despair. The rebbe enjoined, "Love him all the more!"

Now to the matter of patrilineal descent. I am sure that most of you are familiar with what is involved here, but, just in case you are not, let me offer a brief explanation: As you know, for the past fifteen hundred years or so, Jewish identity was determined by the maternal line alone. Halachah, religious law as interpreted by traditional Jews for centuries, ruled that the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father is *automatically* Jewish, whereas the child of a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father is *not* regarded as a Jew and must first undergo conversion. If the mother is Jewish, the child is Jewish, no matter what. But, if only the father is Jewish, his children must be formally converted to Judaism in order to be regarded as Jews. The recent Reform decision on patrilineal descent eliminates the distinction between men and women, between fathers and mothers. It holds that, insofar as genealogy is a factor in determining Jewishness, the maternal and the paternal lines should be given equal weight.

But the Reform resolution on Jewish identity does not limit itself to genealogy, and in this sense Reform is more stringent than is

Orthodoxy. Tradition confers Jewishness automatically if the mother is Jewish. Reform Judaism does not. It sets some added requirements. Reform insists that, while the child of either a Jewish father or a Jewish mother may be considered Jewish, Jewishness must be further confirmed by "acts of identification with the Jewish people" and "the performance of mitzvot."

Let me read the operative section of that resolution since it is usually quoted, or rather misquoted, only in part:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that the child of either Jewish parent is under the presumption of Jewish descent. This presumption of the Jewish status of the offspring of any mixed marriage is to be established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people. The performance of these mitzvot serves to commit those who participate in them, both parent and child, to Jewish life.

...mitzvot leading toward a positive and exclusive Jewish identity will include entry into the Covenant (Berit Milah), the acquisition of a Hebrew name, Torah study, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, and Kabbalat Torah (Confirmation). For those beyond childhood claiming Jewish identity, other public acts or declarations may be added or substituted after consultation with their rabbi.

As you can see, we truly are "machmirim," more stringent than Orthodoxy in the respect that genealogy alone does not suffice for us in establishing Jewish identity, not even if the mother is Jewish. Something more is needed. Jewishness cannot be transmitted merely through the genes. It must be expressed in some concrete way through an involvement in Jewish life and the willingness to share the fate of the Jewish people.

In this manner, incidentally, Reform eliminates some peculiar anomalies to which the more traditional approach gives rise. Let me give you a dramatic case in point: Traditional Judaism denies the Jewishness of Ben-Gurion's grandson because the mother was converted to Judaism by a Reform rabbi whilst it accords Jewishness to the grandson of Khrushchev because the mother was Jewish. Reform Judaism's more stringent approach overcomes such perplexities. We insist that genealogy alone is not enough, even as we broaden the genealogical definition to encompass fathers as well as mothers.

Now this broadened definition does not represent so complete a break with tradition as it might appear. In fact, in the early days of our history as a people, Judaism followed the paternal rather than the maternal line. The matrilineal principle did not always hold

sway. Quite the contrary, there was a time in Jewish life when the patrilineal principle was dominant, when children were considered Jewish primarily because their fathers were Jewish, even though their mothers were not.

Look at the Torah and see: The genealogical tables of the Bible are overwhelmingly patrilineal; it was the *male* line that determined descent and status. In matters of inheritance the patrilineal line alone was followed. Perhaps even more to the point, throughout the Tanach, the Jewishness of the children of non-Jewish mothers is never questioned. Solomon married many foreign wives, and the child of one of them, Rehoboam, succeeded him to the throne. Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest; yet her children were considered Jews, following the line of their father. Joseph married Asenath, the daughter of a priest of On. She certainly was not a Jewess; yet her children were reckoned as Jews because their father Joseph was a Jew. Indeed, even unto this day every male child of Israel is blessed with the blessing that he be like unto Ephraim and Manasseh, and this even though their mother's father was a priest who worshiped the sun in the heathen shrine at Heliopolis near Cairo.

In rabbinic literature, evidence of the patrilineal tradition continues to be manifest. It invokes the God of our *fathers* in prayer. It rules that we be summoned to the Torah by our *father's* name. It reminds us that we live by *zechut avot*, by the merit of our *fathers* alone. And, when a non-Jew is converted to Judaism according to the halachah, he or she is designated as a son or daughter of Abraham, *avinu*, our *father*.

Most significant of all, both the Torah and rabbinic law hold the male line absolutely dominant in matters affecting the priesthood. Whether one is a *kohen* or a *levi* depends on the *father's* priestly claim, not the mother's. If the father is good enough to bequeath the priestly status, why isn't he good enough to bequeath Jewishness? Reform concluded that he was—and hence its newer, and at the same time much older, definition of Jewishness.

There were, of course, contemporary reasons, sociological reasons that also prompted the Reform rabbinate to act as it did, and all of them have to do with intermarriage. The first is rooted in the fact that most intermarriages take place between Jewish men and non-Jewish women. In the case of divorce, the father's right to determine Jewishness of his offspring must be protected.

Second, we cannot ignore the sensitivity of children issuing from such marriages, who, barring a declaration on our part that they are fully Jewish, were bound to believe that they are not really Jewish. And remember, once again, that Jewish sociologists estimate that

there are no less than 300,000 mixed marriages in the United States with twice as many children, and the number of both is growing in geometric progression.

How do you think these children feel, though they were circumcized and reared Jewishly with the consent and cooperation of both parents, when they hear that only the child of a Jewish mother is Jewish. When they grow up, some of them find the strength to speak of their silent pain. Thus, several years ago, I received the following letter from a young woman named Adrienne Gorman, the daughter of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother:

When I read your speech, I realized how deeply the subject of Jewish identity has wounded me . . . and how successfully I had covered the wound through the years. I was raised to be aware that some part of me was Jewish and that with that birthright came the responsibility to remember the six million victims of the holocaust—to remember them, not as a detached humanitarian who, on principle, abhors extermination, but on a far more fundamental level, where the soul of the witness resides.

I can't recall when I first came to understand that my sort of allegiance was to be considered nothing more than a sympathizer's or when I tried to answer for myself the question of what choice I would make if Hitler came again, this time using the halachic definition of a Jew in rounding up his candidates for the ovens and the camps. But at some point over the years I did decide that, where my father's faith—or more precisely, his heritage—was an issue, I would without reservation take my stand as a Jew.

Thus, I effectively bestowed on myself all of the deficits of being a member of an oppressed group with none of the benefits of that community. Jews consider me a non-Jew, non-Jews consider me a Jew . . . and, with a despair tinged with as much humor as I could muster, I began to think of myself as nothing at all.

How could we fail to respond to such a person? Why should we demand that she undergo a formal conversion? Why should we not say to the Adriennes of this world:

By God, you are a Jew. You are the daughter of a Jewish parent. You have resolved to share our fate. You are therefore flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone. You are in all truth what you consider yourself to be—a Jew.

I, for one, am glad that the Reform rabbinate has taken its step. The denial of such a declaration has caused far too many people far too much suffering. And so I am happy that we have finally offered them recognition.

I do not expect what I have said to persuade anyone. I merely want to explain our motivations and demonstrate the earnestness of our concerns. Reform does not make changes in order to offend other Jews. Nor do we make changes in order to make ourselves more palatable to others and to enlarge our numbers. Our changes, including the patrilineal resolution, are born of necessity and conviction. They are entirely worthy of our essential character and history as a Jewish religious movement.

Only one more commentary in this connection: It may seem "chutzpadik" but I do not mean this in any pejorative sense. I do devoutly wish that the *poskim* of our times, the Orthodox decisors of the Law, were just a little bit more daring in halachic creativity, more responsive to the human needs of men and women—Jews living in a changing world. Maybe then, Reform would not have to be quite so daring and innovative in *its* decisions. The two movements would be infinitely more congruent.

But, above all, do I wish that ever more Orthodox rabbis and lay leaders would be prepared to admit what is manifestly true—that the Torah is capable of more than one interpretation and that, of its many faces, the most authentic is the one that reflects, not only the wisdom of the Torah, but its heart.

Let me end as I began with the assertion of our essential unity which has persisted and will continue to persist, please God, despite our divergences. We allowed for such diversity even in times when we were endangered and embattled. Shall we not do so today when we are so very much more secure? We have become a people who need not hunker down into conformity for survival's sake. We can afford to proliferate and to evolve. Indeed, we must—if we are to survive and to grow in creative continuity. Let us therefore regard those words which denote us in our many-splendored diversity—words like Orthodox, Reform, secular, and whatnot—let us regard those qualifying words for what they really are: adjectives and not nouns. The noun is Jew. *Vos mir zaynen zaynen mir—ober Yiden zaynen mir*. Whatever we may be, we may be, but, this above all, we are, we are Jews.

If nothing else, the memory of the *shoah* should impel us to do so. It is a memory that weighs heavy upon us. It constitutes a lasting, impelling mandate for unity. Let us never forget that those who sought to destroy us made no distinctions between us. They killed us all, whatever our "qualifying adjective," yea, even those who were accepted as Jews by non-Orthodox rabbis or whose fathers were Jewish though their mothers were not. Even as we were brothers and sisters in death, so must we ever remain brothers and sisters in life.



איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
838 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

ADDRESS BY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER, PRESIDENT
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

"WILL THERE BE ONE JEWISH PEOPLE
BY THE YEAR 2000?"

CLAL CONFERENCE ON JEWISH UNITY

MARCH 16, 1986

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Let me begin by thanking Rabbi Greenberg for bringing us all together. He fears a schism in our midst, a rift so large that it will tear the Jewish people asunder. And he has resolved to do something about it. Indeed, he has bent all his energies to the task of averting the dangers he perceives. For this he has my respect and my affection, my ear and my active participation. I salute him and I avow that if there is even the remotest danger of such a schism within Jewish life, we ought -- all of us -- to labor to prevent it.

But having said that, I must quickly add that I am not nearly as alarmed as Yitz Greenberg and some others appear to be. I hold a different judgment about the imminence of such a breach.

First of all, I would observe that our disputations, such as they are, are almost solely limited to the professional class -- rabbi vs. rabbi -- and have not truly inflamed the passions of our people. True, our various synagogue affiliations tend to separate us one from the other on the Sabbath and the weekdays -- some will go to Orthodox shuls, and some to Conservative synagogues and some to Reform congregations. And many, far too many of our people go to no Jewish places of worship at all. This my friends is the great problem that all of us here, in all our denominations, must address -- but that's for another day. Today we are gathered to discuss the differences among those who do believe in the synagogue, and I say to you that these differences are as naught compared with the gulf that divides Jews who observe the Mitzvot in whatever fashion and ~~those who ignore them~~. Yes, there are differences, but my travels across this land tell me that they are more often a matter of happenstance than of ideological fervor, more frequently a question of how convenient a synagogue is or how friendly the rabbi than of any strong commitment to one branch of Judaism over another.

Perhaps this is a testament to the democratic currents within American Jewish life. Perhaps, on the other hand, it indicates a weakness in synagogue life, an arbitrariness to Jewish patterns of affiliation. However we interpret it, let us be humbled by the fact that our so-called schism is consciously that only at leadership levels, and only among some leaders. Truly, the greatest danger arising from our wranglings is not that the Orthodox refuse to recognize Reform conversions or Conservative shofar blowing, but rather that the great mass of unaffiliated Jews will be so put off by what they see as pilpul that they will say "a plague on all your houses."

Second, I would remind us that feuding is hardly new to Jewish life. So much of the present day foreboding is predicated on the erroneous

assumption that all was sweetness and light in the past, that before these latest altercations between Orthodoxy and Reform, harmony prevailed, that there was then in that golden and peaceful past a universal consensus uniting the Jewish world.

That is a gross misreading of Jewish history, of course. At no time did such an ideological consensus obtain. In virtually every era of our people's past there were sharp ideological disputations setting Jews in opposition to one another not just on political and social issues, but in the religious realm as well -- especially in the latter -- yet the Jewish world did not fracture.

Remember the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, or the contentions between Saadya Gaon and Ben Meir when their respective followers celebrated Rosh Hashono and Pessach on different dates. Or think of the refusal of the Sephardim to heed the Cherem of Rabbenu Gershon on polygamy. Or recall more recent times when the Chassidim opposed the Misnagdim. Both opposed the Maskilim, who split into Zionists left and right, secular and religious, as well as Bundists. And in every age there were Halachik authorities who rejected one another. Despite all of these conflicts and more, the center of the Jewish world held.

Let it be noted, moreover, that some of these conflicts were infinitely more fierce and even violent than are today's argumentations. The strife between the Misnagdim and the Chassidim was the most brutal of all. These antagonists did not limit themselves to occasional rhetorical outbursts, as we do today. They attacked one another physically, denounced their opponents to the authorities and had them imprisoned.

Perhaps even more to the point, not a few times before our own time, did the extremists of one camp reuse to give their children permission to marry the sons and daughters of the opposing camp. But cooler heads prevailed, and the Jewish world remained intact.

If such insistence on ethnic exclusivity and ideological purity did not work in the past it will not work in our day. Our children will insist on making that decision themselves. If two Jews fall in love and wish to marry, they are going to marry. Who will stop them? They will scarcely be put off by the fear of not being halakhically pure, nor will their parents. Most of them will thank their lucky stars that their children have chosen a Jew as a life mate. In the final analysis, the laity, the people, will shape the terms of communal interaction, and a sane and sensitive rabbinate will respond to its will, yea even an Orthodox rabbinate, which, I am confident, will find a halachik remedy as it always has. After all, the reluctance to exclude Jews from the family fellowship of Israel is a dominant motif which permeates the Halacha along with its more restrictive strains.

Be that as it may, time and again through our long and stormy past we have seen the chasm stretch in peaceful contemplation and violent conflict, over the most elusive definition of Jewishness: religion? people? nation? national minority? religious civilization? without ever

agreeing on one answer, we have nonetheless defined ourselves as One.

Moreover, we share a living history which is partner to the Torah in defining our Jewish identity. In our day, for instance, all but the most extreme forces of the right and left -- such as the Satmer Chassidim or the fading relics of the American Council for Judaism -- have adjusted their perspectives on Jewish life to admit to the influence of history. And thus the struggle to secure the safety of Israel, or in behalf of Soviet Jewry, or against anti-Semitism or an international terrorism whose primary target are the Jews, continues to unite is -- Conservative and Orthodox and Reform Jews, yes even the very people who are most fierce in voicing their disagreements on the theological level, stand shoulder to shoulder -- as brothers and sisters should -- when it comes to these and kindred issues. e.g., the presidents and executives of rabbinic associations meet regularly, Louis Bernstein of the Mizrachi and I usually are on the same side at meetings of the Zionist Executive. At the White House and in the State Department, Moshe Sherer of the Aguda refers to me as Rabbi though he may not do so in his shul.

The fact remains that the evolving historical identity of the Jewish people will continue to grow, for Jewish history, like the Torah, belongs to no one single person or movement, but to all Jews. to all who share the destiny of this people Israel.

All this is not to minimize our differences, to discount those divergences of view which obtain between Orthodoxy and non-Orthodoxy in our day. These differences are real enough. They involve such pivotal issues as the religious divorce and conversion and patrilineal descent. They cannot easily be resolved. Indeed, they are not likely to be resolved. But if they cannot be resolved, we will simply have to live with them. And we can live with them as we have in the past, provided we accord each other mutual respect and refrain from questioning the integrity and intentions of those whose views we do not share.

I speak here, in the first instance, self critically; mark that. In my volleys with Orthodoxy I have in the heat of response to what I saw as attack more than once indulged in the anger of the outcast, using words and invoking images and bitter analogies which I now regret. I confess too that there were times when I did not take into account the Halachik difficulties that certain Reform innovations present to Orthodox Jews. I have responded in kind to the intransigence and zeal of Orthodoxy's most extreme spokespersons, using their scorn as an excuse for not truly striving to lessen the pain of others.

This is not to say that I retreat from any of the steps taken by Reform Judaism this past decade -- only that these steps may have seemed less percipitous and threatening had we achieved a higher level of dialogue in advance of public pronouncement.

But the Orthodox, on their part, must realize how very deeply their intolerance wounds us, how we feel, for instance, when a leading Halachik authority rules that a Reform Jew's aliyah is not an aliyah and his bless-

ing is not a blessing because we don't believe in God and hence God does not hear the prayers of a Reform Jew. Does that not have a chilling resonance? I plead with my Orthodox colleagues to understand how hurt we are when the graveside of a revered Reform Rabbi who made aliyah some years ago, after a distinguished career in Chicago, is violated -- as it was in Israel only a few weeks ago -- when Orthodox extremists built a stone wall around his final resting place to segregate him from the other Jews who are buried there. Aye, and they must understand how deeply pained we are when another 'posek', still another decisor of Halacha ordained as he did earlier this year, that if a Jew must escape impending disaster, and he can find refuge in a church or a Conservative or Reform synagogue, the church is to be preferred.

L'ma-an hashem, is it fair to ask us to remain silent in the face of all this and much more? Can we really be expected to interpret these things as anything other than an effort to delegitimize us, to read us all out of the Jewish fold? Oh, I know that Orthodoxy sings the praises of ahavat Yisrael as a foremost virtue, and yet these excesses, let it be recognized, convey just the opposite message. And so does the eloquent silence from the overwhelming majority of Orthodox leaders.

And what shall we say about the persistent efforts to amend the Law of Return - spear-headed as they are by Chabad, by the Lubavitcher movement, and endorsed, at least publicly, by all of mainline Orthodoxy? How are we to read that? We are told that such an amendment will affect only a scant few, since only non-Orthodox converts are intended to be excluded, and how many of them choose to go on aliyah? Well, to begin with, the number of such converts and their children is scarcely insignificant. They number in the hundreds of thousands, in America alone, and their children exceed the half-million mark by far. by nov

True enough few of these Jews-by-Choice plan to go on aliyah-- today. But was Israel created only for such a time as this? Israel was established as a haven of refuge for all who are potentially victimized because of their Jewishness. The attempt to narrow its definition, therefore, is unacceptable, indeed, it is morally reprehensible. Safe harbor for Jews, the unreserved embrace of K'lal Yisrael for its persecuted children -- that is what the Law of Return represent. It is a life preserver in a world that asks not "What kind of a Jew are you?," before drowning us in hatred, intolerance and oppression. To tamper with the Law of Return is to tamper with Jewish life and flesh and bone and heart and soul.

Let me note in this connection that while I have on occasion been guilty of hyperbole in defending Reform against the onslaughts of the politicized Orthodox establishment, I have never been guilty of attacking either Orthodox Jews, or Orthodox Judaism per se. Indeed, I deem Orthodoxy essential to Jewish life. I was raised by parents who taught me to respect Orthodoxy and those who practice it.

But that Orthodoxy which I was taught to revere, as a young man, manifested a good deal of modesty. It did not lay claim to an all-exclusive authenticity. It did not presume to know with a certainty what the Holy One blessed be He demanded, and whom He deemed acceptable in His eyes. It did not wear armor in the name of righteousness or wield the sword to trim the beards of other Jews.

Religious triumphalism must be banished from our table. Simply put -- though not simply achieved, I know -- what is required is the emergence and amplification of more Orthodox voices such as those of Yitz Greenberg and Emanuel Rackman and Eliezer Berkovitz. The genius of these men is in building bridges, not citadels of intolerance. We need to see them strengthen their hand, vie more actively for influence, reach out especially to the Orthodox laity who I believe would welcome the refreshing breeze of dialogue among Jews.

Let us then earnestly dialogue, building as many channels of discourse as are humanly possible. Concretely, I propose the following:

- ...exchange of pulpits, wherever feasible.
- ...positive reportage and attitudes in our publications.
- ...a review of our Jewish educational materials in order to make certain that the views of those who differ from us are presented without bias.
- ...exchanges on a lay level, especially for our youth through joint meetings, retreats and summer camp experiences. Our youth, alas, is already a victim of our differences.
- ...joint studies involving the faculty members of our various seminaries. We might be able to evolve a transdenominational approach to such vexing, divisive issues as inter-marriage and conversion. But even if we don't, even if we start with less controversial subjects, such a process of joint study will be unifying.
- ...we ought to jointly establish a regular, no less than quarterly, forum or some kind of instrumentality to air differences and explore possible compromises -- not binding on any one, but at least with the imprimatur of various schools of thought. Such a forum could also help define issues of common cause and strengthen our sense of alliance.

Such a multi-faceted dialogue is possible, if all of us appropriate the resources necessary for it -- above all, if we accord each other respect and if the "what" and not the "who" becomes the object of our

quest -- by which I mean, for example, that we will endeavor to determine what the requirements for conversion should be, not who is doing the converting. Indeed, many Reform rabbis insist on extensive preparatory study and many require that the minutiae of Halacha regarding conversion -- including mila and tevila -- are observed. Yet these conversions are disqualified by the Orthodox not because of what is done, but because the officiants are not Orthodox.

In his excellent article in last December's issue of Moment, that giant of the spirit, Harold Schulweis, points to the historic, passionate dialogue between the House of Hillel and Shammai as the prime example of respectful Jewish conflict.

"Between the two schools," so Harold reminds us, "a spirit of trust and respect prevailed. Each informed the other when practices contrary to the rulings of the other school were being enacted..And if..the House of Hillel was entitled to have the halacha fixed in agreement with its rulings, that was ...due to the kindness and modesty of the House of Hillel. For the House of Hillel studied the arguments of its opponents and even mentioned the words of Shammai before its own."

It is in this spirit that I would like now to discuss most briefly two issues which are the cause of much mis-understanding between Orthodox and Reform:

(1) Intermarriage-conversion and (2) patrilineal descent.

On the first issue there is the wide impression, indeed it is a charge frequently levelled against Reform, that we are somehow encouraging of intermarriage and that we embrace anyone and everyone as a Jew without restraint or requirement. This is simply not the truth. It is an unwarranted accusation.

Reform is unalterably opposed to intermarriage, even as are the Orthodox and Conservative religious communities. We oppose such marriages on human grounds: because they are more likely to founder and end in divorce, as the statistics indeed attest. But above all, we oppose intermarriage on Jewish religious grounds, because there is the ever present danger of the attenuation of our identity and a decline in our numeric strength. And so we resist intermarriage with every resource at our command. The resources and programs of the Reform movement are devoted to building Jewish identity and literacy in the hope of forestalling intermarriage.

nor do those of the other branches of Judaism.

But the reality is that our best efforts do not suffice. We live in an open society and intermarriage is the sting which comes to us with the honey of our freedom. More than ever before, our young people meet and go to school, work and live alongside non-Jews. Ultimately, many determine to choose them as life partners -- not to escape from being Jews, but simply because they have fallen in love.

When they do, what should our policy be? It is here that Reform diverges from the pattern of the past, for we have determined not to sit shiva over our children. Though persisting in our rejection of intermarriage, we refuse to reject the intermarried. On the contrary, we have resolved to love them all the more. We do everything we humanly can to draw them closer to us. We try to involve them in Jewish life and in the life of our community, in the hope of bringing the non-Jewish partner to Judaism, or at least to make certain that the children issuing from these marriages, our children's children, and their children in turn -- l'dor vedor -- will, in fact, be reared as Jews and share the destiny of this people Israel. We believe this is the wiser course. We believe that this course in no ways violates the Jewish tradition, and that it is more in harmony with its more compassionate strain as it is exemplified in the Chassidic story of the father who came to his rebbe with the plaint that his son was a wastrel.. "what should I do," he asked in his despair. The rebbe enjoined: "love him all the more!"

Now to the matter of patrilineal descent: I am sure that most of you are familiar with what is involved here, but just in case you are not, let me offer a brief explanation: As you know, for the past fifteen hundred years or so, Jewish identity was determined by the maternal line alone. Halacha, religious law as interpreted by traditional Jews for centuries, ruled that the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father is automatically Jewish, whereas the child of a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father is not regarded as a Jew and must first undergo conversion. If the mother is Jewish, the child is Jewish, no matter what. But if only the father is Jewish, his children must be formally converted to Judaism in order to be regarded as Jews. The recent Reform decision on Patrilineal descent eliminates the distinction between men and women, between fathers and mothers. It holds that insofar as genealogy is a factor in determining Jewishness, the maternal and the paternal line should be given equal weight.

But the Reform Resolution on Jewish identity does not limit itself to genealogy, and in this sense Reform is more stringent than is Orthodoxy. Tradition confers Jewishness automatically if the mother is Jewish. Reform Judaism does not. It sets some added requirements. Reform insists that while the child of either a Jewish father or a Jewish mother may be considered Jewish, Jewishness must be further confirmed by "acts of identification with the Jewish people" and "the performance of mitzvot."

Let me read the operative section of that Resolution, since it is usually quoted or rather misquoted only in part:

"The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that the child of either Jewish parent is under the presumption of Jewish descent. This presumption of the Jewish status of the offspring of any mixed marriage is to be established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people. The performance of these mitzvot serves

to commit those who participate in them, both parent and child, to Jewish life.

"...mitzvot leading toward a positive and exclusive Jewish identity will include entry into the Covenant (Brit Mila), the acquisition of a Hebrew name, Torah study, bar and bat mitzvah and Kabbalat Torah (confirmation). For those beyond childhood claiming Jewish identity, other public acts or declarations may be added or substituted after consultation with their rabbi."

As you can see, we truly are 'machmirim', more stringent than Orthodoxy in the respect that genealogy alone does not suffice for us in establishing Jewish identity, not even if the mother is Jewish. Something more is needed. Jewishness cannot be transmitted merely through the genes. It must be expressed in some concrete way through an involvement in Jewish life and the willingness to share the fate of the Jewish people.

In this manner, incidentally, Reform eliminates some peculiar anomalies to which the more traditional approach gives rise. Let me give you a dramatic case in point: Traditional Judaism denies the Jewishness of Ben Gurion's grandson because the mother was converted to Judaism by a Reform rabbi whilst it accords Jewishness to the grandson of Kruchev because the mother was Jewish. Reform Judaism's more stringent approach overcomes such perplexities. We insist that genealogy alone is not enough, even as we broaden the genealogical definition to encompass fathers as well as mothers.

Now this broadened definition does not represent so complete a break with tradition, as it might appear. In fact, in the early days of our history as a people Judaism followed the paternal rather than the maternal line. The matrilineal principle did not always hold sway. Quite the contrary, there was a time in Jewish life when the patrilineal principle was dominant, when children were considered Jewish primarily because their fathers were Jewish, even though their mothers were not.

Look at the Torah and see:

The genealogical tables of the Bible are overwhelmingly patrilineal; it was the male line that determined descent and status. In matters of inheritance the patrilineal line alone was followed. Perhaps even more to the point, throughout the T'nach, the Jewishness of the children of non-Jewish mothers is never questioned. Solomon married many foreign wives, and the child of one of them, Rehoboam, succeeded him to the throne. Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest, yet her children were considered Jews, following the line of their father. Joseph married Asenath, the daughter of a Priest of On. She certainly was not a Jewess, yet her children were reckoned as Jews because their father Joseph was a Jew. Indeed, even unto this day every male child of Israel is blessed with the blessing that he be like unto Ephraim and Menasseh, and this even though their mother's father was a priest who worshipped the sun in the heathern shrine at Heliopolis near Cairo.

In rabbinic literature, evidence of the patrilineal tradition continues to be manifest. It invokes the God of our fathers in prayer. It rules that we be summoned to the Torah by our father's name. It reminds us that we live by zechut avot, by the merit of our fathers alone. And when a non-Jew is converted to Judaism according to the Halacha, he or she is designated as a son or daughter of Abraham, Avinu, our father.

Most significant of all, both the Torah and rabbinic law hold the male line absolutely dominant in matters affecting the priesthood. whether one is a cohen or a levi depends on the father's priestly claim, not the mother's. If the father is good enough to bequeath the priestly status why isn't he good enough to bequeath Jewishness? Reform concluded that he was, and hence its newer and at the same time much older definition of Jewishness.

There were, of course, contemporary reasons, sociological reasons that also prompted the Reform rabbinate to act as it did: and all of them have to do with intermarriage. The first is rooted in the fact that most intermarriages take place between Jewish men and non-Jewish women. In the case of divorce, the father's right to determine Jewishness of his offspring must be protected.

Second, we cannot ignore the sensitivity of children issuing from such marriages, who, barring a declaration on our part that they are fully Jewish, were bound to believe that they are really not Jewish... And remember, once again, that Jewish sociologists estimate that there are no less than 300,000 mixed marriages in the United States with twice as many children and the number of both is growing in geometric progression.

How do you think these children feel, though they were circumcized and reared Jewishly with the consent and cooperation of both parents, when they hear that only the child of a Jewish mother is Jewish. When they grow up, some of them find the strength to speak of their silent pain. Thus, several years ago I received the following letter from a young woman named Adrienne Gorman; the daughter of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother

"When I read your speech, I realize how deeply the subject of Jewish identity has wounded me ...and how successfully I had covered the wound through the years. I was raised to be aware that some part of me was Jewish, and that with that birthright came the responsibility to remember the six million victims of the holocaust -- to remember them not as a detached humanitarian who, on principle, abhors extermination, but on a far more fundamental level, where the soul of the witness resides.

"I can't recall when I first came to understand that my sort of allegiance was to be considered nothing more than a sympathizer's or when I tried to answer for myself the question of what choice I would make if Hitler came again., this time using the Halachic definition of a Jew in rounding up his candidates for the ovens and the camps. But at some point over the years I did decide that where my father's faith -- or more precisely, his heritage -- was an issue, I would without reservation take my stand as a Jew.

"Thus, I effectively bestowed on myself all of the deficits of being a member of an oppressed group with none of the benefits of that community. Jews consider me a non-Jew, non-Jews consider me a Jew..and with a despair tinged with as much humor as I could muster, I began to think of myself as nothing at all."

How could we fail to respond to such a person? Why should we demand that she undergo a formal conversion? Why should we not say to the Adriennes's of this world:

By God, you are a Jew. You are the daughter of Jewish parents. You have resolved to share our fate. You are therefore flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone. You are in all truth what you consider yourself to be --- a Jew.

I, for one, am glad that the Reform rabbinate has taken its step. The denial of such a declaration has caused far too many people far too much suffering. And so I am happy that we have finally offered them recognition.

I do not expect what I have said to persuade anyone. I merely want to explain our motivations and demonstrate the earnestness of our concerns. Reform does not make changes in order to offend other Jews. Nor do we make changes in order to make ourselves more palatable to others and to enlarge our numbers. Our changes, including the patrilineal resolution, are born of necessity and conviction. They are entirely worthy of our essential character and history as a Jewish religious movement.

Only one more commentary in this connection: It may seem 'chutzpedik' but I do not mean this in any pejorative sense. I do devoutly wish that the poskim of our times, the Orthodox decisors of the Law were just a little bit more daring in Halachik creativity, more responsive to the human needs of men and women -- Jews living in a changing world. Maybe then, Reform would not have to be quite so daring and innovative in its decisions. The two movements would be infinitely more congruent.

But, above all, do I wish that ever more Orthodox rabbis and lay leaders would be prepared to admit what is manifestly true, that the Torah is capable of more than one interpretation and that of its many faces, the most authentic is the one that reflects not only the wisdom of the Torah, but its heart.

Let me end as I began with the assertion of our essential unity which has persisted and will continue to persist, please God, despite our divergences. We allowed for such diversity even in times when we were endangered and embattled. Shall we not do so today when we are so very much more secure? We have become a people who need not hunker down into conformity for survival's sake. We can afford to proliferate and to evolve. Indeed, we must; if we are to survive and to grow in creative continuity. Let us therefore regard those words which denote us in our many-splendored diversity -- words like Orthodox, Reform, secular, and what not -- let

us regard those qualifying words for what they really are: adjectives and not nouns. The noun is Jew. Woz mir zennen zennen mir..ober yiden zennen mir. Whatever we may be, we may be, but this above all, we are, we are Jews.

If nothing else, the memory of the shoa should impel us to do so. It is a memory that weighs heavy upon us. It constitutes a lasting, impelling mandate for unity. Let us never forget that those who sought to destroy us made no distinctions between us. They killed us all, whatever our "qualifying adjective," yea even those who were accepted as Jews by non-Orthodox rabbis, or whose father were Jewish though their mothers were not. Even as we were brothers and sisters in death, so must we ever reamin borthers and sisters in life.