NL: you can still make changes.

(9) Pl. call Bernie & tell him that in rereading my ~~[illegible]~~ Foreword, I rather liked it & don't want any changes. But make sure to mention on fly-leaf: Meiselman's connection — YULA

Editor's Foreword

The feminist movement of recent years has, inevitably, turned its attention to the Jewish tradition. The critique of Judaism—specifically, of the role of Jewish women in Jewish law—has frequently been more hysterical than historical, more apoplectic than apodictic. The millennial Jewish concern for the protection of woman's welfare and dignity in a world where these were not at all taken for granted, was simply ignored or, worse, stood on its head. Nothing that the Jewish tradition had to say about women, it seemed, could be right. If a statement was openly misogynistic, it was taken to be characteristic of all Jews at all times. If it was clearly in favor of women, it was accused of being patronizing and condescending. Thus, advocates of the Jewish tradition were caught in a "double bind," and there was no opening for rational discourse and analysis.

Not all the criticism, of course, was part of this feminist frenzy. Some of the liberationist animadversions were measured and thoughtful. Even those who struck out wildly at almost every Jewish position were usually motivated by genuine concern and perplexity.

The action elicited an equivalent reaction. Defenders of the tradition either shouted back, matching decibel for decibel, or acted as if there was nothing to discuss. Whatever, the rhetoric was more notable for its temperature than for its luminosity.

The present volume by Dr. Moshe Meiselman is, to my knowledge, the first full treatment of the subject by a staunch advocate of the Jewish tradition, presented in a manner both thoughtful and scholarly. One need not agree with every position taken by the author to be grateful to him for his reasoned analysis and for the multitude of sources he has gathered to support his interpretations. But it is not agreement with his position that is important, as much as the opportunity to hear the quiet and reasoned analysis of a young Jewish scholar who knows his material, who has engaged the contemporary issues with respect and sympathy, and who asks only that we pause long enough to turn the debate into a dialogue.

The concerned layman and the scholar alike are surely indebted to Dr. Meiselman for this contribution.

NORMAN LAMM

August 5, 1976

Preface

The purpose of this work is to evaluate the issue of feminism from a Jewish perspective. Such an effort requires a study of certain fundamental areas of Jewish thought. The feminist critique of Judaism, as in fact much of contemporary life, is based on a very definite value structure which is at odds with Jewish values on a number of basic points. The book, therefore, begins with an introduction to the Jewish value system. This is followed by a brief analysis of the story of creation. In Jewish thought, the story of creation is not merely of historical interest. Its prime significance is that it puts into perspective certain essential aspects of the human personality. Therefore, an analysis of the creation of woman becomes important for any study of the position of woman in Jewish thought. Because the Bible views marriage and family as essential elements of the divine plan of creation, my treatment of these topics follows the discussion of creation. I then proceed to evaluate the position of women in Jewish law.

The range of topics required to evaluate properly the topic of the Jewish woman in Jewish law would fill many volumes. In any limited work, such as this one, the author must select the areas most germane to the interests of his audience. I have selected my topics with an eye to the current feminist critique of Judaism. Hence, some topics were omitted and others treated lightly.

This volume is an outgrowth of a series of lectures given by me at the Hillel Foundation of Northwestern University. The arranging of those lectures, and whatever success they enjoyed, is due in large part to the efforts and kindnesses of Rabbi Mark Gellman and Mr. Murray Goldenhersh. To them I give my thanks.