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Centrist

MODERN
ORTHODOXY

NORMAN LAMM

January 23, 1989

FOR: TORAH UMADA; CENTRIST ORTHODOXY--RE: HAREDI PROVINCIALISM

The January 13, 1989 edition of Der Yid, the Satmar organ (which announces itself as the "Voice of American Orthodox Jewry"), carries an article on page 45 by a Rabbi Landsman, one of a series on, "The Trials of the New Generation."

In this particular column, which otherwise has certain perceptive ideas on Talmud education, we read some rather astounding things about this group's formulation of the trials and temptations of being a Jew in the modern world. This particular article is directed to a relatively large amount of publication of halakhic works by people of suspect ideological purity. The Satmar Rebbe taught that no volume of pure Halakhah, even if it does not contain any questions of ideology, may be used if the author is not one of the "in-group," that is, those who identify with their brand of Orthodoxy.

In the previous issue of Der Yid, in the article by the same author in this series, he tells of the late Tzehlemer Rav, Rabbi Levi Greenwald, who in the middle of a sheur asked a student to bring him a classic halakhic work (Shitah Mekubetzet on Pesahim), and when the student brought it he noticed that it was a fairly new volume, and he asked who issued it. The student answered that it was a Gershuni (the rabbinic title was removed from the story, although Rabbi Yehuda Gershuni has been prominent for years as a distinguished talmudic scholar). The Tzehlemer Rav

inquired whether this was the same Gershuni who was active in Mizrachi, the organization of religious Zionism, and when the answer was affirmative he asked that the book be taken out immediately. When the student returned and the rabbi asked him what he did with the volume, and the student replied that he put it with the Shemot--the scraps of sacred literature that are prepared for being discarded and buried--the rabbi was alarmed and said, "No, that is not good enough; I want it out of this house altogether..."

How does one examine the religious credentials of standard halakhic works which are otherwise impeccable? The author--and presumably the community--seems to be fixated on two things: Not enough hair on the chin, and too much on the forehead. The very trimming of a beard disqualifies the author of a halakhic work from having his works studied by the Haredim, and the presence of too much hair on the forehead is equally a source of delegitimation.

But such insistence on mental strait-jackets and paranoid witch-hunting is not confined to the pages of a weekly newspaper. Thus we read in the responsa Be'er Mosheh, by Rabbi Moses Stern (the "Debrocziner Rav"--Brooklyn: Defus Balshon, 1970-1971), Chapter 3, where the author was asked if it is permitted to buy holy books, by those of the earlier and later authorities, which were printed in our times by various institutions and movements whose names are synonymous with heretics. His answer was that it is the duty of all rabbis and leaders of the generations to

proclaim both verbally and in writing that it is forbidden to purchase works from such publishers because, somehow, they will cause the innocent reader to be attracted to their false ideas. The following are some of the choice comments by one of the contemporary icons of Hungarian Haredim:

One may rightly fear that (the reader) will learn from (the author's) deeds, since he will detect in the book the latter's greatness in Torah, and therefore erroneously conclude that the author, with his great ability, determined that it is permissible to be a Zionist or a heretic,* and others of the sort. Or, for instance, if one studies from a book the author of which is a rosh yeshiva in some (sic!) Yeshiva University, and he will notice his great knowledgability in Torah, he will certainly, Heaven forbid, say that it is permissible to teach in Yeshiva University, and it is permissible to study there, since a rabbi as great in Torah as (the author) is stands at the head of it, whereas in truth he is blasphemous and abominable, as it is well known.

Making sure that the reader not misinterpret what he is saying, our author summarizes at the end of the responsum his conclusions, which contain some of the following gems:

Not to repeat in the Study Hall any dicdum or mention any halakhah from the books of Zionist or Mizrachi* rabbis;

Not to study any of the books of Zionist or Mizrachi* rabbis;

Not to study from any student of Yeshiva University.

Enough said.

*The term used is misrahim, a play of words on mizrahim. The former is a harsh, almost obscene word used for blasphemers and which means, "stinkers."

Some more "gems" from Der Yid:

December 23, 1988. An attack by the same author on the publishers of a children's biography of R. Aryeh Levin, the "Zaddik of Jerusalem." The writer agrees that Rabbi Levin was entitled to the honorific encomium by virtue of his simplicity, humility, hospitality, help to the broken-hearted and hopeless, etc. But there's the rub!--he was not discriminating in whom he succored, consoled, encouraged. The man actually risked his life to do acts of kindness to imprisoned members of the Irgun and Lehi (Stern gang) just before, during, and after the founding of the State! Moreover, he was a disciple of Kook (no rabbinic title provided; "Kook" is burned at the author's literary stake in a previous issue--December 16, 1988), which is a sure sign that he imbibed heresy. Other sins of the "Zaddik": he lit memorial candles to fallen Israeli soldiers on Mt. Herzl; is friendly with officials of the State; attended the Bar Mitzvah of the son of the "tragically apostate poet," Uri Zvi Greenberg. Such "poison," our author declares, has no right to be found in the home of devout Jews.