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This paper which was first delivered as a lecture at the Ideological Seminary of the World Union of Jewish Students in Kiljava, Finland in 1969 represents an attempt to provide an objective evaluation of one of today's most controversial movements. Rabbi Lamm, who served as Editor of *TRADITION* since its founding until 1961, is Erna Michael Professor of Jewish Philosophy at Yeshiva University and Rabbi of the Jewish Center in New York.

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE NETUREI KARTA

According to the Satmarer Version

The obscure but highly vocal group known as the Neturei Karta was born in 1935 when a few hundred members of Agudat Israel considered the Agudah too lenient to Zionist groups, and generally too moderate, and under Amram Blau seceded and formed the Neturei Karta. They number today several hundred families in Israel, and have followers and adherents in Brooklyn and several other centers throughout the Diaspora.

Neturei Karta means "Guardians of the City." The term appears in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Chag.* 1:7), which relates that three sages, under instructions from R. Judah the Prince, traveled through the land to make sure that every town had sufficient teachers of Bible and Mishnah. They came upon one town that had none, and said to the townsfolk: Show us your *Neturei Karta,* i.e., the guardians of the city. Thereupon they produced police (*Sentorei Karta* — sentries of the city). No, said the Rabbis, these are destroyers of the city. Who then are the Neturei Karta? They are the teachers and scribes, for without them a city is fated to destruction. Neturei Karta, therefore, are teachers of Torah by virtue of whom, despite their small number, the rest of the population survives.

The Neturei Karta come to our attention usually through acts of dramatic protest or minor violence, rarely serious. Their

publication is restricted largely to shrill posters, polemical pamphlets, and strident banners. The only serious works of any real consequence are by the aging "Satmarer Rebbe," R. Yoel Moshe Teitelbaum, a Rumanian Hasidic leader in the U.S.A. since the end of World War II.

It is true that the Neturei Karta is fragmentized around different personalities, and that — like all other groups — it contains elements that are more radical and some that are more conservative; some more pacific and "responsible," and some more militant and "reckless." There are differences between many of the Jerusalem group and the Rebbe from Williamsburg. Occasionally their inner dissensions have been exposed to public scrutiny and have proved most fascinating or bizarre — depending on one's perspective. However, all these internecine conflicts are not fundamentally ideological in nature but tactical; and whatever ideological differentia one can discern are not of sufficient significance to warrant detailed analysis by those not committed to its major premises. This article, therefore, will be confined to an exposition of the views of the Satmarer Rebbe, as detailed in his three volumes published in the last ten years: *Va-yoel Mosheh* (Vol. I—1959; II—1961)* and *Kunteres al ha-Geulah Ve'al ha-Temurah* (1967).** Their orientation is, in essence, the continuation of the strongly held views of the Hasidic dynasty of Muncacz and their Hungarian-Rumanian followers.

Now, these views are, by any current standards, extreme. Most Orthodox Jews — even non-Zionists and anti-Zionists — reject them, and many of them consider them reprehensible. Yet they represent a consistent ideology of Jewish life, and they are not without some basis in the classical Jewish sources. The Satmarer, of course, claims far more than this for his views. He sets out to demonstrate that his ideology is what we might call "mainstream" Judaism, and that his formulations flow naturally and logically from the classical sources of the Jewish tra-

*Hereinafter to be referred to as *VM;* citations and references to Vol. I only.
**Hereinafter to be referred to as *GT.*

dition: Bible, Talmud, medieval scholars, etc. The author does not hesitate to offer a program of action which includes extremely radical suggestions. It is a major achievement, although I am convinced that the arguments are often contrived, always one-sided, and decidedly extravagant.

The context in which the discourses proceed is that of the Jewish theology of history, which revolves around the two poles of *galut* (exile) and *geulah* (redemption). We are now in a major exile which will ultimately result in the final Redemption, ushered in by the Messiah, descendant of David, the original *Mashiach* or King anointed by the Lord.

The Messianic concept is subject to a vast variety of interpretations and is one of the most fertile ideas in Judaism. Mainly, he is conceived of as the divine instrument of the redemption of the Jewish people, leading to their independence, their restoration to the Land of Israel, and the rebuilding of the Third Temple; and through the renaissance of Israel, to the redemption of all mankind, ushering in an era of universal peace and justice.

Now, Messianism is a highly corruptible idea — the whole sad history of pseudo-Messiahs, from Jesus through Sabbatai Zevi, amply demonstrates its vulnerability. But it bespeaks an optimistic view of life, an imperishable hope for a happy ending to history, a powerful faith in the divine promise of redemption for His exiled people.

Within this rubric, there are large gaps. Normative Judaism itself has a tremendous history of Messianic speculation, some of it more authoritative, some less so. How we treat this literature, how "normative" we consider it, will determine, to a large extent, our view of current events.

Against this background, sketched in all too briefly, we may discern four major premises in the Neturei Karta ideology as formulated by the Satmarer.

A. *Divine Redemption and Human Passivity.*

God alone will redeem Israel in a supernatural, miraculous manner (*VM* — 126, 7), making His power manifest. Israel

will remain passive as history comes to an end without human intervention. All Israel must do is submit to the yoke of exile while it waits faithfully and lives in accordance with the divine will, i.e., Torah (*ib.* 10). The Neturei Karta do not accept the view that Messiah will have primarily a political function — ensuring Israel's restoration and independence — and insists instead upon seeing his advent as the occasion for cosmic changes and indisputable miraculous events. Man's contribution is purely spiritual; his "waiting" is, politically speaking, utterly passive.

The Satmarer acknowledges that in other areas, such as earning a livelihood and promoting health, divine governance of human affairs does not contradict human initiative; but he asserts, without adequate distinction, that this does not apply to the redemption of Israel — here only God can act, not man (*VM,* 137). In effect, he seizes upon one strand in the complex Jewish tradition, that of religious quietism, and transforms it into the very fountainhead of Judaism; what we might call "quietistic apoliticism" becomes for him the fundamental expression of Jewish faith. Hence, he considers the very idea of an independent Jewish State, before or without Messiah, as heretical. Political initiative is a gesture of defiance of the divine Redeemer (*VM,* 7); it is an act of arrogance, and is "cynical" or dog-like (*VM,* 113).

The major source for the Satmarer is the passage in the Talmud (*Ket.* 111a) which raises a halakhic problem as to whether husband and wife can legally compel each other to change residence from the Land of Israel to Babylon and vice-versa. Appended to this is a lengthy discourse, based on Scriptural verses, in which a tradition is recorded that at the destruction of the Temple and the beginning of exile, God administered a number of oaths; four of them are especially relevant. God made Israel swear that they will not use force in a mass return to the Land of Israel; that they will remain loyal to the countries of their dispersion; and that they will not take the initiative in hastening the advent of Messiah prematurely. Also, he adjured the gentile nations that they not oppress Israel in exile

more than is necessary or bearable. Now, everyone agrees that the other nations violated their oath; about this there can be no argument. Some Talmudists, such as R. Meir Simchah of Dvinsk, maintain that the oaths are all interdependent, they constitute one package-deal; and since the gentiles violated their oath, Israel is released from its oaths which are null and void. The Satmarer, however, considers this interpretation as both heresy and nonsense (*VM*, 135).

Now, the key here is the distinction between Halakhah (law) and Aggadah (the non-legal portions of the Talmud — such as legend, ethics, general wisdom, etc.). Halakhah is normative, decisive, and follows a systematic form. Aggadah, though possessing mines of Jewish teaching, is non-legal, and hence does not require any decision between competing points of view. It is given to hyperbole and is non-normative.

The Satmarer insists that our passage concerning the oaths, despite its obvious non-legal style and form, is not Aggadah but Halakhah (*VM* 12), and he proceeds to apply to it the whole, complex, systematic halakhic methodolgy of analysis and decision. The results are often grotesque. For instance, this involves him in a number of immediate difficulties — such as Maimonides' omission of the whole passage of "oaths" from his legal code in the Laws of Kings, where he discusses Messiah. The author's response is fanciful, to say the least. He asserts that the "oaths" are not technically oaths but — far more than oaths! They are fundamentals of Judaism, the essence of the faith, and hence not classifiable as ordinary *halakhot* (*VM* 67).

In order to overcome Maimonides' rational, non-miraculous interpretation of Messianism, he resorts to a rather modernistic point. In a famous passage, Maimonides (Laws of Kings, Chap. XII) declares:

> (1) Let no one think that in the days of the Messiah any of the laws of nature will be set aside, or any innovation be introduced into creation. The world will follow its normal course. The words of Isaiah: "And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid" (Isa. 11:6) are to be understood figuratively meaning that Israel will live securely among the wicked of the heathens who are likened to wolves and leopards, as it is written:

"A wolf of the deserts doth spoil them, a leopard watcheth over their cities" (Jer. 5:) . . .

(2) Said the Rabbis: "The sole difference between the present and the Messianic days is delivery from servitude to foreign powers" (B. *San.* 91b). Taking the words of the Prophets in their literal sense, it appears that the inauguration of the Messianic era will be marked by the war of Gog and Magog; that prior to that war, a prophet will arise to guide Israel and set their hearts aright, as it is written: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet" (Mal. 3:23). He (Elijah) will come neither to declare the clean unclean, nor the unclean clean; neither to disqualify those who are presumed to be of legitimate descent, nor to pronounce qualified those who are presumed to be of illegitimate descent, but to bring peace in the world, as it is said: "And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" (Mal. 3:24).

Some of our Sages say that the coming of Elijah will precede the advent of the Messiah. But no one is in a position to know the details of this and similar things until they have come to pass. They are not explicitly stated by the Prophets. Nor have the Rabbis any tradition with regard to these matters. They are guided solely by what the scriptural texts seem to imply. Hence there is a divergence of opinion on the subject. But be that as it may, neither the exact sequence of those events nor the details thereof constitute religious dogmas. No one should ever occupy himself with the legendary themes or spend much time on midrashic statements bearing on this and like subjects. He should not deem them of prime importance, since they lead neither to the fear of God nor to the love of Him. Nor should one calculate the end. Said the Rabbis: "Blasted be those who reckon out the end" (B. *San.* 97b). One should wait (for his coming) and accept in principle this article of faith, as we have stated before.

(3) In the days of King Messiah, when his kingdom will be established and all Israel will gather around him, their pedigrees will be determined by him through the Holy Spirit which wil rest upon him, as it is written: 'And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier . . .' (Mal. 3:3). First he will purify the descendants of Levi, declaring: "This one, of good birth, is a priest; this one, of good birth, is a Levite." Those who are not of good birth will be demoted to the rank of (lay) Israelites, for it is written: "And the Tirshatha said unto them that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Tummim" (Ezra 2:62). It is inferred there-

from that the genealogy of those considered to be of good lineage will be traced by means of the Holy Spirit, and those found to be of good birth will be made known. The descent of the Israelites will be recorded according to their tribes. He will announce: "This one is of such-and-such a tribe, and this one of such-and-such a tribe." But he will not say concerning those who are presumed to be of pure descent: "This is a bastard; this is a slave." For the rule is: once a family has been intermingled with others, it retains its status.

(4) The Sages and Prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah that Israel might exercise dominion over the world, or rule over the heathens, or be exalted by the nations, or that it might eat and drink and rejoice. Their aspiration was that Israel be free to devote itself to the Law and its wisdom, with no one to oppress or disturb it, and thus be worthy of life in the world to come.

(5) In that era there will be neither famine nor war, neither jealousy nor strife. Blessings will be abundant, comforts within the reach of all. The one preoccupation of the whole world will be to know the Lord . . .

Such sentiments, which Maimonides considers Halakhah, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be reconciled with the whole temper, let alone the details, of the Neturei Karta view of the Messiah. The Satmarer, however, points to the Messianic speculations in the famous "Epistle to Yemen" where Maimonides' thinking is considerably closer to the traditional views. The reason for the change, according to the Satmarer, is that Maimonides wrote the Epistle *after* he wrote the Code, and this indicated that he changed his mind (*VM* 71ff, 146). This solution might be considered acceptable if not for the fact that his great Code was concluded in 1180, and the Epistle to Yemen was written in 1172. But all this is really irrelevant. What the Satmarer refuses to consider is that in the Code Maimonides writes Halakhah, whereas in his correspondence he permits himself much greater latitude, especially when addressing a pious, Messiah-intoxicated community which if not restrained, might well be misled (by an unfortunate madman who proclaimed himself the Messiah) into the most terrible consequences, including persecution by the Yemeni gentiles.

There are other issues which the Satmarer dismisses quite

unconvincingly. Thus, the logic of his own argument should lead us to agree that the Balfour Declaration and United Nations vote on establishing the State of Israel cancel out the assertion that Zionism violates the oaths of rebellion against the gentile governments and forcible immigration to Palestine. Yet the author gives this compelling notion short shrift, despite important authority (*Avnei Nezzer*) to the contrary (*VM* 149).

His most important post-Talmudic source is a remarkable statement by the MaHaRaL (R. Loewe) of Prague that forbids the transgression of the above-mentioned oaths even if the nations insist that the Jews return to Israel, even if they physically force the Jews to redemption — even under pain of torture and death! A critic of the Satmarer, the renowned Talmudic scholar, R. Menachem M. Kasher, takes up this citation in his encyclopedic (and, in some ways, rather strange) and massive work on the interpretation of contemporary Jewish history, *Ha-tekufah ha-Gedolah* ("The Great Epoch"), a kind of traditional *Heilsgeschichte* of modern times. R. Kasher shows that the MaHaRaL has been misread and misinterpreted by the Satmarer. Further, the statement is patently absurd, for to resist efforts by Gentiles to force us to return to the Land of Israel, because we are bound by the oaths, would entail in itself violating the oath of not rebelling against the Gentile governments! Nevertheless, this becomes a *locus classicus* for the Satmarer, and a major source for him to elevate the precipitate return to the Land of Israel to the rank of a most solemn sin, legally obligating us to resist it even unto death, equal in severity to idolatry, unchastity, and murder.

From the above, the Satmarer concludes that "forcing the End," human initiative in precipitating the redemption, is the vilest sin available to Jews today. Zionism is thus the archheresy of our times — and, of course, Theodore Herzl is the heresiarch of modern Jewish history. For only God can redeem, and any endeavor by man to hasten the process is a breach of faith and an intolerable and perfidious act of arrogance.

B. *Sequence of Redemption.*

Torah and the Jewish tradition speak of eschatology, the End of Days, as including both national restoration and spiritual renaissance — *geulah* and *teshuvah,* Redemption and Repentance. The Neturei Karta hold that there can be no *geulah* without prior *teshuvah,* and that this sequence is crucial to the Jewish belief in redemption. Even if Messiah were to come before the mass repentance of Jewish people, the actual redemption would be delayed until such collective religious return to God took place (*VM* 81-83). One who denies this necessary sequence is no different from one who denies belief in the Messiah himself (*ib.* 84). But Zionism is a prime source of denial, atheism, and heresy (*VM* 14). The whole movement of Jewish nationalism is but an imitation of the gentiles (*VM* 124). Obviously, then, the attrition of religion caused by Zionism vitiates any claim by Zionism to be a precursor or agent of redemption.

C. *Agents of Redemption can only be the Pious.*

It is inconceivable and absurd that God should bring on redemption by means of those who deny and hate Him. Hence, Zionists and the State of Israel are in effect obstacles to the true redemption (*VM* 9, 216; *GT* 6) because they are a source of irreligion. The Satmarer thus implicitly and uncompromisingly rejects the well-known view of Rav Kook that the irreligious, by virtue of their zeal and sacrifice for national goals, are unconscious agents of the divine redemption.

D. *The Messianic State—a Complete Theocracy.*

The Satmarer holds that democracy is valid for non-Jewish political communities. For Jews, however, democracy is utterly unacceptable. Only the laws of the Torah, as interpreted by its authorized expositors, are applicable to Jews (*VM* 164). The Zionist state, a majority of which is non-religious, and of which even the religious Zionist faction accepts democracy, is untenable and reprehensible.

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The four major elements we have discerned are: there can be only divine, not human political initiative; spiritual return must precede political redemption; the agents of redemption must be the pious, those committed to God and Torah; and the Jewish State must be a thorough theocracy, not a democracy.

Hence, any cooperation with the Zionists or the government of the State of Israel is a major sin (*VM* 14); this would be true even if the whole government were composed of saints and sages (*ib.* 139). One should rather submit to martyrdom than become a member of the Knesset (*ib.* 152). Those who cooperate with the government of Israel — such as the Agudath Israel — do so because of unworthy motives: they are bribed by power, and other important principles are compromised (*ib.* 220). The evil king of Biblical times, Ahab, had the halakhic status of a king; but the Zionist government, because its very inception is in defiance of Torah, cannot be accorded the status of even a *de facto* legitimate government (*ib.* 208).

The ideology so far delineated serves as the criterion by which to judge and evaluate the climactic events of current Jewish history. That such an evaluation is necessary is evident from the triumph of just those forces condemned by this ideology. Zionism, execrated as heresy, has the allegiance of the majority of the Jewish people. Its political aspirations have been realized in the establishment of the State of Israel. The very groups so deplored by the Neturei Karta have scored phenomenal military successes. The great majority of religious Jews identify with the State and with those organizations that believe in full cooperation— while the Neturei Karta dwindle into more and more precarious marginality, and must resort to futile gestures of violence in order to make their presence felt. Under such conditions, a rather extreme philosophy of history is called for.

The Rabbi of Satmar, as the chief theoretician of the Neturei Karta, does indeed offer such a philosophy of history. He sees the events of modern Jewish history, from Herzl to the Six-Day

War, not as secular history, certainly not as sacred history — rather, as an elaborate, diabolical scheme to ensnare Israel by dangling before it the wicked temptation of Zionism. In a word, the Neturei Karta's reading of this history is: *demonological.* The State of Israel is a satanic kingdom that has unloosed dark powers upon the Jewish people. The Satmarer even names the demon in charge of this unholy intervention in human affairs: Samael. Samael is frequently mentioned in the Zohar and Kabbalistic literature and occasionally in the Talmud and Midrash. (The Satmarer does not consider a symbolic interpretation of demons.) Samael, general of the profane legions, is charged by God with ensuring the success of Zionism and the State of Israel (*VM* 10). God permits this because Zionism is a ***nisayon,*** a trial or test for Jews: will they succumb to the evil illusion of their own autonomous initiative in effecting redemption, or will they faithfully refrain from interfering in the course of the divinely preordained destiny of Israel? (*VM* 8). Such demonic intrusions into Jewish history occurred before, in the form of pseudo-Messianic movements. Zionism is just the latest such manifestation; its precursors are the Messianic pretenders, such as Bar Cozeba (Bar Kokhba), those of medieval Yemen, and, of course, Sabbatai Zevi (*VM* 13). It has happened before our times that Samael triumphed, and the majority of the Jewish people were misled: our people succumbed to paganism during the First Commonwealth. In the days of Gideon, only 300 people were left who did not kneel to the idol (*VM* 8, 89). We who dissent, the Neturei Karta assert, are the ones who will save the entire people from the Satanic ensnarement of Zionism. The picture is two-tone: black and white. The Zionists are defiled, *reshaim* (wicked); we are *tzaddikim.* It is as simple as all that.

This demonology of history focuses, of course, on the most demonically apocalyptic event in all of human history: the Holocaust. Politically, this is interpreted by the Satmarer as a response to the incitement by Zionists when they challenged Hitler, and declared war on Germany. This vain but provocative gesture aroused the fury of the tyrant (*GT* 11). Spiritually, the Holocaust is divine punishment for transgressing the three oaths

and yielding to Samael (*VM* 5, 182). It was only the prayer of the righteous (i.e., the Neturei Karta) which effected the rescue of the remnants of Jewry (*GT* 18).

But the question arises: did not the Zionists attempt to save the pitiful few survivors of the Holocaust? Did not the State of Israel become the haven and refuge for the Displaced Persons? The Satmarer refuses to give the State any moral credit: since the Zionists were responsible for the original massacre, they are not to be lauded for opening their national home to the straggling survivors. In a parable, he refers to the Zionists as criminal arsonsists who stay for the fire and then enthusiastically help to save a few survivors (*VM* 185, 6).

The Zionists are responsible not only for the Holocaust, but for the three wars from 1948-1967 (*GT* 171). Were it not for their political ambitions, England would have permitted an unlimited number of refugees to Palestine (*VM* 184). Their policies are to be blamed as well for causing the expulsion of the Jews from the Arab countries (*VM* 183).

The Sinai invasion of 1956 was morally unjust. The use of the Suez Canal was not worth jeopardizing human lives in battle and the difficulties that ensued for Egyptian Jewry (*GT* 88). Any war carried out not in accordance with the opinion of Torah authorities is not a war but simple murder (*VM* 112). This military action of 1956 led to the war of 1967. The Arab threats of genocide against Israel were the direct result of Israeli intransigence (*GT* 11). The Zionists were the aggressors, for aggression is in character with their over-reaching in forcing the redemption (*GT* 10, 89).

The Satmarer is of two minds as to why Israel won the Six-Day War. At one point he attributes it to the prayers of the righteous (i.e., the Neturei Karta), for which he feels he must apologize, since both Arabs and Zionists are *reshaim* (wicked) (*GT* 12, 13, 88). Elsewhere, he reverts to his demonological theory: Samael was at work again (*GT* 7).

But was not the dramatic Israeli victory a true miracle, as religious Zionists and even non-Zionists — indeed, even some secularists — declared? First, answers the Satmarer in an almost

rationalistic vein, a true believer is unimpressed with miracles; his faith cannot be shaken even by supernatural attacks against it (*GT* 7). Second, as we have said, if there were miracles, they were part of Samael's satanic designs further to ensnare unsuspecting Jews (*ib.*). Third, it was just extraordinary success, but no miracle at all (*GT* 8). All of what occurred was perfectly natural, and largely the end product of Arab technological backwardness and military inferiority (*GT* 36). Reports that the war brought in its wake a renewal of religious feeling are discounted by the Satmarer, who compares it to the religious enthusiasm that swept over many Jews in the days of Sabbatai Zevi, and thus must be considered illusory at best, satanic at worst (*GT* 100). Donning the mantle of prophecy, the Satmarer expects more apparently miraculous victories for Israel. But this does not gladden his heart, for it will be the work of Samael and will thus further delay the true redemption (*GT* 137).

As a result of this approach to contemporary history, the Satmarer lays down the following guide-lines of policy.

A. The policy most in accord with the divine will is that the State now be dissolved. It should be emphasized that this does not by any means imply the advocacy of a permanent exile in the Diaspora. Paradoxically, the Neturei Karta favor giving up Statehood now so that, by this gesture of renunciation of human initiative and overreaching, the Messiah may come and usher in the complete redemption and restore Israel to its ancient eminence. Meanwhile, the United Nations will see to it that the Jewish population is protected (*GT* 10).

B. Until such time that the State is dismantled (and the Messiah will have to undo the entire State and rebuild it on sacred rather than demonic foundations — *GT* 133), the Satmarer strongly disapproves of visiting the Western Wall, and other shrines and holy places. The possession of the Wall by the evil, corrupt, and unclean Zionists is an unmitigated disaster (*GT* 153). They have desecrated the shrines by assembling at them frivolously and immodestly (*GT* 142). To visit them, even with the right motives, implies support of the Zionist State (*GT* 139, 142). Since the United Nations is opposed to Israeli

rule over the Old City of Jerusalem, therefore residing there is a violation of the oath of rebelling against the nations and is to be discouraged unless one is a true saint (*GT* 160). At times his logic is piquant: if God had wanted Jews to return to the Old City, He would have arranged for them to return to it legitimately, under proper aegis, and not in violation of the oath (*GT* 162). He uses similar reasoning — perhaps even more astonishing — in counseling against visiting the Cave of Machpelah (*GT* 165).

C. Consistent to the end, the Satmarer declares that the commandment of *Yishuv Ha-aretz* (settling the Holy Land) is applicable only to the period of the Temple and is not in force today (*VM* 37f). And the ingathering of the exiles too is therefore contrary to Judaism (*VM* 55).

D. Finally, the Neturei Karta are not disturbed, at least ideologically, by the successes of their Zionist adversaries. The Satmarer does not subscribe to triumphalism, the idea that political triumph validates the ideology of the victors (*GT* 92) — an idea that used to be part of Catholicism's self-justification. Numbers are no guarantee of truth. In a charming homily, he asks: Why does the Talmudic formula read *Yachid Verabbim Halakhah Kerabbim* (when one individual opinion is opposed to the majority, the Halakhah is in accordance with the majority); would not the more economic expression *Halakhah Kerabbim* be a sufficient legal maxim? He answers: We are to follow the majority only when the One — the One God, the *Yachid* — is with the *Rabbim* (the majority). Without God, no majority can prevail. Indeed, he tells us in a psychologically revealing aside, the Neturei Karta are the only real Jews left. All the others possess the souls of multitude of non-Jews, the riff-raff or rabble — that accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt in the days of Moses (*VM* 229).

Clearly, we are dealing here with a fringe group that, in its extremism, its hyperbolic language, its extravagance and simplicism, reveals a psychological pattern of defensiveness. Yet its fierce independence of thought, its refusal to be outvoted on matters of principle, the courage of its convictions, and the

coherency of its ideology, cannot but elicit our admiration. Courage, especially idealistic courage, expressed at great personal sacrifice, is so rare that even if we disagree with its thesis, it deserves our respect.

However, the Neturei Karta's uncompromising ideological integrity is not matched by an equal intellectual honesty. R. Menachem M. Kasher and others have pointed out the careless manner in which the sources are treated so as to yield a predetermined conclusion. The Talmudic passage of the oaths, for instance, can be easily disputed. Most objectionable is the Satmarer's misapplication of legal, halakhic methodology to nonlegal, aggadic texts. Classical talmudists often did this, but only as a kind of academic playfulness, never imagining it to be a *bona fide* avenue for determining practical issues. There are many other instances where the Satmarer tries to fit a square peg in a circle; his intellectual gymnastics are a tribute to his mental agility, not to scholarly objectivity. The Jewish tradition certainly does possess, here and there, a quietistic element, one that was most noticeable in Hasidism. But it certainly does not predominate. Similarly, his simplistic, demonological interpretation of Jewish history would be amusing were it not frightening.

The Neturei Karta are incapable of appreciating that the Jewish tradition often embraces divergent views, and that it is neither necessary nor desirable to reconcile them. The Neturei Karta thus emerge with an awesomely consistent ideology. But its very coherence and consistency is itself an indication of its vulnerability. One need not return to the philosophic criticisms of ideology to feel that the ideology here discussed ignores much of Jewish tradition and literature — which, reflecting life itself, possesses ambiguities, ambivalences, paradoxes. Thus, his simplistic view of Messiah, while it may long have been popular, ignores the element of absurdity that must of necessity participate in the Messianic process. Of course it is absurd to view one who denies the Messiah as his very agent for redemption. But then, the survival of Israel, its restoration, indeed the very notion of an eventual vindication of the divine promise to Abraham — these too are by nature absurd. No wonder that

Maimonides counseled against any extravagant speculations about Messianic days. But such ideas are anathema to super-consistent ideologues who will not allow facts to jeopardize consistency.

Finally, with all the aversion of most Jews to this outrageously anti-Israel stance, two things ought to be remembered. First, while the Neturei Karta, theoretically and practically, are totally opposed to the State of Israel, they are not opposed to Israel as a people. On the contrary, they oppose the State because they favor the people. We may deplore them, but we must not indiscriminatingly condemn them (as has been done) as religious anti-Semites.

Second, the existence of this group, scandalous as it sometimes may seem, can prove a much needed corrective. There may be a time when Israel will incline to an inflated view of its own power and prowess. Its triumphs may, in the nature of things, go to its head, and militarism may some day turn from an unwanted necessity to a way of life. Moses already warned us against boasting that "my power and my might have wrought all this." Modern Israel must scrupulously avoid this fallacy, a fallacy which is dangerous not only morally and spiritually but also politically. The Neturei Karta are irritating reminders that activism can lead to the illusion of total self-sufficiency, and self-sufficiency to arrogance, and arrogance to presumptuousness.

Granted that the medicine of the Neturei Karta is too strong for the illness it seeks to cure, and the patient shows no real symptoms of the disease, it is a medicine nonetheless. It need not and should not be swallowed, but its presence on the shelf serves a purpose of sorts.