

Professor Aaron Twerski

A REJOINDER

Dear Mr. Lamm: מחנך
I am delighted that you have taken the time to respond to my open letter to you. It was written to elicit a response and a clarification of your views. However, your letter leaves me with gnawing and troubling concerns. I hope that you will not misinterpret the sharpness of my comments as a personal attack. Indeed, only by honestly confronting the issues can we come to grips with the rather serious repercussions that followed upon *The New York Times* article reporting your Fifth Avenue speech.

By now it is clear that in my open letter to you I faithfully ascribed to you the views that you truly embrace. It is also clear that, from beginning to end, *The New York Times* article was a misrepresentation of the truth. In fact, it would be accurate to describe it as a caricature of the views that you so dearly hold.

Professor Twerski, a mashach of Yeshiva Ner Israel-Baltimore also studied in Beth Medrash Elyon in Monsey. A leading national authority on products liability and conflict of laws, he is currently a professor of law in Brooklyn Law School, formerly acting dean of Hofstra Law School, and has been a visiting professor at Cornell University of Michigan (at Ann Arbor), and Boston University.

**You have made it clear
that you are deeply
offended by both the
terminology and the
false image that the
Times created . . . Yet,
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nothing to set the
record straight.**

You criticize me for not "checking the (news) report" with you, to determine what you really said. Chava! Why did you not "check the news report with you"? You spoke to an audience of four hundred. But for the world, and posterity, "your words" will be those that were reported by the *Times*. It is to those words that you and I had to respond.

RESPONDING TO THE TIMES

Let me briefly recapitulate:

1. *The Times* attributed to you to such terms as "ultra-Orthodox" and "fundamentalist" as references to the "Right." It further intimated that the "Right" was not open to secular culture. This image of the Orthodox "Right" as fundamentalist, Bible-belt know-nothings is one

that the *Times* generally has portrayed. Your own view is diametrically opposed. You have made it clear that you are deeply offended by both the terminology and the false images that the *Times* created. . . .

Yet, you sat idly by and did nothing to set the record straight.

2. *The Times*, you say, reported the "valid groupings and spiritual dignity" remarks out of context. In order to understand them, you refer me to your CLAL lecture of March 1986. As to "valid groupings," that is to be understood by your "idiosyncratic" definition of the term to mean that they are "strong." And for that we are referred to Latin for an appropriate definition. In any event, it means nothing more than recognizing that there is a group out there with power and strength. As to "spiritual dignity," you quite agree with my characterization that the "spiritual dignity" you would confer upon them is comparable to that conferred on a Tibetan Monk. But, not *chas veshalom*, that of a rabbinic leader.

What was published in *The New York Times* was thus taken out of context. They are neither "valid" in the sense that the word is used by the overwhelming majority of those

who speak the English language and who are not conversant in Latin (see footnote below for entry from American Heritage Dictionary)¹, nor does their spiritual dignity—removed as it is from *Mesora* and *halacha*—have Torah meaning. They are usurpers and falsifiers of the title "Rav" as used for generations.

Clearly, no one but an omniscient G-d could so have read *The New York Times* report of your speech. It was a gross misrepresentation of your views. . . .

Yet you sat idly by and did not lift your pen to place your views in their true light.

3. You say that the *Times* report on your objection to the "Who is a Jew" issue was clear. But that simply is not so. May I suggest that you take the relevant paragraph² and place it before people who are

1. val-id (val-id) adj. 1. Well-grounded: a valid objection. 2. Producing the desired results: efficacious: valid methods. 3. Legally sound and effective: incontestable: valid title. 4. Logic. a. Containing premises from which the conclusion may logically be derived: a valid argument. b. Correctly inferred or deduced from a premise: a valid conclusion. 5. Archaic. Of sound health: robust. [Fr. valide < Latin validus strong < valere, to be strong]—valid-ly adv.—validness n. American Heritage Dictionary

2. The *Times* article says: "Dr. Lamm said he hoped that the 'Who is a Jew' legislation, . . . which has been defeated in the Israeli Knesset, . . . does not come up again." (*The New York Times*, March 24, 1988)

If the problem of slander and deep offense were an isolated one, *volt noch gevain tzu derleiden*. But your speech was not made in a vacuum, and your words thus assume impact beyond your avowed intent.

not intimately familiar with your views. I question whether anyone would read it but to say that you were taking issue with the "*Mihu Yehudi*" question in a manner diametrically opposed to your true position.

Yet you permitted the matter to rest without correcting this misconception.

4. Whatever is to be said for the *Times* article itself and your initial reading of it, there is another painful truth that must be put on the table. On the morrow of the article, you knew what the article had wrought. There was a veritable explosion over it in all Orthodox circles. For example, respected

Roshel Yeshiva and *talmidim* in your own institution reacted in deep anger to the *Times* rendering. And yes, Alexander Schindler apparently understood it to mean that a Conservative or Reform rabbi was finally being acknowledged as a rabbi by the prestigious president of Yeshiva University.³ No, he did not have Jesuit priest dignity—he had rabbinical spiritual dignity. Maybe not "*Yoreh—Yoreh, Yodin—Yodin*," but close enough so that no one would ever know the difference.

And throughout this all, you did not lift your pen to write a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* or to any other medium of communication to reveal the truth.

Was it necessary for Aaron Twerski to do it? I wonder: had the *Times* mischaracterized your words to portray Yeshiva University in an unfavorable light, would you not have written somewhere to set the record straight? In short, is it proper that the lie will have been told to millions and the truth limited to the readers of *The Jewish Observer*?

NOT IN A VACUUM

Iask these questions because what seems to be the inevitable answer disturbs me to the depth of my being. Forgive me if I misjudge you. But wasn't the *Times* article left to stand because, though it played badly in Borough Park, it played well in Peoria?

Does the thinking go something like this?

—The Orthodox "Right" will be angry with me; but they are already alienated from Torah *Umadda* anyway. To tell the harsh truth to the "left" in the mass media is unthinkable for me. That task I will leave to the Agudists.

If so, then hasidim and *bnai yeshiva* were slandered and deeply offended by such terms as "fundamentalist and ultra-Orthodox," while you kept intact your creden-

3. Rabbi Alexander Schindler wrote in a letter to you (Dr. Lamm): "This is the kind of voice that I and many others have been longing to hear. You express the kind of Orthodoxy that I was taught to revere." (Quoted in *JTA*, March 28, 1988)

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tials with the left as a non-judgmental leader of *Klal Yisroel*.

If the problem I describe were an isolated one, *volt noch gevain tzu derleiden*. But your Fifth Avenue speech was not made in a vacuum, and your words thus assume impact beyond your avowed intent. For the last five years, the attack from the Conservative and Reform movements against "Right"-wing Orthodoxy has been unrelenting and vicious. . . . They have sought to portray the "Right" as fundamentalists, as divisive separatists, as bigots, as *Khoumeins*, who have no claim on historical Jewish truths. . . . They are waving the "unity" banner as a means for legitimating deviationist groups, which happen to be responsible for more divisiveness and disunity than has ever before threatened *Klal Yisroel*—what with Reform recognition of patrilineal descent as a basis of Jewishness, and countless *mamzeirim* resulting from second marriages that take place with Reform blessings, without benefit of a *halachic* divorce. . . . They have attempted to project "pluralism" in the manner that you personally find so unacceptable, as the true tradition of Judaism. . . . They have sought with considerable success to have Jewish Federations throughout the length and breadth of this great country implement this pluralism in a wide array of educational activities.

JOINING THE CLAL CHORUS

Giving inspiration and direction to this endeavor is a leading self-proclaimed "Centrist" Orthodox spokesman, Yitzchak Greenberg, a member in good standing of a "Centrist" Orthodox rabbinic organization. His influence, especially through his organization, CLAL (the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership), has been devastating and destructive. You are keenly aware of the CLAL agenda. Indeed, you lent your name and your personal participation to a major CLAL conference with the speech that you refer to in your letter.

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There is no question whatsoever that CLAL's views on pluralism and other matters central to *emunas Yisroel* are sacrilege; indeed, the word is simply *kefira* (heresy). For example, Greenberg likens the differences between Orthodoxy and other groups to the disputes between "Hillel and Shammai, (about whom the Talmud says: 'Both are the words of a living G-d') and Hasidim and Mitnagdim" (-Greenberg). In line with this approach, Greenberg calls for an interchange of pulpits between Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbis "to clarify ideology and values of their movement to a new constituency." (See the footnote below⁴ for a fuller quotation on this view from CLAL literature.)

Thus, the Conservative and Reform leadership has been writing the music of 'pluralism'; Greenberg has furnished the orchestration; and, sadly, you wrote the lyrics. In short, if I take you to task for permitting the misinformation to continue to linger, it is because your voice is now being perceived as

How one can be "personally observant" while identifying with a religious movement that denies *Ikrei Hayahadus: Torah MeSinai?*

having been added to a chorus that has been heard nationwide and which is deeply and essentially hurtful to the Torah community—"Right" and "Centrist" equally. There are Orthodox rabbis of "traditional" (no *mechitza*) synagogues in outlying communities who have reproduced and distributed the *Times* article as a vindication of their "accommodationist" attitudes and pluralistic programs.

CLAL has even gone further. In a paper on "The Relationship of Judaism and Christianity: Toward a New Organic Model," published and widely distributed by CLAL, Rabbi Greenberg demonstrates why

Orthodox rabbis—Rabbi Yoseif Dov Soloveitchik prominent among them—have always opposed interfaith dialogue, mainly for courting confusion and trouble. Greenberg's paper exceeds these conventional objections by actually flirting with apostasy. Indeed, he says, "In concluding... that Christianity was an alien growth... the rabbis perhaps erred.... The rabbis confused a 'failed' messiah (which is what Jesus was) and a false messiah.... A failed messiah is one who has the right values but did not attain the final goal... [similar to] Bar Kochba...." (We quote below more fully from his statement on Christianity⁵.)

NOT YOUR VIEWS, BUT YOUR IMPRIMATUR

In this connection I want to make something absolutely clear. I do not attribute the views of Yitz Greenberg to you. From everything I have read by you and know about you, I would venture to say that if one were to put a gun to your head and say: "Utter these words or else I shoot," you would say, "Go ahead and shoot." You would agree that they are the stuff of "*yehoreig ve'al ya'avur*...." Yet in some ways you do carry responsibility for his statements.

At Fifth Avenue you spoke in the name of "We Centrists." The intellectual and religious leader of a group has not only the right, but the duty, to speak for the entire movement. (In passing, I would like to add that I'd have preferred that the term "Centrist" would never have seen the light of day. If you are at the center of normative Judaism, just exactly who occupies the left?... *Oberman hot nisht bei mir gefregt*.)

You created the term "Centrist"—or at least bear the responsibility for popularizing it—and I am afraid that it is here to stay for awhile. Isn't it time that a stand be taken as to who may speak for the "Centrists"? Should one who preaches vile *kefira* be allowed to travel throughout the United States as a consultant to over

4. In a National Conference of CLAL—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership—held in June, 1987—the *Am Echad* (One People) Department proposed the following:

MODELS OF COMMUNAL COOPERATION

CLAL encourages rabbis, rabbinic organizations and communal groups to conduct a wide array of programs designed to promote Jewish unity through greater understanding among the movements....

1) Seminars on Jewish Unity

... CLAL can assist in the development of innovative study programs exploring the issue of religious diversity, and currently offers two four-part seminars, models utilizing CLAL scholars and local rabbis.

The first format includes sessions on the dawn of modernity, the four major movements (i.e. Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstruction)... The second format studies historical cases of communities in conflict, i.e., Hillel and Shammai and Hasidim and Mitnagdim. The focus is to understand how other Jewish communities dealt with powerful ideological conflicts in order to locate the threads of commonality and unity, within diversity, that can serve as models for the contemporary Jewish scene. (In other words, Conservative versus Orthodox, which is in effect *Keifra* versus *Emuna*, is comparable to Shammai versus Hillel—A.T.)

2) Rabbinic Pulpit Exchange

Local rabbis visit congregations of other denominations. In this model, rabbis speak from the pulpit in an effort to clarify ideology and values of their movement to a new constituency....

5. Christianity triumphed among the Gentiles. No Jew would fall for that fairy tale of a virgin mother. If you were pregnant from someone else, what would you tell your husband? This is fundamentally how medieval Jews handled Christianity.... So, if a few Jews followed Jesus, it proved nothing. The rabbis concluded that Christianity was an alien growth, developed by those who followed a false messiah.

The rabbis perhaps erred here.... Out of defensiveness, the rabbis confused a "failed" messiah (which is what Jesus was) and a false messiah.... A failed messiah is one who has the right values, upholds the covenant, but who did not attain the final goal... [similar to] Bar Kochba, the great Jewish freedom fighter who led a revolt against Rome that temporarily drove Rome out of Jerusalem.... He was hailed by Rabbi Akiva and many great rabbis as the messiah....

Calling Jesus a failed messiah is in itself a term of irony. In the Jewish tradition, failure is a most ambiguous term. Abraham was a "failure",... Moses was a "failure",... Jeremiah was a "failure",... All these "failures" are at the heart of divine and Jewish achievements....

The unfinished agenda of the Jewish-Christian dialogue is the recognition of the profound interrelationship between both. Each faith community experiencing the love of G-d and the chosenness of G-d was tempted into saying: I am the only one chosen. There was a human failure to see that there is enough love in G-d to choose again and again and again. Both faiths in renewal may yet apply this insight not just to each other but to religions not yet worked into this dialogue. (Italics mine—A.T.)

three score Jewish Federations preaching 'pluralism' and heresy in the name of Orthodox "Centrism," and remain unchallenged by the prime spokesman for "Centrism"?

Isn't it essential that someone declare that "the field" begins and ends with unquestioning *emuna*, and that denial of *Ikrim* (basic tenets of faith) does not render someone into the "left-wing," but totally out of the ballpark? *

By the same token, shouldn't the head of the world's leading "Centrist" rabbinical seminary reject all vestiges of pluralism, once and for all? The position you articulated at Ritz Greenberg's CLAL conference dedicated to pluralism two years ago was not a ringing rejection of pluralism, as you set forth in your response. The image of Daniel in the lion's den is belied not only by your active role in the

6. As the JO is going to press, the most recent issue of the *National Jewish Law Review* has come to my hand. It contains an article by Rabbi Emanuel Rackman (a member of good standing in the "Centrist" Rabbinical Council of America) entitled, "The Case of the Sotah (Indiscreet wife) in Jewish Law: Ordeal or Psychodrama" (3 *National Jewish Law Review* at pp.49-64, 1988). Once more I am constrained to question whether he too is a legitimate spokesman for Centrist Orthodoxy or whether you would reject him as unsuitable for that role.

The thesis of Rackman's article is that the *mat sotah*—the mixture of water in which the ink from the oath of the *sotah*, including the name of *Hashem*, was dissolved—did not have the miraculous power to kill the guilty *sotah*. Instead, he argues that it was all a psychodrama used either to cause her to confess or to reconcile her with her suspicious husband. Rackman claims that a significant group of the rabbis in the Talmud held this view but "were not free to verbalize why they did not accept the supernatural approach for they feared that public criticism of the supernatural approach would have vitiated the *sotah* ceremony as they perceived it." In other words, the Torah prescribed a psychological hoax and the Talmudists engaged in a conspiracy of silence not to let the cat out of the bag.

Rackman's article is contrary to everything recorded in the Talmud on the topic. In other words, simply blatant *kfirah*. In another note in this letter I have set forth Rackman's warm and fulsome embrace of both you and your Fifth Avenue speech. He said that he "has always known" that you and he "shared the same ideology" and differed merely whether "our cause should be called centrist or modern."

I believe that Rackman is dead wrong; that you are repulsed by his views, as expressed in the *Law Review* and on numerous other occasions. Isn't it time that you deny him the right to characterize his Torah *Weltanschauung* as yours, and to present himself as a spokesman for Modern Orthodoxy—or Centrism, as you prefer to call it?



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CLAL conference, but also by the position that you staked out—half-way between rejection and embracement of your own home-made brew of pluralism. Permit me to explain:

A PLURALISM OF "SANCTITY"

It was at that CLAL conference that you publicly granted the Conservative and Reform "validity" (in accordance with the word's Latin root *validus*, of course). And it was there that you bestowed "spiritual dignity" upon them, without the qualifying explanation that appears in your letter to me in this issue of *The Jewish Observer*—an explanation that would not have endeared you to Alexander Schindler (Reform) or Wolfe Kelman (Conservative), as the unexpanded version did.

And now, in your letter to me, you confuse things further. In the very same paragraph where you respond to my challenge, whether you confer the same "spiritual dignity" upon Conservative and Reform rabbis as you do on a devout Jesuit priest or Tibetan monk, you make an extremely troubling reference. You reply: "But of course!" and refer the reader to *Rambam, Hilchos*

Shmitta VeYovel 13.13. And here I am at an absolute loss to understand you. The *Rambam* in that famous, oft-cited passage compares honest searchers of truth to the Tribe of Levi, as being *Chail Hashem*—G-d's chosen ranks. For the sake of the reader, permit me

If you are to deal with the Conservative and Reform rabbinate as the functional equivalent of secular Jewish groups, as you suggest, and no more, than it will have to be spelled out with excruciating clarity.

to quote the *Rambam*: "Not only the Tribe of Levi, but every man, from all who come into the world, who is so inspired and understands on his own to separate himself and stand before G-d to serve Him... to know G-d, and to walk upright as G-d created him, and renounces the many concerns that people pur-

sue—he is sanctified to be holy of holies and the L-rd is his portion. . . ." (Original language of the *Rambam* appears below.)

Of course, "*kol bo'ei olam*—all who come into the world"—even in Tibet—have this potential for spiritual greatness. But is one supposed to assume that the *Rambam* also means that an idolatrous monk, or a "rabbi" who denies *Torah MiSinai*, is walking "upright as G-d created him"? The *Rambam* makes some unforgiving judgments against those who reject the Seven Noahide Laws; and he is no less harsh with *meisim umetdichim*—Jews who disavow the Thirteen Principles of Faith, and knowingly lead others similarly astray (see *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section III, Ch.41). You surely don't mean to suggest that the *Rambam* confers "spiritual dignity" on pagans and on Conservative and Reform rabbis! (See *Rambam's* commentary on *Mishnayos Chelek*—excerpted below). Nor could one ever study the *Rambam* in its entirety and conclude that he is describing any "rabbi" who is *marbeh mamzeirim beYisrael* as "הרי זה חילוק קדוש קדוש—sanctified to be holy of holies." To read such interpretation into the *Rambam* is nothing less than *ziuf haTorah* (falsification of Torah)!

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7. ולא שבט לה כלבו אלא כל איש ואיש מכל באי העולם אשר נדבה רוחו אותו וחבינו מדעו לחבדל לעמוד לפני ד' לשירו ולעובדו לדעה את ח' והלך ישר כמו שעשעו חלקים ופרק מעל צוארו עול החטבות חרנים אשר בקשו בני האדם הרי זה נתקדש קדש קדשים ויחיה ד' חלקו ונחלתו לעולם ולעולמי עולמים ויזכה לו כע"ז דבר המספיק לו כמו שזכר לכתובם ללוי.

8. The *Rambam* discusses three classes of thinkers who differ in their interpretation of the words of Chazal. In his second category, he describes people that "... call these (rabbinical assertions) foolish, and deprecate them and slander that which should not be slandered. From time to time, they deride the words of the Sages and imagine that they are more intelligent and have more penetrating minds than the Sages. ...

"... those who stumble into this type of belief consider themselves to be intellectuals and wise philosophers but how far removed they are from humanity when they are compared to true philosophers. These (thinkers) are even more stupid than the first class, and more foolish. It is an accursed class because they oppose men of great worth whose wisdom has already been established before scholars."

See Maimonides, Commentary on the Mishna, Tractate *Sanhedrin* (translation by Dr. Fred Rosner).

What is one to say, then, to your reference to the *Rambam*? At this point, I can only repeat the final line of my previous letter: "Dr. Lamm, are you there with us?"

NATIONAL BETH DIN— A FANTASY

Coming back to your CLAL address, it contained a deeply distressing and confusing proposal, which served to further put the question mark on your claim to opposition to pluralism: that a national *Beth Din* (rabbinical court) be formulated to deal with the issues of *gittin* and *kedushin* in a format that will be accepted by all—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. As part of that, you boldly propose that "rabbis who are expert and personally observant, no matter what groups they formally belong to, may be authorized to serve."

I fail to understand how one can be "personally observant" while identifying with a religious movement that denies *Ikrei Hayahadus*: Torah M'Einai! We all know that not only Reform, but the Conservatives also reject the binding character of codified *halacha*. Hence your proposal was unacceptable, and will remain unacceptable. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל made it clear beyond doubt in a responsum in *Igros Moshe* that a rabbi who is connected with a Conservative synagogue cannot be counted among the members of a *Beth Din* for *getrus* (converts) because of his affiliation. Do you think for a moment that he, or any *halacha* authorities, would have decided differently regarding a *Beth Din* for *gittin*? Do you think that there is any basis for pretending so?

You and I know that such a National *Beth Din* will never be. In fact, it is unthinkable, unless one

would grant Reform and Conservative rabbis more validity and dignity than your response to us would indicate. The suggestion serves only to send further mixed signals about "legitimacy," which I find so dismaying.

The problem that I and others like me confront in attempting to understand your position is that we find it incomprehensible that you do not understand the national currents in which both your words and your silence find themselves. In that context, you are not making yourself understood at all. Yes, there is nothing wrong with diplomacy, but

there is a good bit wrong with confusing ambiguity, especially when one of the gravest problems befalling our people today is lack of clarity on fundamentals of *emunah*.

UNITY, WHERE IT COUNTS

In your quest for unity for *Klal Yisrael*, there is another unity with which you must concern yourself, and that is the unity of *Shomrei Torah*. Nothing, in my opinion, would more lead to a full and formal schism between the "Right" and the "Centrists" than continuing to needlessly violate the

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9. בגרות שלא כדיון
...ואף שלא נקבל עדות עליהם הוא באן סהדי שכל
מי ששם הכוזי קאנסערהאטיון ע"ו הוא בחזקת
מופקר להרבה איסורין ולכפירה להרבה עיקרים
...ולכן פשוט שאין הגרות שעשה הראב"י של
הקאנסערהאטיון כלום.
הגרות מסת"ו חלק א' סימן ק"ט

sensibilities of the yeshiva community—by such statements as proposing the establishment of a *Beth Din*, which would include those who have formal affiliations with the Conservative or Reform movement.

I might relate to you that when Agudath Israel's Commission on Legislation and Civic Action undertook to formulate the New York Get Bill, I met with outstanding constitutional lawyers (e.g. Nathan Lewin) and a host of rabbinic leaders. The dictate from the leading *Roshai Yeshiva* was to arrive at legislation that would have the *heskem* of all Torah authorities within the Torah community. That was done. The entire spectrum, from the Satmar *Dayan* to Rabbi Soloveitchik, was contacted. The directions were clear. On matters that effect *kedushas Yisroel*, no action can and should be undertaken if there was valid halachic objection from any quarter. (Similarly, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski זצ"ל of pre-war Vilna, undisputedly the *Rabban Shel Kol Bnei Hagola*, dealt with a proposal for a lenient approach toward a specific kashrus problem for starving Jews, but would not concur on such a ruling without the consensus of other *gedolei poskim*. As long as he suspected in advance that the

answer would be negative, he would not issue a tentative *psak*. Such is the way of responsible Torah leadership.)

"Centrism" is a term that places your group in the center. In the center of what? Avoiding excessive zeal to the right, in which area? Embracing what degree of deviation to the left?

UNHYPHENATED TORAH ACTION

I have only a few remarks with regard to your true views as expressed in your response to me. You defend your approach of using "the silken language of diplomacy" because "it proves effective"—moreso than our approach, which you characterize as "worthy of their contempt if I [i.e. Dr. Lamm] had shouted at them [Reform and Conservative leaders], stamped my foot, and called them 'shkotzim'."

How does one determine effectiveness in reaching our brothers that are so distant from us? By gaining coverage in the *Times*—even when the story distorts your views? By winning kudos from Schindler? Does that really accomplish *kiruv* of the hearts of *rechokim*, or does it perhaps tell them that they're okay the way they are?

People today are in desperate need of clear guidance, and they respond to it when they get it; and we endeavor to give it to them—without name calling, without apology. Are our efforts effective? Witness the innovative publishing of original Torah thought, and the translation of classic Torah literature, in the vernacular. Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, an avowed spokesman for Modern Orthodoxy, gives the credit for pioneering such ventures to ArtScroll-Mesorah Publications¹⁰—among others, we are quick to add. "Black-hat" outfits, for sure. . . . And take note of how "Right-wingers" have also been blazing trails in high-tech communication to bring recorded Daf Yomi classes and numerous Torah lectures to the telephones of thousands of subscribers across the map . . . in bringing Torah to Russian Jews in America and abroad . . . in helping Jewish Ivy League collegiates discover the Judaism they never knew . . . in operating a massive program of rescue, shelter and religious education of young refugees from Iran . . . in initiating the remarkable Hatzoloh volunteer ambulance program. . . . Yes, "Right-wing" yeshiva graduates and *hassidim* are in the leadership of all of these endeavors.

10. "Thirty years ago, I wrote: 'In the area of English publications . . . Orthodox Judaism must meet new challenges. Its halachic and scholarly journals . . . have a limited circle of readers, while most American Jews have only the vaguest notions of the nature of Orthodoxy and its spiritual and intellectual vitality.'"

"Now, it can be said that Orthodox Judaism is coping with that challenge very effectively, and much of the credit is due to those who conceived and are executing the program of the ArtScroll Series. . . . The translations of the ArtScroll Series are felicitous, the expositions abundantly clear and the art work truly sophisticated. All in all, the series is a historic contribution to the advancement of Torah study in English speaking countries."—Focus, by Rabbi Emanuel Rackman The Jewish Week, Inc., N.Y.C., March 4, 1988.

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By the same token, your dismissal of "Right wing" Orthodoxy's accomplishments in other areas as a matter of political push is surprisingly simplistic. Besides lobbying for legislation to protect the kosher consumer and the unfortunate *aguna*, we wrote the laws in a way that stand up well under the courts' unforgiving eye. And yes, Agudath Israel was alone among Jewish groups to challenge Mayor Koch's Executive Order 50, and led the successful battle to stop the Gay Rights order in the courts.

These are the areas where one would expect exponents of *Torah Umadda* to be in the forefront, but somehow the fires of conviction—which inspires all this creativity and spawns these innovative, effective projects—burn strongest where an allegiance to Torah is not splintered or diluted (or "enriched") by a broader ideological framework.

WISE IN OTHER WAYS

In your letter to me, you note that the Torah refers to pagan priests as *kohanim*, and that *Rishonim* speak of *chukmei ha-kara'im*, and that those titles were not intended to, and did not, confer halachic status upon them. Come now. Those titles referred to "position," but did not bestow honors by any means. Nobody ever confused pagan priesthood with halachic legitimacy. They were of different religions. And the rabbinic split with the Karaites could not have been more complete. No one to my knowledge ever accorded them "spiritual dignity." Nor should anyone today confer "spiritual dignity" on those who by definition are leading vast numbers of Jews away from Torah and *mitzvos*.

It is well-known that "Right-wing" rabbinical leadership has not always been in full agreement with the views of the leading mentor of Modern Orthodoxy, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Rosh *Hayeshiva* of Rabbi Isaac Elchonon Theological Seminary, yet there is no disagreement among them in this regard. As Rabbi Soloveitchik wrote: "From the

point of view of the Torah, we find the difference between Orthodox and Reform Judaism much greater than that which separates the Pharisees from the Sadducees in the days of the Second Commonwealth, and between the Karaites and the traditionalists in the Geonic era. Has Jewish history ever recorded an instance of a joint Community Council or a joint Rabbinical Council which consisted of Karaites and Torah-true Jews?" (translated from an article in *Der Tog-Morgen Jour-*

nal January 18, 1954).

If you are to deal with the Conservative and Reform rabbinate as the functional equivalent of secular Jewish groups, as you suggest, and no more, then it will have to be spelled out with excruciating clarity. The analogies that you draw are simply historically inappropriate to our present day dilemmas and dangerously confusing to the groping masses, especially at a time when the Torah's authenticity is being questioned by so many.



the beanstalk

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