

SAMUEL NEWMAN, M.D., F. A. A. P.
NEWMAN BUILDING
DANVILLE, VIRGINIA

October 21, 1959

Rabbi Norman Lamm
The Jewish Center
New York, N.Y.

Dear Rabbi Lamm:

I admire your erudite essay, "Separate Pews in the Synagogue", in the Spring 1959 issue of TRADITION.

There is a difficulty which I would like to point out from the viewpoint of a person who lives on the periphery of Jewish life and in the midst of an intellectual climate which is Western and Christian.

Religion is an aspect of culture. Since the Jew in America, consciously or unconsciously, identifies himself with American culture it is natural and logical that he should adopt the forms, if not the ideas, of the religion of the culture with which he identifies himself.

To argue that "mixed pews" is against Halakah and the spirit of historic Judaism would carry weight only with a person who in his daily or secular life would identify himself with Jewish culture, as was the case in Eastern and Central Europe. To argue against "mixed pews" in a land where the Jew identifies himself with the majority culture is to impose upon him the burden of selecting only certain and particular elements of the majority culture and rejecting others. This is beyond the will or intellectual grasp of the average person.

I shall go a step further and say that it is difficult to profess and practice a religion which is not indigenous to the culture with which ones wishes to identify himself. The problem, in my view, stems from the fact that the Emancipation Era presented the Jew with a dilemma. He had either to reject the notion of being a member of a particular race or ethnic group which confesses an autochthonous religion or he had to modify his religion to fit the condition imposed upon him as the price of emancipation; this, the Reformers did. The Jewish intellectual who does not wish to be guilty of mimicry can only function as a schizoid personality.

Yours very sincerely,



SN:ia