

"The American Council for Judaism: Neither American nor for Judaism"

A-70

I. Last week, on the eve of the departure of Secretary of State Dulles and Mutual Security Administrator Stassen, to the State of Israel and the Arab Countries of the Near East, the American Council for Judaism held its annual convention in San Francisco. The convention, well-covered in the American press for an organization so small, spewed forth its usual poison under the guise of pro-Americanism and anti-Zionism, pro-Arabism and anti-State-of-Israel.

Normally, the rantings of this numerically small but vociferous ~~people~~ ^{purple} fringe of American Jewry would not call for an answer by Zionists and teachers of religion. Americans, both Jews and non-Jews, have already become immune to the pompous malice this outfit yearly injects into the press. But the attack this year is most ominous because of two reasons: First, as we pointed out, it comes at a critical moment in the power-equilibrium in the Near East and in the relations of Israel to the new American administration. Second, their accusations of disloyalty against American Zionists smell strongly of the Pravda charges against Israel and Jews in general, especially before their recent "T'SHUVAH". I believe that a sermon on "DA MAH LE'HASHIV LE'APIKORUS", on the rebuttal to their perverted charges, is an essential of religious education. In fairness to the Council, allow me to read to you a short statement of their principles which they have prepared and which they disseminate in every propaganda release.

"The American Council for Judaism is a national educational organization whose primary objective is the advancement of the ethical, spiritual, religious aspects of Judaism. The Council rejects the notion that Judaism is in any sense a nationality, or that Jews constitute a "race", a "nation apart" or a "culture". The only homeland of American Jews, the Council maintains, is the

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United States of America. The Council therefore favors the social, economic, political and cultural integration into American institutions of all Americans of Jewish faith."

Note that the statement itself reflects a most negative approach. "The Council rejects". "The only homeland". The negative and restrictive attitude is itself symptomatic of Ideological stagnation. For the truth of the matter is that these people are perennial "againsters". They are against Zionism, against Israel, and, as we shall later prove, against ANY FORM OF Traditional Judaism. But ~~only~~ they do, after all, claim to be pro- American and pro-"Judaism". Let us then, analyze these claims and, I hope, prove that the American Council for Judaism is neither American nor for Judaism.

II Their strongest argument against Zionism, or any form of sympathy by American Jews for the State of Israel, is that of "dual- allegiance". How, they ask, can one be a loyal American if he seeks to promote the welfare of Israel? They maintain that Zionism implies a political loyalty to a foreign state, and is therefore treason, pure and simple. The conclusion, drawn from the words of this handful of self-declared patriots, is that the vast majority of American Jews are traitors to America. A conclusion, incidentally, which is reached also by the ^{Gerald} ~~Arnold~~ L. K. Smiths and the Father Coughlins.

The answer, of course, is self-evident. No Zionist feels any political allegiance to the government of Israel. I doubt if Supreme Court Justice Brandeis was disloyal. I doubt if the late Stephen Wise, a Democrat, was a traitor. I do not think you can accuse the strongly Republican Abba Hillel Silver of treason. On the basis of the facts, the Council's accusations are just so much

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eye-wash from blind bigots who will not see the Truth even if they were able. Zionists who fought for Uncle Sam and gave their lives for him are incensed by this "BILBUL". We do not respond to such hollow charges apologetically. We respond with indignation.

What the Lessing Rosenwalds and Elmer Bergers cannot understand is that we feel for our fellow Jews in Israel, we seek to advance their economic and cultural and religious status, and, yes, even their political status. But that does not imply political allegiance. The fact that certain New York papers advocate more aid for Korea does not mean that they profess allegiance to Syngman Rhee. Nor does the opposition of some Americans to Premier Mossad^egh of Iran make them the royal subjects of the Shah. American democracy is big enough and broad enough to allow its adherents to help other peoples. It is big enough to allow all sorts of sympathies, provided political loyalty to the U.S.A. is not infringed upon. The scared super-patriots of the American Council for Judaism had better learn this and learn it fast. American Jews will not long remain silent on this matter of Jewish McCarthyism.

True Americanism, as propounded by its foremost thinkers and philosophers, is based on what is known as "cultural pluralism", which means that many diverse cultures can thrive and develop independently within the framework of our political and governmental structure. Every culture continued and nourished whether the Jewish or the Irish or the Chinese, seems only to add to the greatness and stature of our wonderful country. The existence of different folk-ways and religious customs has always been proof of the democratic nature of our country.

As Rabbi Miller, President of the Z.O.A., said recently:

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"I know of no organization of Irish-Americans which tries to represent the deep attachment of the sons of Erin for their mother country as 'un-American' or 'unpatriotic'. Would anyone - Irish or otherwise - dare to suggest that the St. Patrick's Day Parade should not be held in the United States? I, who am a Jewish Rabbi, and as far removed from the culture of Ireland as could possibly be imagined, would certainly protest any attempt to remove the 'wearing of the green' from our scene. It is almost as much a part of our culture as that of Ireland, and it has added another dash of color to American life".

This Rabbi, for one, though not a card-holding Zionist, has infinite love for Israel, and yet I do not feel any political loyalty to the present Israeli government. As a matter of fact, I feel strongly opposed to the Ben Gurion regime and feel more friendly to the religious centrist parties and even the rightist party of Menachem ^{Beigin} ~~Beitdin~~. My President is Eisenhower, not Ben Zvi. But I fear only the G-d of Israel, not the opinions of McCarthy and McCarran.

But not only is the attempt to suppress Zionist feeling un-American, but equally so is the callous pro-Arab policy of ~~ACJ~~ ACJ un-American. I do not propose to repeat the well known argument that Israel is the only real democracy in the Near East. Nor do I propose to enter into any ^{polemics} ~~policies~~ regarding the Arab Refugee question. It is true that no humanitarian, Jewish or Gentile, Zionist or non-Zionist, can remain unperturbed by the lot of these unfortunate Arabs. But the solution to the problem is not to attack those who offered them peace and whose offers these same Arabs rejected. Obviously, the Arab feudal lords are playing politics with their own unfortunate brethren, and the ~~ACJ~~ ACJ is helping them.

It is curious, too, that these same benevolent Rosenwalds and Bergers never were overly excited about the tragedy of the Jewish refugees. Their charity seems to begin and end away from home. I am reminded of the time Maurice Samuels, in a brilliant lecture, set forth the Zionist point-of-view for what was then known as Palestine. During the Question-and-Answer Period, this same "Rabbi" Berger asked the speaker, "But what would you say, Mr. Samuels, if you were an Arab?". To which he answered, "and what would you say, 'Rabbi' Berger, if you were a Jew?".

III. So much so for the "American" part of the A C J. But they lay claim, too, to the "advancement of the ethical, spiritual, religious aspects of Judaism". Can genuine Judaism support their contentions?

Here, too, the A C J is negative and exclusivist. To their ancient complaint that Jews are not a "nation", and therefore Zion means nothing to us, they have in recent years added the argument that we are not a "people", a "community", or even a "culture".

"The Council's position has been that Judaism, like Christianity, is a universal religion, not a nationality." Notice at once how their anti-Zionism is linked to a neo-Christianity. Listen further to another selection from their propaganda releases: "The Council's religious program, Rabbi Berger promised, would give priority to the Judaism of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Jesus and Judah Magnes". I believe that this choice piece of undiminished "CHUTZPAH" sufficiently illustrates the extent of their "Judaism".

Zion, Jerusalem, Israel - These have always been central in Jewish thought. Any attempt to purge them from the whole of Judaism is as vulgar and as blasphem^mous as the attempt by the pro-Communist Shomer Ha'Tzair to expunge the name of G-d from the Bible. How, in the "double-think" of the A C J, are you going to interpret the

covenant of Abraham with G-d concerning the Land of Israel? What about Isiah's prophecies of Return to Israel; what of the myriad of Biblical laws concerning the Land; what about fully one-half of Talmudic Law which concern "MITZVOS HA'TLUYOS BA'ARETZ", commandments relating to the Land of Israel?

And their second "interpretation of Judaism", their berating of the idea of Jewish culture and community, is even more un-Jewish. AM YISROEL has always been a holy concept for us. We are a people and a culture, and Judaism is meaningless without that central theme. I would say that fully nine-tenths of Jewish Laws and Ethics treats of this brotherhood and cultural element. Yes, and we are a community too.

It is interesting that the Bible records two covenants between G-d and Israel. One was culminated on Mt.Sinai where Israel accepted the Torah and the Ten Commandments, where we accepted OLE MALCHUS SHAMAYIM, and became a religious people. That was the great covenant which initiated Judaism. But this covenant was only the second of two, and would have been impossible without the first. And that first BRISS, or covenant, was made when the Jews were still in Egypt. That was the covenant when G-d first referred to us as AM, a people. We were molded together by common bonds of fraternity, ~~mutual~~ mutual interest and fate and destiny. It was then that we became Jews, and only afterwards were we able to acquire Judaism. For he who has not identified himself with his fellow-Jews, he who has not suffered with them, and loved and laughed and cried and complained and toiled with them, can never accept a Torah and practice the second covenant, Judaism.

No wonder, therefore, that in this week's portion, the Bible begins to give the geneology of the children of Moses and Aaron -

but somehow neglects to mention the children of Moses. V'EILEH TOLDOS AHARON V'MOSHE, "These are the children of Aaron and Moses", B'YOM DIBER HA'SHEM ES MOSHE B'HAR SINAI, "The day God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai", when He gave them the Torah and the Oral Laws. And whose children are worthy of mention this day of the covenant of Mt. Sinai, when Judaism was first revealed? - V'EILEH SHMOS BNEI AHARON, "These are the names of Aaron's children". But no mention at all of the two sons of Moses! And why? - Because during the stay of Israel in Egypt, when the covenant of peoplehood was forged from the pains and tragedies, the persecutions and tortures our people suffered in MITZRAYIM, during that time, the two sons of Moses were vacationing with their grandfather ~~Jethro~~ on the sunny meadows of Midyan! And if one does not identify himself with Israel as a people, if ~~he~~ does not recognize the BRIS MITZRAYIM, the covenant of peoplehood, then he can keep shouting NA'ASEH VE'NISHMA and announcing his "Judaism" from the roof-tops or even the mountain-tops of Sinai - it is insufficient. If ~~he~~ forgets his fellow Jews, even if he professes his "Judaism", why even if he is the very son of Moses, still he has no place in the Bible, the religion of Israel.

The rantings of the A C J are, therefore, in vain. Their protestations of "Judaism" ring hollow and are eminently unconvincing. For traditional and historical Judaism can never agree to a Jewish religion without a Jewish people. Perhaps the best proof for this contention lies in the words of the A C J. They print and disseminate: "We are reviving - and extending - the basic principles of Reform Judaism....as those principles were first seen by the founders of the movement". Assuredly not the Reform Judaism of Wise and Silver. But Reform, nevertheless, the Reform which once boasted that "Germany is my Palestine and Berlin my Jerusalem", And the Reform which, again in

the words of the A C J, seeks to mold a "Judaism like Christianity" and which gives priority to the Judaism of "Jesus and Judah Magnes". No Rabbi, be he Orthodox, Conservative or Reform, who has not flirted with Christianity, could ever maintain such un-Jewish ideas and call them "Judaism".

In conclusion, then, we have tried to show that the A C J advocates sham Americanism, fake Judaism, ersatz religion and false sociology. Such a movement is bound to fail - and the words of Rabbi Berger at the convention bear out this good news.

Let me finish by reading to you one short congratulatory telegram sent to the A C J on the occasion of the recent convention:

"On the tenth anniversary of the American Council for Judaism it gives me real pleasure to express my appreciation of the constructive work to which you have been devoting yourself. By your continuous efforts to reveal the true and deep meaning of Judaism, you have brought a valuable contribution to the enrichment of the common spiritual inheritance of mankind, and have shown the right way to those who are willing to promote genuine understanding between peoples of different faiths. Best wishes for the success of your endeavors".

Now who is this man who speaks this pro-American language of "genuine understanding between peoples of different faiths"? Who is this authority on Judaism and lover of Jews who declares in favor of the Council's "True and deep meaning of Judaism"? A great exponent of democracy? A noted Rabbi or Talmudic Scholar?

No, my friends, decidedly no. The man who sent this message is closer to medieval feudalism than to American democracy, and loves Jews even less than he knows about Judaism.

He is Charles Malik, the Minister of Lebanon. I leave you to draw your own conclusions.