

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

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1 Iyyar 5747
April 29, 1987

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm
President
Yeshivah University
500 West 185th Street
New York, New York 10033

Dear Dr. Lamm,

As always it was a pleasure to see you last Shabbat in Riverdale. At the same time I want to thank you for your kind words about my lecture. I hope that you know that I cherish your friendship and guidance, so that your favorable comments about my talk were all the more appreciated.

You mentioned that you were interested in sources documenting the rejection of the nexus of Sin and Punishment as explanations for the massacres inflicted upon Rhenish Jewry in the First Crusade of 1096. My major source for this contention has always been the collection of crusader chronicles themselves which are, as you know, available in the pocket edition of A. Habermann under the title, **Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz v'Tzarfat**, (Jerusalem, 1945). Careful examination of these texts shows a definite incongruence of reaction to the events described. The editors *do* interpolate comments such as **Mipnei Hataeinu** but such sentiments are not echoed by the speeches of the principles as recorded. These latter speak of the privilege of dying **Al Kiddush HaShem** and the like. Now, I fully realize that the history of the creation and redaction of these texts is highly problematic. However, based upon other evidence of the self-image of Askenazic Jewry in its "Heroic Age" (as Dr. Agus z'l would put it) confirms the authenticity of these sentiments. Classical Ashkenaz was self-conscious in a grand way of its unimpeachable piety and scholarship. It would have been most consistent of them to refuse to see their trials as punishment but rather as a test or testimony of their loyalty to G-d. Certainly the acceptance of the massive self-immolation practiced on that occasion , by the children and students of the martyrs is itself convincing evidence of this self-image.

As I mentioned, I have been of this opinion for a number of years now. Prior to preparing my lecture of last Shabbat I had the opportunity to read the relevant chapter in Alan Mintz' book **Hurban** (Columbia University Press, 1984) which independently arrives at the same conclusions. I highly recommend Mintz' study if you haven't had a chance to read it, although, personally I disagree with his downplaying of the Akedah motif in the liturgical pieces devoted to the crusades, in favor of the so-called "Recreation of the Temple." Moreover, while I regret I can't presently give direct

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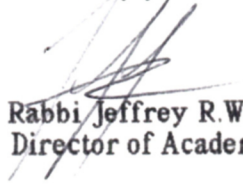
citations, my remarks about the self-image of Classical Ashkenaz are derived from the following studies: A. Grossman, Hachmei Ashkenaz HaRishonim, (Jerusalem, 1981); J. Katz, 'Maariv BiZmano v'Shelo BiZmano,' Tarbiz, 35(1970); H. Soloveitchik, 'Can Halachic Texts Talk History?' AJS Review, III(1978) and idem, 'Three Themes in Sefer Hassidim,' ibid, I(1976) especially part III.

Regarding the sources I cited which justify the mass-suicides of 1096 from an *Halachic* point of view, there were actually two of these. The first is found in Moshav Zegenim l'Baalei HaTosafot commenting on Genesis IX:8. The second is a responsum of the Maharam MiRotenberg, whose exact location I do not have noted at present. I will check out the exact citation and forward it on to you separately.

I hope that I have provided you with the information you needed. If there is any other way in which I may be of assistance please let me know. I certainly applaud the position which you have adopted in terms of Holocaust Theodicy and admire you greatly for your courage in supporting it.

With every warm regard to you and Mrs. Lamm, I am

Sincerely yours,


Rabbi Jeffrey R. Woolf
Director of Academics