

Overseas News

Modern Orthodoxy's 'identity crisis'

*From our Correspondent
New York*

According to Rabbi Norman Lamm, one of the leading young scholars of Orthodoxy in the United States, modern Orthodoxy is going through a largely unnecessary "identity crisis," deriving from its failure to work out a successful synthesis on strong theological grounds between its "two worlds"—the "modern" and the "Orthodox."

This failure "to interpret itself to itself," Rabbi Lamm said, "derives from a remarkable intellectual timidity, which we should long ago have outgrown," towards the positions of those both to the Left and the Right of modern Orthodoxy in the United States.

Rabbi Lamm, the spiritual leader of the Jewish Centre of New York, and a professor of Jewish philosophy at Yeshiva University, sharply criticised the "humiliating apologetic posture" of modern Orthodoxy towards those to the Left of the movement.

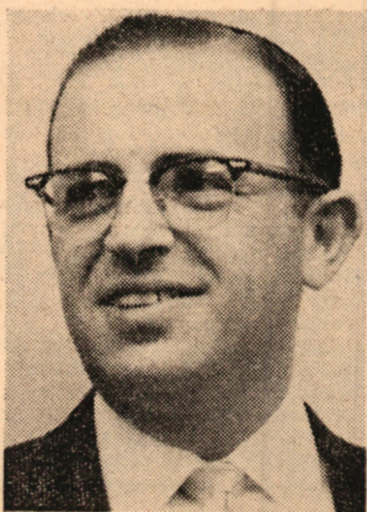
Unbecoming shyness

"We seemed to be saying that while we hold on to the practices and doctrines of the Jewish tradition, we are really just like everybody else, perhaps even more so. We appeared to be whispering, in unbecoming shyness, that we were not really foreign or dirty."

At the same time, he continued, modern Orthodoxy has been "almost masochistically apologetic" towards the Right wing of Orthodoxy, which disapproves of its educational policy of engaging in secular studies.

To this group, he said, modern Orthodoxy has presented "the lamest of apologies—vocational necessity." Thus, "our whole existence is based on a practical economic concession—the need of a college degree in order to get a better job," instead of on sound halachic grounds.

Rabbi Lamm said that the prob-



Rabbi Norman Lamm

lem of modern Orthodoxy is that it has not yet itself accepted "openly and directly on the basis of our major contribution to Jewish life in this century: that it is our religious duty, our sacred responsibility, to live the whole Torah tradition in the world, instead of retreating from a world in which there is literally no longer any place left to retreat to.

"As long as this condition of spiritual and intellectual diffidence prevails, we can hardly blame the non-Orthodox world for accusing us of temporising, the chasidic world for ignoring us and the yeshiva world for disdaining us," he said.