

BOOK REVIEWS

The Case for the Chosen People, by W. GUNTHER PLAUT (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965).

Reviewed by Arnold Ages

"Let no one say," Blaise Pascal once wrote, "that I have never said anything new; the arrangement of the subject is new." This description of originality is, I think, applicable to *The Case for the Chosen People*. For it is not the newness of Dr. Plaut's* theses which command attention. It is rather the consummate skill with which he has marshalled the evidence in his case and the seductive charm of a lucid and at times lyrical English style which raises his work above the run-of-the-mill religious essay. And since it is impossible in a work of art to separate *forme* and *fond*, the reader finds himself confronting an interpretation of Judaism which, because of the artistry of the approach, is fresh, dynamic, proud and dignified.

The first section of this book deals with the "improbabilities" of Jewish history. Dr. Plaut concedes

readily that his interpretation is not new. Rabbi Hertz in his famous edition of the Pentateuch precedes him in the exposition of this thesis. Yet Dr. Plaut expands the Hertz approach with a series of rhetorical questions which furnish some profound insights into the inexplicable (by rational norms at least) peculiarities of Jewish history. Among the anomalies of that history Dr. Plaut suggests the following: Moses was hardly the prototype of a national hero; the servitude in Egypt was a strange beginning for a priest people; Jethro, a Midianite, founded the Sanhedrin; Job was not even a Jew! Moving into the contemporary period the author marvels at the improbable unity of the Jews who are held together in a common bond "through voluntary submission to the interpretation of scholars." Christianity's pervasive hatred of Judaism and the endless persecution of the Jews in a line from the Gospels to

* See also the immediately preceding article on "Reform and Revelation" by Emanuel Feldman. —Ed.

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Auschwitz make Jewish survival appear incredible. The creation of Israel is no less miraculous in the face of normal historical experience.

To these "improbabilities" Dr. Plaut addresses himself throughout the rest of his essay. He analyzes the various treatments of the puzzle of Jewish existence ranging from the theological to the Freudian. The Christian interpretation, he notes, has undergone some changes in recent times. Whereas the Jews were once the accursed nation they have now become those who have "a legitimate concern with at least half of the divine economy." To Marx's view of Judaism, Plaut accords the distinction of having taken Jewish history out of isolation and bound it to the history of the nations. Spengler's "international" Jew, we learn, was maliciously distorted and exploited for preposterous Nazi racial theories. The author devotes several paragraphs to a discussion of Toynbee's view of Jewish history, pointing out that Jewish nationalism has always furnished the matrix for Jewish spiritual flowering.

The author dissects with great finesse the arguments of the Jewish humanists whose apotheosis of Judaism is based on an alleged uniqueness in Jewish values, culture and folk ways. Dr. Plaut asserts that uniqueness, even if it were demonstrable, is no end in itself. As for anti-Semitism, he rejects this phenomenon as a *raison d'être* for Jews.

It is in the penultimate section of his book that Dr. Plaut begins to suggest some of his own reasons

for accepting the chosen people concept. It is here that he is at his lyrical best. Speaking of the mysterious bond which unites Jews, he says: "For there is one matter we cannot overlook: the Jew in Marrakesh and the Jew in Manhattan *think* they belong together — despite all their mutual ignorance and despite all their divergencies. Across the chasm runs a narrow, swaying bridge of faith. Across it walk the hopes and prayers of one single people who say 'Yet we are one.'" Elsewhere he refers to Jewish history as an auto-da-fé "which burns to illumine, not to destroy. It burns like the Biblical bush beyond the reach of physical laws."

Dr. Plaut's best chapter is the one in which he lists a series of "perhaps" to explain in his own personal way the why of Jewish existence and hence the rationale for the chosen people concept. For him Israel was chosen: to proclaim God's unity with Abraham, to demonstrate that from slavery can come freedom, to announce the prophetic vision of God, to be the progenitor of Christianity and Islam, to constitute a bridge between East and West (in the Middle Ages), to initiate the idea of emancipation, to show the possibility of minority survival and to preach the possibility of grace "in a world that denies the incursion of the divine." These purposes in Dr. Plaut's mind do not remain static. They change according to time and circumstance. He believes that we cannot know our providential destiny while we are part of it. That is part of our chosenness.

The most poignant part of W.

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Gunther Plaut's book is an all too short autobiographical sketch of his boyhood years in Germany, his subsequent journey and home in America and his heart-breaking return to the Nordhausen concentration camp as a U. S. chaplain in 1945. Confronting the mounds of bodies lying unburied in the streets he asked questions about the ultimate meaning of life and God. "Out of the contradictions of my own soul," he writes, "rose the belief that this very tension was part of the world's essence. It was a thought embraced and explored before; to me it now became more than thought: it became my visible road to God."

One of the distinguishing features of *The Case for the Chosen People* is Dr. Plaut's comparison of Orthodox and Reform views of the Jewish religious vocation. To his credit,

the author, an acknowledged leader of the liberal school, presents an adequate and in the main, fair picture of both approaches. One could take issue with his description of the purpose of the Mitzvah, which he feels has an exclusively spiritual end. While Jewish tradition does teach the performance of the Mitzvah as spiritual training the observance thereof is not contingent upon this but on obeisance to divine commandments.

But who can dispute Dr. Plaut's concluding words? "Why is a Jew? I have only one answer: because there is God. In finding my people, I found Him; in finding Him I found my people's purpose in history. And in this starry coalescence forever shining with uncertain brilliance, I meet all men in common search for large and noble goals."

Urban Civilization in Pre-Crusade Europe: A Study of Organized Town-Life in Northwestern Europe during the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries Based on the Responsa Literature, by IRVING A. AGUS (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1965, 2 vol.).

Reviewed by
F. M. Heichelheim

This is a standard work about the Jewish responsa of early medieval Europe. It contains a Preface, an Introduction, an account about how the material was arranged, and brief biographies of the main responders. There follow some 750 pages on which free versions in English of the major responsa are given, accompanied by valuable comments. This main part of the book is divided into eleven quite reasonable chapters,

although the author has to refer forward and backward more than occasionally. They are Travel, Security, Monopoly, Business, Money-Lending, Trades, Real-Estate, Community, Family, Education, Relations between Jews and non-Jews. A List of Sources and Texts, an Index of Authors, and a General Index close the book.

The main part of this book proves to be philologically superior to any earlier publication wherever I tried to check it. Unfortunately, identical Hebrew and Aramaic terms are, in different documents,

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not always translated by the same English words. This, of course, does not create any difficulty for linguistic experts. On the other hand, a large mass of Jewish readers who are interested in such a subject are not sufficiently at home in Hebrew and Aramaic, and even less so are the non-Jewish historians of the Middle Ages whose attention the author rightly wishes to attract. Otherwise, the *pièce de résistance* of this book, the survey of responsa, is an ingenious and excellently informed work of Jewish scholarship of which the author and all his friends can justly be proud.

The main weaknesses of this book are found in the embellishments. The General Index neither is compiled in accordance with the requirements of responsa philologists nor medieval historians. It therefore is almost useless.

One suspects that the author had no hand in it at all, but agreed that some *Am Ha'aretz* should do this work, which would have been tedious, indeed, for himself or any other true scholar. Another weakness is found in the Introduction and in many brief supporting remarks throughout the book which try to make the Jewish social and economic sector decisive for much of the pattern of early medieval development in Western Europe. Here the author unfortunately shows that he does

not know the non-Jewish contemporary evidence and extensive modern discussion sufficiently well. Especially the seminal and vital Italian source material is rarely considered.¹

To mention a few errors of fact, the "Syrians" in the Roman Empire were usually not of "Phoenician" descent, but a mixture of Hellenistic Greeks and Orientals, i.e. "Levantines." The Romans were fully experienced in trade operations, as any perusal of the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* proves. The Jews of the early medieval West were not really separated from those living in the Greek-Orthodox and Islamic worlds, as the very documents which the author has made accessible to us prove irrefutably. In principle, Darwin's "Natural Selection" is not a theory which can be used to explain special social, economic, or theological patterns of medieval western Jewry. The interconnection of the Greek-Orthodox, Islamic, and Papal worlds was much more obvious in the non-Jewish sector too than the author realizes. Too many generally medieval institutions are considered to be influenced by those of early Western Jewry.²

Furthermore, the Jewish predecessors in the same field of research are not evaluated satisfactorily. One example may suffice. Thirty or so years ago, a young rabbi visited me in Cambridge, England. He had

1. Cf. with a comprising bibliography by L. Ruggini, *Economia e Società nell'Italia Annonaria* (Milan, 1961).

2. Cf. here especially with bibliography G. Mickwitz, *Die Kartellfunktionen der Zuenfte etc. Societas Scientiarum Fennica. Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum VIII, 3* (1936), as an antidote.

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discovered the significance of the Talmudic *Cherem Hayishuv*, the "Law of Exclusive Settlement" in responsa from Rabbenu Gershom onwards. At first he considered whether this Jewish legislation might not have been influenced by the existence of medieval guilds, but I was able to provide him with proof evidence which indicated that the medieval guilds on the Rhine were one century, if not more, later than Rabbenu Gershom's period. As a result of our discussions L. Rabinowitz wrote two important articles,³ and thereafter the book *The Herem Hayishuv. A Contribution to the Medieval Economic History of the Jews* (Goldston, London, 1945). Today L. Rabinowitz is the retired Chief Rabbi of South Africa, and was mentioned as one of the foremost albeit controversial candidates for the coveted posts of

Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel and of Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. The pertinent scholarly work of such a learned and widely known personally is at least worthy of being discussed critically. This Dr. Agus does not do.

In sum, the author has presented us with a book on the early medieval Jewish responsa of Western Europe which will have to be used for several generations at least. Those who, like the present reviewer, have ancestors among the early Rabbis of this time, will be grateful to Dr. Agus because he was able to shed new light on the medieval past of their own families. Whether, however, those special theories of the author which are not connected with his splendid Jewish scholarship will find general acceptance, is very much to be doubted.

3. The Medieval Jewish Counterpart of the Gild Merchant, *Economic Hist. Review* 8 (1938), p. 180 f., and The Talmudic Basis of the Herem Hayishuv, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, N. S., 28 (1938), p. 217 f.

Jewish Identity — Modern Responsa and Opinions, compiled by BARUCH LITVIN, edited by SIDNEY B. HOENIG (New York: Philip Feldheim, 1965).

Reviewed by
Herbert C. Dobrinsky

On October 27, 1958, David Ben Gurion, then Prime Minister of the State of Israel, sent a letter of inquiry to the *Chachmei Yisrael* in the Holy Land and in the Diaspora, inviting their opinions on the question of "Who is a Jew?" It was the Israeli Government's security

requirement that all citizens register, indicating their nationality and religion, that gave rise to the question, how children of mixed marriages should be treated.

Some forty-three replies from Rabbis and other scholars, authors, and historians, from countries all over the world were received.

Many will recall the violent wail of frenzy and fury which accom-

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panied the inquiry and placed Ben Gurion in the awkward position of questioning the advice of his Rabbinate in whose purview this halakhic question should have been rightfully contained.

Others, quite apart from seeking to enhance and preserve the prestigious role of the Israeli Rabbinate, objected to the galaxy of authors invited to submit opinions on a problem in an area of Halakhah where their expertise may be dubious.

The fact that the question of "Who is a Jew?" had to be posed in such dramatic fashion is in itself a commentary on the prevalent problem facing Jewish life throughout the world and even in Israel. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, revered religious thinker and foremost halakhic spokesman for American Jewry, succinctly states in his own name and in behalf of Rabbi Chaim Heller זצ"ל, the position of traditional Judaism.

It is impossible for any person — minor or adult — to be considered or to be registered as a Jew if the mother is a non-Jewess so long as he (himself) has not been converted to Judaism according to the laws of Moses and Israel. Parental assertions or even the declaration of the grown-up himself (that he wishes to be known as a Jew) will never avail . . .

And towards the end of his brief reply, Rabbi Soloveitchik asserted,

We are indeed perplexed that the State of Israel now seeks to hew down our traditional branches . . . sanctified through the spilt blood and sufferings of preceding generations. It is only be-

cause of these roots that we preserve our uniqueness as a holy people and that we are inextricably bound to the Holy Land.

We therefore ask you — Your Excellency — you, whose name we honor and whose historic accomplishments for the establishment of the State of Israel we acknowledge: Will the present State of Israel be built up (maintaining a threat of) destruction to its very sanctity?

It comes as no surprise that Mr. Baruch Litvin, "The Orthodox Warrior" of Mt. Clemens, Mich., who fought with heart and soul and substance in the courts of that city to preserve the sanctity of the House of God by retaining the *Mechitzah*, should once again do battle to preserve the sanctity of the House of Israel and place the *Mechitzah* of *Kedushah* before those who seek to infiltrate and dilute *Kedushat Yisrael* by seeking admission to the community of Israel without proper halakhic conversion procedures. Mr. Baruch Litvin is a unique man of letters, who previously compiled *The Sanctity of the Synagogue*. It was with great difficulty, phenomenal expense and inexhaustible patience that Mr. Litvin brought this *Jewish Identity* into print. Permission had originally been given by Mr. Ben Gurion but, due to certain pressures by one of the respondents, this permission was withdrawn and was granted again only after much travail.

Surely the book was worth the effort—for its most revealing reading is in the respected position which Torah Law holds in the eyes of even the non-Orthodox and secularly inclined who recognize the role of Halakhah as the sole

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means through which Judaism can retain its unity with the past and future. If more works of this nature which show the relevance of Jewish tradition would reach our youth, our future will be more readily secured.

It is for the reader to himself experience the adventuresome path of these 420 pages. In so doing he will realize that Mr. Ben Gurion is posing a problem which, although related to the State of Israel, affects all Jews. The greatest chal-

lenges facing our youth are ignorance of Judaism and assimilation into the non-Jewish world. A careful reading of *Jewish Identity* should be an antidote to the misconceptions which are rampant and should serve as a deterrent to intermarriage which threatens to destroy the House of Israel.

Mr. Litvin and Dr. Hoenig have here given us a treatise which, speaking in the modern idiom, articulates the traditional point of view.

Jews and Americans, by IRVING MALIN (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965).

Reviewed by William Braun

The widespread acceptance of Jewish writers in America in this past decade tempts critics to look into their Jewish ties. Mr. Malin examines the work of seven Jewish writers whose note of Jewishness is unmistakable: Saul Bellow, Leslie Fiedler, Bernard Malamud, Isaac Rosenfeld, Delmore Schwartz, Philip Roth and Karl Shapiro. At the end of his investigation Mr. Malin declares somewhat dogmatically that the lasting qualities of the works he has been discussing come precisely from their Jewishness: "When our writers are *directly* concerned with their Jewishness—interpreting the God of their ancestors—they produce powerful sincere art; when they are not, they offer less intense, phony, or imperfect work" (pp. 9-10).

The Jewishness of genuine works of art, Mr. Malin finds, is not a

national or cultural concept, but a religious impulse.

Our seven writers crave God, but they do not seek Him through orthodox worship, learning, and action. They are more "solitary": because they are torn by dualities — exile and Land, head and heart, past and present — they believe that God is the Transcendence of such dualities. In trying to identify this Transcendence, they point everywhere — at sex, nature, joy — although they do not eventually accept the Jewish God, they do give us a "legacy of wonder" and "mystery" (104).

Though one may cavil at the sweeping tone of Mr. Malin's statement, its significance seems obvious. He sees the American Jewish writer as the authentic God-seeker of our time, and his work as an expression of a religious quest, more intense and more timely than the traditionally accepted manifestation of man's relationship to his Creator.

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Reading Malin's book, in spite of its unquestioned importance, is no complete joy. In his critical discussions the magic somehow evaporates from the magic barrel. He chooses to cover a great deal of material, and of necessity he devotes much space to the retelling of plots, much of it in a clumsy, hackneyed and colloquial fashion. Often he fails to transmit the mood of the works he is talking about. Perhaps he was in a hurry to finish his book and to get it on the market while times were propitious. One could have wished that he had given his critical pre-

sentation as much care as he gave to thinking about his writers. At the danger of being called a stickler, this reviewer mentions even the many printing mistakes in the book, one of them a howler that contributes to a special kind of Jewish humor: "When her fiancé goes into the army, she simply exchanges him for another" (p. 88). Perhaps the stylistic inadequacies are to be symbolic of the alienation that Mr. Malin's writers are troubled with, but even there an attempt at transcending it would have been in order.

Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, by DANIEL JEREMY SILVER (Leiden: E. J. Brill Co., 1965).

Reviewed by Irving A. Agus

At the beginning of the second quarter of the thirteenth century there erupted among the Jews a serious controversy of immense proportions: a protracted dispute characterized by intense bitterness and biting viciousness, the likes of which the Jews of Europe had not witnessed for five hundred years. It arose mainly in the communities of the Provence, whence letters and appeals by the partisans of both sides were dispatched to the Jews of Northern France and to those of Spain. The authors of these letters heaped accusations at their adversaries, asked for sympathy and for active support, and thus embroiled an ever-widening circle of communities in bitter dispute and serious contentiousness. Special agitators were dispatched

by both sides, and the awesome weapons of *niddui* and *cherem* (excommunication and anathema) were freely brandished and mercilessly hurled even against scholars and saintly individuals. Jewry was again threatened with a serious and permanent split, similar to the one that had isolated the Karaites.

The controversy centered on the philosophic ideas of Maimonides in his *Guide for the Perplexed*, and in the first section of his *Mishneh Torah*, entitled *Sefer ha-Mada*. Already before the year 1200, R. Meir b. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia had written a letter to the scholars of Lunel criticizing sharply Maimonides' ideas on Resurrection and the Incorporeality of God, expressed in the *Mishneh Torah*. But his was an isolated voice. When, however, Samuel Ibn Tibbon translated the *Guide* from

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Arabic into Hebrew, and especially when Judah al Charizi produced a bolder and freer translation, a sharp dispute arose over the question of whether Maimonides had treated too cavalierly the basic dogmas of Judaism, whether he had revealed many secrets of faith that were best kept hidden from the masses, and whether it was dangerous to Judaism to allow indiscriminate perusal of books meant only for the elite. The dispute grew in heat and intensity until R. Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier, abetted by his students R. Jonah Gerondi and R. David b. Saul, took strong steps to discourage the study of the above-mentioned books. Subsequently a storm of indignation broke out in the neighboring communities. The three scholars became the arch-enemies of the admirers of Maimonides, and a most powerful campaign of character assassination was inaugurated against them, a campaign that was pursued with great vigor and unequalled fury.

Modern Jewish scholars have shown great interest in this so-called Maimonidean Controversy. They have discussed it at great length, and have searched out and published many relevant documents and letters. To them the controversy appeared as a Jewish Reformation struggle, as a forerunner of the Haskalah movement of their own day, as an altercation between the obscurantists and the "enlightened," and as a wrangle between the admirers of sweet reason and exalted philosophy on the one hand and the traditionalists and fundamentalists on the other.

The subject was therefore a highly favored one; and the greatest historians, from Heinrich to Itzchak Baer and Solomon Zeitlin, have dealt with it at great length.

Nevertheless, the treatment of the subject remained superficial. No one attempted a truly critical analysis of the sources. No one went beyond the surface recriminations and accusations and tried to discover the true reasons for the fantastic acrimony and bitterness of the pro-Maimonists. In the face of the claim of the chief victim of this campaign of hate, R. Solomon b. Abraham, that grossly falsified letters of his had been circulated by his opponents—the writings of these opponents have not been subjected by modern scholars to rigorous criticism, but were taken at face value. The vindictiveness of these writings, and their sharply abusive characterizations directed at outstanding Talmudic scholars—in an age when such scholars were most highly honored by all Jewry—received but scanty attention. The basic reasons and causes of the unusual bitterness of the admirers of philosophy—and therefore the true nature of the controversy—have so far not been explained.

The book of Dr. Daniel Jeremy Silver, entitled *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy*, is a fresh attempt at a study of the impact of the works of Maimonides on the Jews of his day, and of the criticisms and controversies these works have engendered, both in Europe and in the East. With fine penetrating insight the author describes first the commentators on

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and critics of the *Mishneh Torah*, and then launches upon a detailed analysis of the heated controversy that was aroused by the *Guide*. Sharply does he project the idea, first emphasized by Prof. Zeitlin in his book, *Maimonides*, that it was the proven greatness of the *Mishneh Torah* as an halakhic work of the very first calibre that caused the philosophic writings of its author to be taken so seriously both by the admirers of philosophy and by those who feared its destructive influence. With fair accuracy and scholarly detachment does he describe the views of those who feared the deleterious effects of the *Guide*, as well as the indignation and the anger of those who felt that their great hero was belittled and besmirched. He does not criticize nor condemn either party to the controversy, but tries impartially to elucidate and explain their views, attitudes, opinions and actions.

The author took his task very seriously. His fair mastery of the language and the categories of thought of the pertinent sources, and his thorough knowledge of the modern literature on the subject, point to unusual devotion and many years of concentration. It is true that his knowledge of Talmudic Judaism and the rabbinic idiom leave a great deal to be desired; and his understanding of Jewish life

and scholarship, especially of Ashkenazic Jewry, is somewhat limited. Statements such as "Maimonides' sources were not always familiar, available or acceptable; something of a bibliophile, Maimonides had enjoyed collecting textual variants . . . [p. 57]," as if this method of textual criticism was not widely used by Franco-German scholars; or "Maimonides' answer was equivocal . . . [p. 71]," when in reality that answer was crystal clear and quite emphatic — obviously point to serious limitations in the author's preparation for understanding rabbinic literature. Another example: In *Bava Batra* 16a, several *Amoraim* criticize sharply some bold and heterodox expressions of Job. In reference to one such detraction by the *Amora Raba*, the author writes (p. 115): "The traditional treatment of resurrection was anything but consistent. Raba had insisted that Job 7:9 indicated a *Biblical denial* of the entire doctrine [*italics mine*]." One could cite a number of such misinterpretations. His grasp of the subject, however, and his penetrating analysis of much of the pertinent data connected with the controversy, are indeed worthy of praise. Nevertheless, the basic cases and the true nature of this controversy are still as much of a problem as ever.

Sheilat Yeshurun, by GEDALIA FELDER (New York, 1964).

Reviewed by Morris S. Gorelik

There are essentially three forms of rabbinic literature which embody the major areas of halakhic

development. First, the *Talmudim* and the commentaries and sub-commentaries contain the bulk of discussion, evaluation, enactment and formulation of principles.

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These serve as the bedrock for the second group which is the codification of the academic discussions. This group of literature systematizes the Halakhah into definitive codes which serve as guides for rabbinic decisions. The third group, the Responsa, reflects the attempt of the individual *Poskim* to solve contemporary questions and problems in the light of halakhic principles. To the student of Halakhah these areas are often interrelated. An obscure Talmudic passage may be clarified as a *Posek* seeks a decision for a particular problem, just as the study of codes can be facilitated by a knowledge of Talmudic sources.

There are few scholars who are conversant in all areas of rabbinic literature, for this requires the rare ability to relate theory to reality. In the person of Rabbi Felder, author of *Sheilat Yesheurun*, one finds such a scholar blessed with the talent to translate academic knowledge into a living force. He possesses a mastery of the material, and the capacity to apply theoretical principles to contemporaneous situations. Knowledgeable in the diverse facets of Jewish law, he is able to treat in depth a wide range of halakhic subjects. The author is not satisfied with one or two supporting opinions, but he documents his decisions with numerous references and precedents. For example, his first responsum treats the question of whether it is permissible for a congregation to transplant its synagogue to a new area in which another congregation is already established. The author displays his

analytic talents as he divides the question into several sub-topics. This is followed by an extensive analysis of the *mitzvah* inherent in the establishment of synagogues in the light of Talmudic passages and commentaries. He cites copiously from the three areas of rabbinic literature of all periods. He then views the question in the light of the contemporary situation, always referring to the innumerable sources at his command. His all-embracing knowledge of various areas of rabbinic literature is again displayed in Responsum 33 dealing with the status of the apostate in Halakhah, and also in Responsum No. 16, which treats the subject of a Jew owning shares in firms engaged in the production and selling of non-kosher products. In these responsa, in addition to his references to both Talmudim and the standard codes of Maimonides and the *Shulchan Arukh*, he cites Gaonic sources, *Rishonim* and latter day commentaries as well as the responsa literature of the medieval and modern periods. His lucid style facilitates the reader's comprehension of otherwise complex and abstruse material.

In the study of several of his responsa, one notes, however, an inadequacy of historical perspective in the evolution of halakhic decision. This can be observed in the discussion of the status of the apostate in Jewish law. The reader would appreciate a chronological and historical order of halakhic views in reference to the question. Aside from the legal concepts, it might be advisable to place individual views and opinions in so-

ciological and political perspective. One would like to see a systematized study of the trends and tendencies of the Talmudic sages and how their respective opinions were applied in different periods. The reviewer also believes that a study of the different outlooks toward the apostate between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic authorities would produce deeper halakhic insights into the question. This lack of historical perspective is observed in Responsum No. 22 which treats the *mitzvah* of accepting converts to Judaism. Although the author comprehensively reviews the subject, one thirsts for a more extensive study of the social and political conditions of the times during which the respective opinions were expressed.

One may also take issue with the author in his analysis of present-day Jewish community and synagogue life. In Responsum No. 1 he permits a congregation to transfer its synagogue to an area in which another is already established. He bases his decision on the precedents of classical authorities who did not consider the establishment of more than one synagogue in an area as unjust competition. He also indicates that synagogues conduct services according to either the Ashkenazic or Sephardic manner, and that, if we should restrict the erection of synagogues, segments of people will be deprived of the opportunity to worship according to their custom. The author, however, fails to differentiate between the community patterns of yesteryear and of today. The synagogue of old was an

aspect of the general community offering mainly religious worship. Other services such as education, *mikveh*, burial were provided by the general community. Today, however, an individual synagogue is often a community in itself containing many facilities in addition to the *Bet Hakeneset*. The synagogue serves as a center for youth activities, adult education, social affiliation, and religious education for children. It has become necessary to incorporate these varied programs and activities within the confines of a synagogue center in order to strengthen the Jewish identification and association of our people. Thus, the synagogue has assumed the role of a community and requires the support of a large membership. In viewing the question under study, the author did not sufficiently consider the changing sociological pattern of the Jewish community.

A further illustration of the need to appreciate religious conditions in our society can be pointed out in reference to the question of page announcements during services treated in Responsum No. 4. Among his objections is the author's contention that the individual worshipper can study the order of the services on his own and therefore requires no pulpit assistance. He also indicates that in Talmudic days the cantor served as the proxy for large segments of the population who were unacquainted with the liturgy. Rabbi Felder, however, fails to take into account the unfortunate reality we face today—the estrangement of a great number of Jews from synagogue prac-

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tice. Due to the lack of a comprehensive Jewish training and neglect of religious observance many of our people have lost familiarity with the procedure of synagogue services. The reviewer, therefore, believes that since it is the duty of rabbinic leaders to draw people closer to religious observance, attendance at synagogue services can perhaps be a first step in the gradual return of individuals to the fold. The religious leader must therefore create a climate of welcome and provide direction to the estranged Jew. Page

announcements may be a step in that direction. In order for individuals to share in a religious experience they must become participants rather than onlookers.

Notwithstanding the above observations, the reviewer believes that Rabbi Felder has made a very significant contribution to practical Halakhah. One can only hope that in subsequent volumes he will utilize his vast scholarly resources for the study of the many issues that confront Orthodox Judaism in this space age of technical complexities and medical miracles.

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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Special Announcement

An article by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on “Is a Philosophy of Halakhah Possible?” is scheduled for publication in our Fall issue.
