

COMMUNICATIONS

JEWISH INTEREST IN VIETNAM

TO THE EDITOR OF *TRADITION*:

Prof. Charles S. Liebman makes clear in his contribution to the Spring-Summer 1967 issue of *TRADITION* that he disagrees with my views expressed in "The Jewish Interest in Vietnam." Beyond that, however, very little else is clear.

1) He claims that "Wyschogrod poses the alternatives of Communist victory or American victory in Vietnam. . . ." In the very next paragraph he quotes the following sentence from my article: "The U. S. should be ever ready to negotiate with the enemy and come to reasonable terms, even well short of total victory." How one can quote this sentence and at the same time assert that I pose the alternatives of Communist or American victory surpasses my understanding.

2) Liebman asserts that the majority of those active in the peace movement advocates negotiations and not a pull-out. They also believe "that America is not honestly pursuing a policy of readiness to negotiate short of total victory." This suspicion is largely based on U.S. unwillingness to stop the

bombing of North Vietnam. If the U.S. were to stop the bombing, then we have Kosygin's explicit assurance that North Vietnam would be prepared to negotiate. Since we are not willing to stop the bombing, it follows that we are not really interested in negotiations.

A less persuasive piece of reasoning is difficult to imagine. Of two parties engaged in a conflict, one is willing to negotiate without conditions while the other insists its opponent discontinue one form of military action while the side that makes this demand is to be free to continue its military operations uninterrupted. And yet, the side that makes this unreasonable demand, in the opinion of Liebman and his friends, is willing to negotiate while the side that demands no price for negotiating "is not honestly pursuing a policy of readiness to negotiate." Suppose the U.S. took the position that it would not negotiate unless North Vietnam ceased infiltrating troops to the South or unless the Vietcong discontinued its terrorist attacks. I suppose Liebman would take this as evidence of willingness to negotiate.

3) Liebman is surprised that I

Communications

maintain both that the war in Vietnam is morally right and that Jewish self-interest demands that the U.S. not pull out of Vietnam. "If the war in Vietnam is morally right, then why raise the problem of Jewish self-interest at all?" asks Liebman. The answer to this question is obvious: if there are two good reasons for following a course of action, why not mention both? But even more important is my contention that if the war were in accordance with Jewish self-interest but otherwise immoral, I could not support it. Liebman disagrees and implies that if the war were in accordance with Jewish self-interest he would support it irrespective of all other considerations. Here he goes considerably beyond my position. This is particularly strange since he then criticizes my much more restrained view of Jewish self-interest as lending credence to the charge that the Orthodox are self-serving. Surely his view that Jewish self-interest justifies support of an otherwise unjust war lends much more credence to such anti-Orthodox sentiment. Now, for my part, I do not for a moment accept the view that Orthodox thought should be inhibited by misinformed or malevolent stereotypes concerning the nature of Orthodoxy. But it was Liebman who brought up this subject, only to contradict himself in the next breath.

4) I do not, as Liebman asserts, base my contention that the war in Vietnam is not immoral on the grounds that this question has been thoroughly debated. I mention that the non-Jewish aspects of the war have been thoroughly debated to

explain the brevity of my remarks in this area. The contention that the war is not unjust is supported by arguments plainly set forth in the article which need therefore not be repeated here. How Liebman gets the notion that my evidence is that the question has been thoroughly debated (an obvious non-sequitur) I cannot fathom.

5) Finally, and most important, what happens to my argument in the light of the Six Day War? Liebman writes cryptically: "Events of the past few weeks only strengthen the argument against Wyschogrod." Do they?

One fact that has emerged from the events since June is the unanimous and unequivocal hatred for Israel that has been demonstrated by the Communist world. In this respect there was no difference whether we looked to Moscow or Peking, Prague or Hanoi. On June 8th, Reuters carried the following dispatch:

The Vietcong promised today to step up the war against Americans as a way of backing the Arabs in their struggle "against imperialism." The promise came over the Liberation Radio, the Vietcong's network broadcasting from its secret jungle base.

Anyone who has gone through the past months without learning who our friends are and who our deadly enemies, will never learn that difference.

Secondly, the New Left in this country, the spearhead of the anti-Johnson peace-at-any-price movement stands exposed as backing the "progressive" forces in the Arab world represented by Nasser and

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

his cohorts in their murderous assault on Israel. The recent vote at the National Conference for New Politics in Chicago to "condemn the imperialist Zionist war" is only one example of a frame of mind. There are, of course, those who oppose the U.S. presence in Vietnam while supporting the Israeli position in the Middle East. But these are torn souls, profoundly vulnerable to charges of inconsistency and out of touch with the political realities of the contemporary world. . . . Finally, a word about my contention that Israel would suffer if events in Vietnam revealed America to be a paper tiger. The fact that, thank God, Israel managed to win a breathtaking victory without direct American military support must not blind us to the underlying reality. During those fateful days in June the great danger was Soviet intervention. In spite of the hysterical quality of the verbal support given to the Arab cause by Moscow, the Soviet Union permitted words to take the place of deeds. To me it seems quite clear that the only reason for the Soviet restraint on the level of action was the conviction in Moscow that Soviet intervention would prompt an American response. Without the example of Vietnam, or in the light of a pull-out from there, it would have been much easier for Moscow to conclude that when the going gets tough the U.S. goes away. Such a miscalculation could easily have produced catastrophe not only for Israel but the whole world.

It is to be hoped that by the time this appears, peace will have returned to tortured Vietnam. How

this will come about no one can predict. Surely the first step in this direction is the initiation of negotiations. At the same time it must be remembered that in Korea the U.S. suffered approximately half of its total casualties after the commencement of negotiations. In whatever way peace will come to that tortured land, I am convinced that the American stand there will be read by future generations as an important chapter in the resistance against Communist tyranny, however much it is now maligned by people whose hearts work better than their heads.

Michael Wyschogrod

RELATIONS TO NON-ORTHODOX GROUPS

TO THE EDITOR OF *TRADITION*:

Rabbi Spero concludes his article ("Does Participation Imply Recognition?", *TRADITION*, Winter 1966) with an invitation to resume the shooting and an admonition to be on target. I readily accept his invitation and trust that he will not mind if his article be my target.

At the very outset let me state that the question which is the title of Rabbi Spero's article has long been answered in the affirmative. I am confident that those who participate in mixed religious groups *do* recognize not only the existence of Conservative and Reform Rabbis but also their official roles as religious leaders and spokesmen. Hence *de facto* they are also recognizing their legitimacy. No amount of tortured reasoning and rationalization can change this fact and it would be well for us to put this particular

Communications

problem aside and ask ourselves a different question. For years those in our camp who participated in mixed groupings did cling to the consoling thought that though we recognize and accept these deviationist movements as legitimate expressions (and not "perversions" as Rabbi Spero would have it) of Judaism, we did not *equate* them with Torah-true Judaism. The question then would have been "does recognition imply equation?" Alas, this last vestige of vindication was shattered by the recent Synagogue Council of America Dinner honoring the three seminary heads.

Now for some specific rejoinders and rebuttals to Rabbi Spero's article:

1. How should one regard Conservative and Reform Rabbis? How, indeed, does the Halakhah regard them assuming that this is our yardstick? Though some may indeed be the innocent, doubt-ridden seekers depicted by the author, nonetheless in my experience and I am confident in Rabbi Spero's as well, there are so many who unfortunately meet the qualifications of the classic *apikores*, in the generic sense, and alas there are also those who do not qualify for this status because of their role of *am ha'aretz*. The term *apikores* is not one of value judgment on my part, but simply the application of the definition given by our Sages and by the Rambam. The definition is "one who ridicules and degrades the Torah and its scholars in deed and in ideology." The Rambam (*Mishnayot* Introduction, *Sanhedrin*, 10, 1) traces the root of the word *apikores* to that of *hefker*, since

they treat the Torah irresponsibly and with abandonment. I am afraid that the majority of Conservative and Reform Rabbis qualify under this definition and the former interpretation as well.

2. Although there have been noticeable changes in Reform and Conservative theology in recent years, this was not necessarily brought about as a result of self-examination or soul-searching as much as the bankruptcy of their original ideology coupled with the success and renewed strength manifested by Orthodoxy. It is interesting to note that this progress in the Orthodox camp came to a great extent from those forces who are militantly opposed to Conservative and Reform theology and are quite vociferous in their stand regarding co-participation in religious agencies.

3. The strange and disturbing apologia submitted by the author that Reform and Conservative rabbis have served a positive role in strengthening Jewish identity and literacy must not be permitted to pass without strong refutation. His claim that it is easier to convert good Conservative Jews to Orthodoxy than those who have no religious sense is also debatable. One need not conduct costly surveys or retain the services of sociologists to determine that save for the strongly committed Torah community never in Jewish history has there been such widespread Jewish illiteracy and non-observance. Now, precisely because the masses are illiterate and not committed to any ideology, regardless of their synagogue or temple affiliation, it is fair to state

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

that thousands, if not tens of thousands of Jews would have been led to the orthodox fold when the proper time came (as it did) for them to seek out and become receptive to the Synagogue, the School and Yiddishkeit. The fact that so many chose to become part of the Conservative or Reform community, because of convenience rather than commitment, makes it now more difficult for us to reclaim them for Orthodoxy. Had they remained unaffiliated, once Orthodox leadership became effective they could have been attracted to the total commitment of Judaism. Today, they have been taught that half or quarter a loaf is better than none and therefore the complete loaf is too difficult to swallow.

4. The casting of secularism and secularists into the role of *the* enemy, while embracing all religionists as allies, is open to question. History shows that Jews who have left the religious fold but retained their identification with our people in a national or cultural sense can sooner be mobilized for Klal Yisroel needs, without the encumbrances of deviationist religious principles, and present far fewer problems for unified agencies and actions than do those who have made of their religious ways a movement and a *derekh*. The Kotzker wisely interpreted the phrase "let the wicked forsake their ways" to mean that is far more important for them to forsake the idea that they have a "way" than it is to forsake their wickedness. The latter is more susceptible to *teshuvah* than the former.

5. For many years we have at-

tempted to differentiate between Conservative and Reform rabbis and Conservative and Reform Jews. We have clearly stated that there are no Conservative and Reform Jews. Our argument has never been with individual Jews or even groupings of laymen. In most cases they are definitely in the category of a *tinok she'nishba*. Rabbi Spero's quote from the Rambam, *Hilkhos Mamrim*, is certainly applicable to them. It is, however, most misleading when applied to Conservative and Reform rabbis and teachers as is his citation from the Chazon Ish. The earlier Halakhos of the Rambam in *Hilkhos Mamrim* and *Yesodai Hatorah* including the statement immediately preceding that quoted by Rabbi Spero, is far more applicable to the spiritual leaders and teachers of the Conservative and Reform movement. I recommend that they be studied by the readers of TRADITION.

6. The granting or denial of the title Rabbi to Conservative and Reform spiritual leaders, I admit, is a moot matter. Our refusal to call them Rabbis will win no battles, it will not strengthen our position or weaken theirs. I do feel, however, that it is understandable when a Torah-true Jew finds it difficult to call a man Rabbi who teaches, preaches and practices that which we believe to be capital transgressions which in the time of the Sanhedrin would be punishable by death. This is no moot matter. Rabbi Spero's comparison to the title *Navi* is quite weak and if we were to carry it *ad absurdum* we would have to conclude that just as we always refer to the false prophet

Communications

as *Navi Sheker* and the pagan prophet as *Navi Baal* so we would have to refer to the present-day Rabbis as "False Rabbis" or "Idolatrous Rabbis." I question whether this would be courteous and perhaps it is better to follow those who refer to them as Doctor or some other respectable title.

7. I do not think it is important what a non-Jewish sociologist says of the American Jewish community regarding its three wings. What is important is whether the average Jew is convinced that there are three wings. If the presence of Orthodox Rabbis and organizations in mixed groups lends credence to the illusion that there are a number of legitimate expressions of Judaism then that should be sufficient reason for these men and organizations to reconsider their position. The reality of a situation is all-important. The reasons, the justifications and rationalizations are fitting subjects for intellectual discussions — they are not, unfortunately, of sufficient weight to dispel distortions, misconceptions and above all the equation. The division created in the Torah camp should also be seriously considered. The estrangement of one large segment of the Orthodox community from the other is certainly of equal importance as that of the estrangement which would come about were the Orthodox members of mixed boards and councils to leave. We do not propose that we cut ourselves off from the total Jewish community. There are numerous vehicles available where we can work and strive together for the benefit of *Klal Yisroel*. What we

do submit is that there can be no true honest unity *within* the framework of religious vehicles and it would be far healthier for all of us to face up to this reality. Our relationship with the Conservative and Reform elements could continue on a basis of person to person or organization to organization, but the lines would be drawn and its effect upon the Jewish community would be a positive one. I am convinced, based upon my own experience in the rabbinate and in Jewish communal affairs, that the refusal of orthodox Rabbis to participate in mixed groups sows a seed of doubt in the minds of many who begin to question whether their Judaism is authentic and they become more sensitive to the teachings of Torah when it is presented intelligently and sympathetically by a competent Orthodox Rabbi and teacher.

I do agree with Rabbi Spero that the *Issur* has been ineffective. I lament that it is so but the facts are it has been impotent. Orthodox Rabbis still belong to mixed groups, the S.C.A. still has Orthodox constituent organizations and will continue to have them for the foreseeable future. My own opinion is that we put this matter aside for the time being and concentrate our efforts toward a strong Orthodox council and become more involved in community organizations that are not religiously oriented but respect the needs of *Klal Yisroel*. Our hand of welcome, our spirit of cooperation can and should be manifested in *Klal Yisroel* vehicles while our striving for religious unity should be concentrated within the Orthodox community. In our pas-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

sion to embrace the Conservative and Reform spiritual leadership we have for too long alienated strong, potent and ever-emerging forces within the Torah community. We would do well to turn our attention to them and by strengthening our position and posture we will be contributing far more to the total Jewish community than by attempting to be all things to all men.

(Rabbi) Ralph Pelcovitz
Far Rockaway, New York

RABBI SPERO REPLIES:

I confess I am at a loss as to how to react to Rabbi Pelcovitz's opening paragraphs in which he simply states that "participation implies recognition" without justifying his assertion or considering the objections I raised to that position. He implies that the reasoning I employed was "tortured." But logic is either valid or invalid. If Rabbi Pelcovitz believes that my reasoning is incorrect, he must demonstrate it. This matter is too important to be left to Rabbi Pelcovitz's intuitions or "confidence."

1) While the definition of *Apikoros* is indeed clearly found in the Halakhah, the question as to which people living today have the *din* of *Apikoros* with all of its halakhic and social consequences is a matter of judgment (albeit halakhic) precisely because of the broad qualifications laid down by the Rambam and the Chazon Ish who, by the way, do not distinguish between laymen and Rabbis.

2) The alleged fact that changes in Liberal theology came about through the "bankruptcy of their

original ideology" is quite compatible with the assertion that "soul searching and self examination" were also present.

3) What would the Jewish community look like today if there were no Conservative or Reform movements is a hypothetical question and "debatable" indeed. But again to simply assert a particular proposition and offer no arguments or evidence does not constitute a refutation. To the claim that Orthodoxy would have much greater success with totally secular Jews than with those who have already been sold on "half a loaf," I pose the following:

- a) How do you account for the many "non-observant Orthodox" that are to be found in Orthodox synagogues? Since they are presumably aware of the "whole loaf," why the lack of success?
- b) In the State of Israel, Orthodoxy has had no competition from "half-loafers". There we have to contend only with secularists. How do you account for the lack of success?
- c) About half of American Jews are affiliated with no Synagogue whatsoever. How much success have we had with this group?

4) Any claim that begins with "History shows . . ." must be based upon the assumption that the secularist of today is the same as the secularist of the 19th century Haskallah and that the Reform and Conservative Jew of today is identical with the Liberal Jew of early

