

COMMUNICATIONS

MODERN ORTHODOXY
TO THE EDITOR OF TRADITION:

I have read the Spring 1982 issue of *Tradition* with a sense of great wonder. It seemed clear to me that many of Modern Orthodoxy's pressing problems—human problems—were given short shrift because of a fixation with the perceptions and attitudes of the right wing. I've listed below several key issues, a list by no means exhaustive, of the challenges facing Orthodoxy's rank and file. I wonder if they also challenge Orthodoxy's leadership.

To begin, kudos to Dr. Wolowelsky! He is the only one of twenty-one respondents on "The State of Orthodoxy" to discuss its invisible majority: Orthodox women. Surely, when discussing the triumphs, challenges and failures that confront us today, the status of women deserves more than a passing mention.

But perhaps I should have realized that women, and the opportunities for all of Orthodoxy that they now represent, would have no part in the symposium when I looked down the roster of distinguished participants. Were there no women—no day school principals, no writers and scholars, no community leaders—who were available to speak their minds on the pressing issues of our day? Orthodox women represent a vital resource for our community, but they cannot contribute, they cannot lead unless they are given the opportunity to do so.

Women respondents might have expressed some fresh viewpoints on the Orthodox family, a responsibility that men and women share. Several respondents did raise the depressing decline in the birthrate of Orthodox Jews, but none examined—as a

priority—the solutions available to us, which we have not grasped. Few and far between are the Orthodox day care facilities that enable working women—whether they work for reasons of economic necessity or of personal fulfillment—to leave their children in compatible surroundings. Some children are left in secular or marginal Jewish environments, there to experience a jarring dislocation between the outside world and their homes. The alternative, women impatiently waiting at home until their kids are old enough to go to school, does nothing positive for the birthrate.

The soaring cost of yeshivah education, together with its corollary, the summer camp, has also become a powerful contraceptive for many men and women. While many panelists listed the day school movement as one of the triumphs of Orthodoxy, none remarked on the community's responsibility to assist large families, as a matter of right and not of charity, in carrying out their educational obligations. The cures for our dismal birthrate must be communal and part of our vision for the future, if we are to thrive.

Marriage, too, is an oft-threatened institution in Orthodox circles. No one dealt with the prevailing tendency toward later marriages and the rootlessness of so many singles in their twenties and thirties. For too many women, there seem to be too few men. If our yeshivah education is so successful, why are so few men prepared for marriage? What seems now a temporary issue will become a permanent feature of our community as these single women and men reach their forties and fifties.

On these issues we are passive; we take initiative nowhere.

Turning to the broader issues of Modern Orthodoxy, its parameters and challenges from the right, it was surprising that no definition of synthesis with the world included a true interaction with it. We seem content to take what we can from modernity: we take our livelihoods, technology, science, perhaps even culture. We give nothing. We will be an *or lagoyim* passively, just by being. And as for *tikun olam*, that counts only for our own four corners. The United States Congress hears from us on our issues: Israel, Soviet Jewry. But we are nowhere to be found when the grave social issues of our day are raised. Have we nothing to contribute? Together with the rest of

society, for example, we have a profound stake in the great debate on nuclear disarmament. Even when viewed most selfishly, we have a stake in the outcome: we are not exempt from the consequences of nuclear war.

Our greatest failure, in sum, is that we have lost our voice. It is tough to face the future head on when our eyes stare fixedly at the right. Many of our respondents decried our lack of leadership, and they were righter than they knew. As Rav Lichtenstein put it, we must act "with sensitivity, with perspective, with sweep. Of these we have too little."

Margy-Ruth Davis
Executive Director,
The Institute for Jewish Experience
New York, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF TRADITION:

I enjoyed the thought-provoking "Symposium-The State of Orthodoxy" in the Spring, 1982 issue of *Tradition*, but I was disappointed that it did not address two important issues.

First, aside from Dr. Joel Wolowelsky, none of the symposium writers discussed the role of women in Orthodoxy and modern Jewish life. Equally troubling was the conspicuous absence of women participants in the symposium. Many knowledgeable, religiously committed Orthodox women could have contributed a worthwhile perspective on the state of Orthodoxy today.

The introduction to the symposium does not mention whether or not you invited any women to respond to your list of questions. I hope that the lack of women respondents does not inadvertently confirm Dr. Wolowelsky's comment that Orthodox females "have not been taken seriously by their

religious and educational leaders" (p.79).

I was also surprised that no one in the symposium mentioned the issue of Ethiopian Jews. Most members of the Orthodox community, as well as most of the international Jewish community, have done little or nothing to save the Jews of Ethiopia from the persecution, poverty, and bigotry that afflict them, or to raise the money necessary to bring them to Israel.

Rabbi Poupko points out, rightly, that the spearheading of the rescue of Soviet Jewry is one of Orthodoxy's achievements. Unfortunately, although some congregations and individuals and a few organizations have tried to publicize the danger facing the Falashas, the general lack of action and discussion about the need to rescue these Ethiopian Jews is one of Orthodoxy's failures.

Gitelle Rapoport
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF TRADITION:

It was very gratifying to read the Symposium on the State of Orthodoxy in TRADITION, Spring 1982. An introspective look at our present status raises many pertinent issues that touch upon our very *raison d'être* and should serve as a guide in plotting out our future. I found myself in agreement with the bulk of what was stated and identifying personally with a couple of the themes. Yet, I felt one aspect of modern Orthodox reality deficient in elucidation and therefore I wish to expand upon it.

Many of the authors described the positive philosophy of modern Orthodoxy, as Rabbi Lichtenstein put it, in "realizing Torah values within the context of an integrated life." The consensus on this basic approach is apparent. What seemingly was neglected though, is the practical reality of this approach on an individual basis. I venture to say, that whereas accepting the philosophical ideal and its inherent difficulties is very appealing, a greater dilemma is faced in trying to "integrate" one's life. The problem for the modern Orthodox Jew today is modern society. For, whereas we search for "the beauty of Yafeth to live in the dwelling of Shem," we are presented much filth and must search for the beauty. Modern sexual and cultural mores and a general lack of sensitivity to ethical issues affect not only a Jew's behavior but also his thinking. The modern Orthodox yeshivah bochur, in his acceptance of modern society, acknowledges his susceptibility to its errors. He recognizes that, as Rabbi Grunblatt pointed out, "modern Orthodoxy suffers from being more modern than Orthodox." A true modern Orthodox philosophy requires one to reject Western society while delving into Western literature and social science. Our "attempt to relate the truth of Torah to the social and intellectual milieu of a more general

culture" at this time, results in a rejection of the social values of today and the society that preaches them.

Of course, I am not denying the wealth of knowledge attainable from millenia of Western thought and culture—"hokhmah bagoyim ta'amin." Rather, I am presenting the external challenges faced by a young modern Orthodox Jew in attaining this knowledge. We are bombarded daily by today's values from a variety of avenues—television, radio, newspapers, magazines—which we rarely take note of, but which make deep impressions. Our response to this assault cannot be that of compromise, for we would then negate our Orthodox Judaism. Often, the response is to the other extreme, to negate all of modernity, the good along with the bad, resulting in the "resurgence of right-wing Orthodoxy." Another option, often more difficult, is a rejection of American society. I dare say that the love of Eretz Yisrael expressed by those learning there for just a year is encouraged by the lack of any "beauty" drawing them back to America. Israeli yeshivot, insulated as they may be, give an opportunity to actualize Torah values in response to personal and social challenges without the constant affront to our moral sensibilities and in an environment that advocates what modern society views with incredulity as anachronistic. In this sense, aliyah is idealized not only for its own spiritual value, but also as the only way to give expression to an entire *Weltanschauung* of halakhah without fear of its being diluted or eroded.

This tension does not necessarily doom modern Orthodoxy in America, just as the lack of a Yeshiva University type institution in Israel does not preclude a modern Orthodox philosophy there. What it does present is the need to face these problems forthrightly and, as with the other issues presented in the

symposium, to develop a viable methodology with which we can confront these conflicts.

In our American society, I suggest that what we must do is deal with the salient issues of today. It is not enough to speak about Israel or about Jewish ethics. Rather, we must analyze issues such as honesty in American business, exposure to pornography in our society, and laxity with respect to other religious laws. These issues should be addressed from a Torah perspective by our leaders and teachers, in order to guide the Orthodox Jew in functioning in this society and remaining Torah-true. Only through greater cognizance of halakhah in our daily lives, so that we will no longer be ashamed of our halakhic sensitivities, but wear them proudly as our "Keter Torah." Only by causing our social norms to fall within halakhic guidelines will viability be conferred on modern Orthodoxy. Yet, the key to the future of a *Torah U'mada* society, we

must recognize, lies not in the community's leaders, but in its disciples.

If we truly want to develop a modern Orthodox 'community', where halakhah is revered and scholarship respected, then we must nurture such a philosophy in our students so that at least the next generation will appreciate and respect modern Orthodoxy's ideology, whether they subscribe to it or not. A modern Orthodoxy based on halakhic supremacy in all fields of human endeavor, one built upon Torah study where *Tefilah betsibbur* is a given and *Tsniut* is an axiom, will not only gain social acceptability, but also many adherents who now practice, without an ideology, what Rabbi Grunblatt refers to as "the 'spillover' from the 'right.'" I pray that we shall earn this respect by confronting the challenges posed by modern society and thereby enhance the benefits of our paradoxical lives.

Barry Holzer
Flushing, New York

ART SCROLL AND SCHOLARSHIP
TO THE EDITOR OF TRADITION:

Dr. Barry Levy's provocative and controversial review of the ArtScroll series has aroused considerable comment in the pages of *Tradition*. Much of the criticism of Dr. Levy's review, however, centers upon his style rather than the substance of his analysis. Permit me to add several comments for consideration in discussing the ArtScroll series.

1. *The Question of Language*

In high school, my classmates struggled to read and understand the classic commentaries in their original Hebrew. The task was difficult, fraught with error, time-consuming, yet in the long run most rewarding. Our instructors aimed to instill in us a desire to study the commentators and to appreciate their wisdom. Perhaps we did

not cover as much ground as we might have accomplished reading English translations, but certainly we emerged with the ability to read Ramban, Abarbanel and the others.

The ArtScroll series, frequently used today in yeshivah day schools, subverts this purpose. It serves as a "trot," a made-easy translation that removes from the student the challenge and the responsibility of learning how to master traditional commentators. The selectivity of the translations attempts to eliminate the complexities and doubts raised by many of the classic commentaries. Instructors who utilize the ArtScroll series rather than encourage students to undertake study of commentators on their own are raising serious questions about the direction of Jewish education.

2. The Question of Ideology

Dr. Levy's analogy to a pig may be in poor taste, but the substance of his comments must be considered rather than his style. In fact, the ArtScroll looks "modern." Its illustrations are beautiful. It is neatly bound (a minor miracle in the publication of *seforim*). The style is both attractive and lucid.

Yet the contents of ArtScroll are anything but modern. Not only does it not take modern scholarship and modern science seriously, it pretends that they simply do not exist. Consider, for example, the ArtScroll volume on the Book of Esther. The historical introduction sets forth a chronology in which the Declaration of Cyrus occurred in the year 370 B.C.E. The author does not deem it even worth mentioning that historians are of the unanimous opinion that the Declaration occurred many years earlier, approximately 537 B.C.E. This is no mere question of dates. What is at stake is the response of the modern Orthodox Jew to a conflict of assumptions between historical scholarship that places the Persian period as lasting over 200 years and a traditionalist reading of history which assumes the period lasted only 52 years.

One could multiply the examples in which ArtScroll manages to ignore or dismiss as irrelevant the findings and source materials of modern scholarship. Does modern Orthodoxy wish to educate its people towards functioning as modern men and women in the social and business realms, or as individuals isolated and sheltered from the ideas and values of modern culture? One has every right to challenge historical scholarship. However, to omit and ignore the serious questions raised by historians in an historical essay amounts to intellectual dishonesty. Moreover, by ignoring historical scholarship, ArtScroll is implicitly confessing that all attempts to harmonize and synthesize traditional theology with modern historical analysis are inherently impossible.

Permit me again to recall my experience in yeshivah high school. During my junior and senior years an East European *rosh yeshivah*, who had himself never undergone a college education, assigned several term papers concerning questions such as the account of creation in Genesis compared with the doctrine of evolution and a comparison of the Joseph sequence of stories in Genesis with Thomas Mann's epic *Joseph and His Brothers*. The intellectual adventure in studying both traditional commentaries and modern scholarship—literary, scientific and historical—formed some of the highlights of my day school education. In contrast, the ArtScroll series pretends that one may study sacred texts with no references whatsoever to historical method, literary criticism, or scientific scholarship.

3. Modern Orthodoxy's Self-Definition

Correspondents to *Tradition* have emphasized the reality of the ArtScroll phenomenon—people do read it, and it has become a significant dimension of Orthodox education. In many ways this phenomenon symbolizes Orthodoxy's general rightward drift. Recently a student of mine, wearing blue jeans and a knitted *kipah*, questioned my assumption that modern Orthodoxy was defensible. He suggested abandoning the ideal of synthesis and rejecting all secular culture except for professional and vocational purposes. I will not suggest that ArtScroll created my student. I do suggest that much as ArtScroll has adopted the forms of modernity (illustration, proper binding, effective use of the English language) and rejected the content of modernity, so my blue-jeans clad student and countless others of his peers are defining modern Orthodoxy as modern purely in form and not at all in content.

Whether or not these developments are fortunate or unfortunate is a matter of personal values and ideology. Yet the

social reality of ArtScroll connotes that modern Orthodoxy and right-wing Orthodoxy have virtually coalesced. If this means the demise of the ideals of *Torah U'Mada* in favor of a compartmentalized Orthodoxy whose members are quite sophisticated in their professional enterprises yet close their minds to modern scholarship when they think Jewishly, then we must pay the price of acknowledging that Orthodoxy and modernity are indeed incompatible. That *Tradition's* correspondents have all reacted so negatively to Dr. Levy's review indicates their personal confession of modern Orthodoxy's failure to develop its own ideology. To maintain independence and integrity, modern Orthodox leadership must now formulate an ideology of intellectual synthesis between tradition and

PROFESSOR B. BARRY LEVY
RESPONDS:

Several worthwhile points have been made by those who responded to my review article. Rabbi Feldman, for example, has observed that ArtScroll "is a phenomenon on the American Jewish scene which should be taken seriously." (*Tradition*, 19:2). I agree; that is precisely what I have tried to do. I also support the suggestion of Dr. Bayme and the implication of Rabbi Feldman, that ArtScroll should not be used as a text for study in *yeshivot* and day schools. Those institutions with which I am familiar do not use ArtScroll in this way, and I never anticipated the extent of the problem as these two writers perceive it. Similarly, I was pleased that Rabbi Feldman, Rabbi Shapiro (19:4) and Dr. Bayme all noted that there are aspects of ArtScroll that need improvement, though no one acknowledged the extent of the factual errors ArtScroll has made. Various writers have also raised a number of questions: who ArtScroll's readers are; what ArtScroll's popularity tells us about American Orthodoxy; how

modernity. That route is perilous and fraught with danger. Far more dangerous, however, are the directions implied by those who celebrate ArtScroll as the most significant publishing event in the history of American Orthodoxy.

In the previous generation of American Orthodoxy, the Hertz commentary became the most popular English language exposition of Scripture. Hertz's work, although flawed and now frequently outdated, provided a sincere effort to come to grips with modern scholarship. What is necessary now is a revised and updated version of Hertz—not ArtScroll's feeble efforts to pretend that modern scholarship does not exist.

Dr. Steven Bayme
Bronx, N.Y.

ArtScroll relates to the humanities and the sciences; and what ArtScroll's relationship to Hertz's commentary is. All of them have been treated in my monograph on ArtScroll, published in the Frank Festschrift in September 1982 by the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of Montreal. (This study was completed long before the review that appeared in *Tradition*, but its publication has been delayed.) I agree that these matters are worthy of discussion, but there is no space to elaborate on them here. Instead, let me use the opportunity to respond to my critics.

My statement about the pig obviously succeeded in attracting much attention, much more, at least thus far, than the personal insults hurled at me by Rabbi Schonfeld, *Tradition* (20:1). Perhaps some readers think I deserve the harsh response, but is it more for the vivid analogy or for having the audacity to label as religiously unacceptable a work produced under right wing—and hence, presumptively kosher—auspices?

(The letters seem divided on this point.) All too often the same people who question the propriety of works that lean toward modern ideas, or critical thinking or make too much use of historical perspective are willing to tolerate divergent heterodoxies on the right, simply because they are on the right. Accordingly, let my comparison with the pig and the caveat be understood as an outcry against those who use their yeshivah educations and rightest ideologies to misrepresent the sacred literature of normative Judaism and then hide their errors and distortions behind the approbations of yeshivah leaders.

Some of the letters to the editor contain clear evidence that their writers failed to understand much of what I wrote. Rabbi Feldman's criticism of my handling of "the ArtScroll series of Biblical Mishnaic commentaries" is as inaccurate as it is unclear, because ArtScroll's commentary on the *Mishnah* was not mentioned in my review. Also, I did not call Chajes (Rabbi Zvi Hirsh, to be sure) a "biblical commentator" as alleged by Rabbi Shapiro. I said that he shared several positions on the Bible with a number of other writers (among them Maimonides, who was also not a Bible commentator). Furthermore, I did not claim that King David was ignorant of the Torah (as implied by Rabbi Shapiro). I said that the images of David that depict him as a rabbi are anachronistic. Since Rabbi Shapiro finds nothing strange in attributing to the rabbis the application of the contemporary term "Torah sage" to David, we should not marvel at his willingness to question my statement; *vehameivin yavin*.

I also did not say (as suggested by Rabbi Schonfeld) that J.B. Soloveitchik, A.J. Heschel, M. Buber, N. Leibowitz, U. Cassuto, A. Kook, and M. Schneerson should be considered of equal importance. It may or may not be "unworthy to permit the linking

together of these names in one group," but by ignoring the potential contributions of people like The Rav, Rav Kook and Nehama Leibowitz, ArtScroll has implicitly but forcefully made the claim that all of these modern writers are equally irrelevant to contemporary Orthodox interpretation of the Bible. ArtScroll, by exclusion, linked all of these people and suggested they are equally important (or unimportant), not I.

It is true that I suggested that there are "unreasonable midrashim." I would nonetheless take issue with Rabbi Schonfeld's observations that (1) "anyone who pretends to believe in the principles of tradition, and of *Tradition*, has himself no right to speak of midrashim as being 'unreasonable'" and (2) "anyone who wishes to reject unreasonable midrashim has no business reviewing in the pages of a publication issued by The Rabbinical Council of America." Rabbi Schonfeld may be able to speak for the RCA (a letter like his submission to *Tradition*, published in the paper of the Montreal Vaad HaIr, claims that the overwhelming majority of RCA members espouse his position) and possibly for *Tradition*. He does not speak for tradition.

It is not I who introduced the notion to which he objects so violently, but the *geonim*. The problem is not new; it has been discussed for more than 1000 years. Note, for example: "Everything the sages established as *halakhah*. . . one should not detract from it. But what they explained regarding Biblical verses, each did according to what occurred to him and what he thought. *We learn those that make sense, but we don't rely on the rest*" (Shemuel HaNaggid, *Introduction to the Talmud*, printed after *Berakhot* in the Romm edition of the Babylonian Talmud). To be sure, people don't always agree on what makes sense. And some authors defended the literal interpretation of the texts in question, while others sought to

reinterpret them, thereby avoiding both the problems and the need to reject the texts openly. But the fact remains that Rav Hai Gaon, Rav Sherira Gaon, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, Don Isaac Abarbanel, Abraham Ben Maimon, Rabbi Z.H. Chajes and many others readily accepted the notion. I am honored to be chastised in such company.

ArtScroll, on the other hand, can claim the allegiance of American Orthodoxy. It has been endorsed by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and the membership of the Rabbinical Council of America (according to Rabbi Schonfeld), and it has been heartily supported by Montreal's Vaad HaIr. It has also received the imprimaturs of some American yeshivah leaders. But I cannot believe that these learned rabbis have examined ArtScroll thoroughly and concluded that it is an accurate presentation of the traditional materials on the Bible and the correct way for Jews to understand the holy text. It is clear from the wording of the approbations in the volumes that the yeshivah leaders have not read most of what they endorsed, and only one of the letters published by *Tradition* (that of Dr. Bayme) contains the evidence—or the claim—that its author has examined the contents of the ArtScroll volumes at all!

But if the spokesmen of the contemporary Orthodox community are so strongly supportive of ArtScroll and its ideology, and, like Rabbi Schonfeld, so unaware of the range of other possibilities that the tradition offers, so unwilling to examine the serious issues that confront the student of the Bible, so anxious to misunderstand anyone who speaks openly and critically on the subject, and so ready to censor and ban what is really an authentic part of our

rabbinic heritage, then why should anyone take seriously their claims for commitment to tradition, accuracy in presenting that tradition, and authenticity in interpreting it? These Orthodox leaders appear as interested as non-Orthodox spokesmen in being selective about and deviating from tradition, but they are much less honest about admitting this as one of their goals.

The alternative would be an Orthodoxy aware of the breadth of possibilities that tradition offers, sensitive to the similarities and differences between circumstances that helped produce traditional positions over the centuries and those we face today; more self-conscious, and, as a result, more honest. It is high time that this approach to Judaism, which has so often suffered abuse as the illegitimate offspring of science and religion, once again begin to present itself as the authentic way, appealing to those individuals who have toiled in the study of the Torah and the human sciences and who are ready to seek after and serve God with nothing less than the full range of their intellects. Not everyone will benefit equally from a method of Torah study of such breadth and scope, yet surely it should be the basis of both the theoretical ideals and the practical realities of contemporary Orthodoxy. However legitimate they might be as forms of religious expression, the other narrower manifestations of Orthodoxy must be considered wide of the mark. Not only must they abandon their claims of superiority; they must be brought to recognize their intellectual inferiority.

Editor's Note: A fuller treatment of some of the matters discussed above can be found in Professor Levy's contribution to the Frank Festschrift, which he cites in his letter. (S.C.)

CORRECTION

In Dr. David Weiss' article entitled "RANDOMNESS AND DETERMINISM IN NATURE: LANGUAGE AND PERSPECTIVES," in Summer, 1982, Volume 20, No. 2, the following corrections should be made:

Page 102 on line 5 from the bottom, should read:
"...fruition perform by virtue alone of the properties of the...."

Page 104 on line 16 from the bottom, should read:
"Absence of a discernible natural cause for a specific occurrence in time."

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