

REVIEW ESSAY

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IF ONLY MY RABBIS . . .

Sir Immanuel Jakobovits has had a distinguished, if controversial, career as a scholar, spiritual leader and spokesman for causes which have affected him and the Jewish people very deeply. He has made a pioneering contribution to the whole field of Jewish medical ethics, particularly in the English language; he has served with distinction as the Chief Rabbi of Ireland, the first rabbi of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue in New York and, presently, as the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth of Nations. In these areas, he has made an impressive, and possibly enduring, impact.

He has now written a new book—*If Only My People . . . Zionism in My Life*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984; 280 pp.) which is intended to convey the author's feelings about Zionism—both secular and religious—and the State of Israel, its political leadership and its religious establishment. The first section deals primarily with three major controversies affecting the Jewish State which embroiled him with public opinion, the established religious and secular organs and the government of Israel. In the second part of the book, he presents his position on such major issues as religious and secular Zionism, the legitimacy of dissent, and "who is a Jew." The third section reprints two of the author's articles which round out his views on Zionism and the Jewish State.

Quite clearly this provocative book is both apologetic and polemical in its tone. It is intended to defend positions which the author has taken at crucial junctures in the recent history of the Jewish State, and to polemicize with those people and institutions with whom he disagrees and who have criticized his views. He has raised the issues which deserve to be raised. However, in the process he willy-nilly invites critical evaluation of his premises, propositions, actions and conclusions.

This volume reflects the positions shared by others of similar outlook. However, the author has presented his positions boldly and articulately; the book is well-written, the concepts are well-developed and Rabbi Jakobovits has endeavored to add a religious dimension in their support. What he says may not satisfy some of his readers who subscribe to differing or opposing or more conventional approaches to these issues. Nonetheless, the book should be read, evaluated and reviewed with intellectual honesty and integrity—on the basis of the merits of its arguments—even by those who may differ sharply with his assessments, statements and conclusions.

At the same time, it should be noted that the value of the book, in terms of its style and substance, its contemporaneity and its impact, is sometimes vitiated by certain problems which this reviewer encountered in the course of his evaluation. A careful reading will leave the reader with a number of paradoxical reactions. On the one hand, he will be touched by the author's genuine love for the land, the people and the State of Israel; on the other hand, he will be dismayed by Sir Immanuel's unrelenting, almost obsessively critical stance towards the government of Israel, or more accurately and precisely towards the Begin government, for whom he can barely find a good word or a supportive sentence. He will be puzzled by sophisticated insights which are sometimes intermingled with or followed by surprisingly simplistic, almost naive, statements, as well as, on occasion, by contradictory positions which require explanation. At first glance, he will be impressed by the author's scholarly use of historical allusions and analogies, which on closer analysis turn out to be not altogether accurate or fail to stand up to the analogical test.

II

Let me elaborate. No one will deny Rabbi Jakobovits's deep love for the land of Israel and his strong commitment to Zionism, or more specifically, to his brand of Religious Zionism. These feelings come through in many sections of the book. Over the years, he has championed Israel's cause in many forums, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. He has pleaded passionately with the Christian clergy to accept and to recognize the existence of Israel, to grant Jews the right to self-definition in terms of the legitimacy and sovereignty of Israel, to understand the role of Jewish peoplehood as "an integral and indispensable part of Jewish religious identity," and to accept that "any rapport with Judaism and the Jewish people must appreciate the unique combination of religion and peoplehood."¹

After Pope John Paul's meeting with Yasir Arafat, Rabbi Jakobovits wrote to Cardinal Johannes Willebrands urging the

Vatican to adopt guidelines on Israel and Zionism "bearing in mind that anti-Zionism is now a principal ferment of anti-Semitism."² My reading of this statement leads me to the conclusion that Rabbi Jakobovits believes that there is an inherent connection between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Why, then, does Sir Immanuel, in other sections of the book, downplay this equation and urge his flock not "to label every anti-Zionist an anti-Semite" lest it should become a self-fulfilling prophecy "by breeding anti-Semites"?³

It smacks very much of a *galut* mentality. In 1986, the President of Israel hosted a three-day international seminar on "Present-Day Anti-Semitism." The conclusion which the hundred scholars and officials in attendance reached was clear—that anti-Zionism is a "code-word," that below the surface of anti-Zionism lies blatant anti-Semitism, and that anti-Zionism is merely a new dress for anti-Semitism, which is not respectable in many places in the world in the aftermath of the Nazi "final solution." Dr. Svante Hansson of Stockholm, an expert on anti-Semitism in Scandinavia, said that "the conceptual distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism does not mean much to the general public, who have a hard time distinguishing between Jew, Zionist and Israeli."⁴

The distinction, then, which the Chief Rabbi attempts to make in his definition of anti-Zionism between pro-Arab and anti-Israel is artificial, clouds the issue and ultimately serves our enemies because it can be used as a smokescreen for any and every anti-Jewish manifestation. Certainly, here and there, there are anti-Zionists who are not anti-Semites; but they are not the rule. Today, the general term for anti-Semitism in polite, civilized society is anti-Zionism. It is much more acceptable because Zionism can be passed off as a form of racism or imperialism; however, if you scratch just below the surface of your average anti-Zionist, what emerges is a full-blown anti-Semite. You do not create an anti-Semite by equating anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism; you simply expose his real credentials and intentions.

III

In his book, Rabbi Jakobovits eloquently rejects the whole thrust of secular Zionism and the idea that Zionism is just another liberation movement. Secular Zionism contended that the emergence of the Jewish State would solve "the Jewish problem," that it would finally remove "the abnormality" of the Jewish situation and make Israel a nation like all the nations of the world.⁵ The basic principle upon which secular Zionism operated was that Jewish nationality could be

defined in conventional categories, and that within this framework the religious element would either be diminished or disappear altogether.

In fact, the premises of this position have proven to be false, and historical experience has contradicted the basic assumptions of secular Zionism. The history of the Jewish people has been, and continues to be, unique; it is not subject to the normal categories which inevitably accompany the rise and fall of nations. Non-Jewish scholars, like the late Russian Orthodox philosopher Nicholas Berdayev, have freely admitted that all the known historical theories fall down when they come to explain the continued existence of the Jewish people; and they concede that there is something special in the history of the Jewish people which allows it to defy accepted historical norms.⁶ The late professor Hugo Bergmann of the Hebrew University once acknowledged that "we need not be ashamed to admit that the history of Israel is not a secular, but a metaphysical and religious history, and that Zionism is the result and conclusion of this history."⁷

Clearly Zionism could never have been conceived, projected or realized without the overriding importance and value of its religious elements which were and remain "absolutely indispensable and indeed paramount." The Jewish claim to that sacred land was based then, as it is now, on the religious sources of the Bible and Jewish tradition.

More than that, the creation of the Jewish State and its subsequent history has not really solved the problem of anti-Semitism; if anything it has been exacerbated and highlighted by the existence and presence of a Jewish State.⁸ Anti-Semitism in the guise of anti-Zionism, as we have pointed out, has continued to flourish even in very civilized countries.

Even more dangerous in the ideology of secular Zionism is the attempt to "normalize" the Jewish people. In this connection, Rabbi Jakobovits cites Dr. Isaac Breuer's felicitous analogy in which he compared secular Zionism to the early classical Reform movement. Both of these sought to solve the Jewish problem: the Reform by normalizing, or better, assimilating the individual, and secular Zionism by trying the same thing, only on a national scale. Both movements failed in this respect.⁹

Even Ben-Gurion realized that for Israel to be a nation like all other nations would be self-defeating and would only produce another Levantine state. Only an Israel based on the teachings of the Torah could make a lasting contribution to a world society. It is in this spirit that Rabbi Jakobovits writes, "But one thing the Jewish State could not and must not and never will achieve is to turn us into

a nation like all other nations losing our historical identity as a unique people. . . . Would it make sense to establish a Jewish State as the bulwark against individual assimilation only to find it turning into an instrument of national assimilation?"¹⁰

IV

At the same time, Rabbi Jakobovits expresses his deep concern for the social and religious polarization which has taken place in the Jewish State. The land of Israel, he contends, is emerging as a home for two "Jewish peoples" and "the only common denominator, apart from joint self-defense activities was intolerance of each towards the other."¹¹ Certainly recent events have underscored the validity and urgency of his concern. The ugly manifestations of extremism on both the right and the left of the political and religious spectrum, the almost hysterical attempts by secularists to stem the tide of religious return, coupled with the kind of religious triumphalism which emanates from some traditional quarters, reflect a condition which is not healthy and which could have explosive ramifications. This kind of fragmentation is indeed the stuff from which "causeless hatred" is made and which led to the destruction of the Second Commonwealth. The war amongst the Jews is altogether more frightening and disastrous than any which we will ever fight against the Arabs.

However, one of Rabbi Jakobovits' major solutions to this disturbing problem is certainly open to question and disagreement. He proposes, as a way of easing tensions between the various constituencies in the Jewish State, that there should be a separation of religion from state.¹² In effect, he calls for the dissolution of religious political parties. Whatever they may have achieved on behalf of religious Jewry, their existence is now a detriment to the cause of traditional Judaism and the unity of the Jewish people.

In support of this proposition, he makes a somewhat naive statement: "Indeed, I suspect that the majority of Israeli citizens would now be religious if this alliance (between religion and politics) had not estranged them."¹³ For someone who is as politically sophisticated and religiously attuned to reality as is the Chief Rabbi, this is a surprisingly unsophisticated remark. Certainly the Chief Rabbi is fully aware that the secularist attitude towards religious life has very little to do with the political orientation of religious parties; it is the end-result of an ideology which is either Marxist in nature or liberal in background, and which sees religion, as such, as the enemy of the kind of state which it hopes to build. Does Rabbi Jakobovits really believe that the disappearance of religious parties would have

created a situation in which "a majority of Israel's citizens would now be religious"?

Even more astonishing is the example which he uses to support his thesis—North African Jews. One reads with disbelief his statement that the North African Jews who came to Israel steeped in tradition were lost because of the politicization of religion.¹⁴ Quite the contrary! North African Jews were not lost to traditional Judaism because of "the coercive positions"¹⁵ of religious parties but precisely because the religious establishment was not strong enough to prevent the wholesale exposure of this truly pious Jewish community to secular, or even worse, anti-religious environments.

In any case, Rabbi Jakobovits seems to be convinced that through the dissolution of the religious parties religion would be more respected and a *modus vivendi* would emerge with secularist Jews. Is that a realistic expectation? Within the constellation which Rabbi Jakobovits envisions, who will look after the religious interests of religious Jews? Who will ensure that the status quo will be maintained and that the religious legislation which has been passed (and which Jakobovits agrees is a significant accomplishment) will not now be dismantled? This reviewer finds it hard to believe that the Chief Rabbi is actually convinced that the religious needs and rights of the Torah community will be safeguarded by Mapai, which has made common cause with the Conservatives and the Reform, or even by Likud in a post-Begin era! Or is Rabbi Jakobovits suggesting that religion in Israel should be considered a private matter and that religion should be completely separated from the state?

In an address which Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik once delivered before a convention of the Religious Zionists of America, he stated: "Many people claim that Mizrachi should have been a purely cultural, educational movement not involved in political questions. . . . For a time, I was also an adherent of this policy and I thought that the religious Jew ought to keep away from politics. Let us declare unequivocally that this policy is wrong. I was mistaken, as were many of my colleagues. If Mizrachi and other religious parties were to dissolve themselves, many of their religious achievements would be dissolved at the same time."¹⁶ The Rav's insight here, as elsewhere, reflects his deep-seated understanding of the historical and practical realities as they exist in the Jewish State.

V

Rabbi Jakobovits declares himself to be a Religious Zionist, but he has basic reservations about one of the fundamental elements in

Religious Zionism. He is opposed to the redemptive aspect of Religious Zionism; he is upset over the conviction held by some religious leaders that the cataclysmic events which are unfolding in the State of Israel are of messianic, or pre-messianic, dimensions.¹⁷ He is haunted by the ghosts of all the pseudo-messianic movements which have appeared in Jewish history with disastrous results for the Jewish people.

Rabbi Jakobovits concedes that, in fact, Religious Zionism has always been inspired by messianic hopes. It is possible to argue that some of the leaders of the Religious Zionist movement, like Rabbi J. J. Reines, were motivated by practical rather than messianic considerations.¹⁸ However, Rabbi Jakobovits is probably right that the predominant position was reflected in the writings of Rabbi A. I. Kuk (who incidentally was never a member of Mizrachi) who projected Religious Zionism in messianic terms.

The central theme in the seminal thinking of Rav Kuk was the concept of redemption. He considered Zionism to be a vehicle in God's scheme of messianic redemption. He maintained that the bond which tied the Jewish people to the land of Israel was part of "the very essence" of their nationhood, and that the Jewish resettlement of the land was both an indicator of and a spur to the redemptive process. Within this framework, he was able to embrace all the builders of Israel, no matter what their religious inclination, as instruments of that process. Certainly Rav Kuk's thinking, and that of those who are allied with him, can sometimes spawn unacceptable extremes, as we have recently witnessed. However, that does not in any way vitiate or undermine the underlying principle which Rav Kuk advanced, and which Religious Zionism, and for that matter Zionism itself, accepted as the basis of its formulation.¹⁹

Furthermore, Rabbi Jakobovits diverges from Religious Zionism by his undue emphasis on the conditional covenant, that is, that the right of the Jewish people to the land of Israel was never absolute but always conditional, that our tenure and hold on the land is dependent upon our loyalty to the Divine Law.²⁰ Every religious Jew is aware that ultimately our right to Erets Yisrael and our ability to hold on to that land is conditioned by our commitment to God's Law. However, does that give a rabbi—even a Chief Rabbi—the license to tempt the fates, "to open the mouth to Satan," so to speak, by talking about the possible "liquidation of Israel," albeit by qualifying it with an expression of faith that "an eventual accommodation with the Arabs will not allow it to happen"?²¹ Is this the time—when Israel is still involved in a struggle for its very existence—to project the conditional covenant as a cornerstone of a Religious Zionist ideology?

Rav Kuk was also aware of the implications of the *Shema* and of other Biblical texts which elaborate on the conditional character of our possession of the Holy Land. Yet, he did not discourse on the possible “liquidation of Israel.” Rav Kuk was convinced, as an act of faith, that the emerging Jewish State was a reflection of God’s will, that God—not the Arabs—would not allow His people to be driven out of His and their land, and that the “air” or the atmosphere of the land of Israel, like that of Denver,²² would heal the spiritual sickness of the secular Jews. He called the secularists wrong in departing from the Jewish religion and from the political national concepts of Judaism; but he believed in the intrinsic holiness of Erets Yisrael, and that the process and progress of redemption would, in time, correct the secular misconception.

Rabbi Isaac Herzog, who succeeded Rav Kuk as the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel, and who preceded Rabbi Jakobovits as Chief Rabbi of Ireland, took a different approach from that of his Irish successor. During the Second World War, when Rommel was knocking at the gates of Alexandria and Palestine was in mortal peril, Rabbi Herzog happened to be in the United States on a mission. His friends attempted to dissuade him from returning to the *yishuv* because of the catastrophic consequences which would befall him should the Germans prevail. Rabbi Herzog did not speculate as to whether a conditional covenant was operative or whether the Jews of the *yishuv* were worthy of God’s protection. He unhesitatingly rejected all the warnings and importunings and returned to Palestine to be with his people in their hour of trial. He explained that he was aware of the fact that the prophets had foretold the destruction of two Temples and the Commonwealths which accompanied them—but they did not predict a third destruction.²³

It is highly unlikely that either Rav Kuk or Rabbi Herzog, both of whom Sir Immanuel respects and admires, would have allowed his thoughts and terminology on this subject to pass their lips. There is obviously a time, a place and a circumstance for his kind of an approach. Would Rabbi Jakobovits have considered their attitudes as a “heinous betrayal of Israel and Judaism alike and as an unconscionable perversion of Zionism in its authentic formulation rooted in the Bible itself”?²⁴

On careful consideration, it may very well be that Rabbi Jakobovits’ attitude to Religious Zionism is the product of his background. He talks with sincerity and fervor about the legitimacy of Israel and urges that peoplehood is an integral and indispensable part of Jewish religious identity; yet with all of that, he finds it difficult to free himself from his Hirschian background which, after all, was indigenous to his upbringing. The German Orthodoxy in

which he was raised, by his own admission, was distinctly lukewarm towards Jewish nationalism.²⁵ While he has personally moved well beyond it, he has not succeeded in shaking himself completely loose from his past.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who propounded the doctrine of *Torah im Derekh Erets*, and who was the father of German Neo-Orthodoxy, did not differ with his Haskalah opponents in a number of areas. What differentiated Rav Hirsch from them qualitatively was his unconditional commitment to Divine Revelation and the absolutely binding character of the *mitsvot*. However, like them, he was committed to the Enlightenment and to the emancipation which it fathered; like them, he emphasized the idea of the world-mission of the Jews and strongly endorsed the validity and the necessity of *galut* "as an indispensable means to fulfill the Jewish mission to the World." Rabbi Jakobovits affirms, in an essay which first appeared in *Tradition*, that "Hirsch may well be regarded as a spiritual father of modern religious anti-Zionism."²⁶

It was in this vein that Rabbi Hirsch viewed the Bar Kokhba rebellion as a "disastrous error" (as does Jakobovits himself), and that the lesson which Jews had to learn from the revolt was to "never again attempt to restore its national independence by its own power." It was to entrust its future as a nation solely to Divine Providence.²⁷

This approach has remained a part of Rabbi Jakobovits' own philosophy. It is reflected in his almost obsessive concern with Israel's world-mission. Again and again, in attacking the religious leadership in Israel, he expresses his chagrin over the fact that it has neglected or overlooked the universal dimension of Judaism, particularly in its attitude towards the Arabs generally and the Palestinians in particular, that it has little concern for Israel's image among the nations and even less for "any mission to the nations whereby Israel is held responsible for the advancing moral order of mankind."²⁸

This mind-set accounts for his opposition to the idea of the ultimate "liquidation of galut" or of working towards its eventual disappearance.²⁹ It also explains his ability to subscribe to the centrality of Erets Yisrael in the scheme of things even as he rejects the idea of its indispensability to the future of the Jewish people.³⁰

Nonetheless, one wonders whether Rabbi Jakobovits' characterization of the Israeli rabbinate and the religious establishment as being insensitive to the universal dimension is altogether fair or correct. He himself concedes that if Israel has not involved itself fully in the universal aspects of Judaism, it has had good reasons.³¹ The callousness of the world to the Jewish people, which led to our betrayal during the Holocaust, and the cynical double standard in the

U.N., which smacks of a world conspiracy, provide ample grounds for Israel's reservations about the world community. We could add to these accusations the reaction of the world's political and religious leadership on the eve of the Six-Day War, when Nasser threatened to annihilate Israel, as well as the moral cowardice of the nations of Western Europe, which refused to allow their American ally to fly over their air-space during the Yom Kippur War when Israel's fate hung in the balance. Indeed, why should Israel and the Jewish people be concerned by what other people think or by the moral criticism which they delight in directing against Jews?

But the truth is that Israel does have an obligation to be the moral beacon of the nations of the world—for God's sake and for our own commitment. We are obligated to try build a unique society predicated upon divine principles which will redound to the glory of God. No one will argue with Rabbi Jakobovits that *Kiddush Hashem* should be a primary theme in the projection of the Zionist ideal. However, that means building a state on the unique principles of Torah; that means becoming a "light unto the nations," not necessarily by stressing a world mission or living amongst the nations, but by building a Jewish state whose moral and ethical principles will reflect the pride of Jews and Judaism and become a model for the world community. If we do not always succeed, that does not alter the fact that this should be the goal for those, like this reviewer, who are committed to Religious Zionism.

More substantial, it seems to me, is the complaint which the Chief Rabbi levels against the religious establishment for not interpreting "the convulsive events of our times through specifically Jewish eyes," and his conclusion that the religious leadership of Israel "may have succeeded to the priestly functions of spiritual leadership . . . but the Hebrew prophets are without heirs today."³²

Unfortunately, there is some truth to these statements, certainly as far as appearances are concerned. The picture which seems to emerge, all too often, is that the spiritual leadership is so bogged down in religious minutiae that the moral and ethical dimensions of Jewish life are overlooked, neglected or simply disregarded. Sometimes these accusations appear to be warranted; statements made by some religious leaders during the Lebanon War were less than sensitive and seemed to ignore the human dimension of the tragedy. Oftentimes, the criticisms are unwarranted; the case of Ethiopian Jews and their handling by the Chief Rabbis is an instance of this. The fact is that the Chief Rabbis have endeavored to operate within a legitimate halakhic framework—and with great compassion. Their views have deliberately been undermined and distorted by others for

political and religious reasons, which are far from being “for the sake of Heaven.”

However, in our world perceptions play a dominant role, and the impression which comes across is one of a spiritual leadership which has short-changed the prophetic dimension of its calling. There is need for introspective soul-searching on the part of the religious establishment in Israel, to insure that both in reality and in appearance the total religious commitment of our spiritual mentors and guides will be projected in their classical fullness.

VI

In June of 1978, Rabbi Jakobovits conspired³³ with the editor of the London *Jewish Chronicle* to present an alternative peace plan to that of the legitimately-elected democratic government of Israel. Rabbi Jakobovits concedes that he lacks expertise in political affairs, but this did not prevent him from plunging ahead to endorse the peace plan of the London *Jewish Chronicle*—albeit from a religious perspective.³⁴

What motivated him? He himself claims that he was concerned and upset by the impression that the fervor of religious elements in the country was dictating or controlling government policies.³⁵ No one will deny that there was a substantial body of religious opinion centered around Gush Emunim that vocally opposed compromise on a whole Erets Yisrael. However, this is a far cry from the assumption that these people actually were a major element in government policy. Mr. Begin may have respected religious Jews and religious principles, but his motivations and those of his followers have always been political in substance and related to Herut ideology. Even Tehiya, which is most closely aligned with the thinking of Gush Emunim, is guided and directed by secular Jews. Does anyone seriously believe that Professor Yuval Ne’eman or Geula Cohen or General Rafael Eitan are pawns in the hands of religious elements in Gush Emunim, or that their policy is influenced by religious considerations?³⁶

Rabbi Jakobovits advances a second reason for his action. He was anxious to demonstrate that there was more than one position in the Orthodox community on the subject of the territories; that the Orthodox position on this issue was not monolithic.³⁷ This is certainly a most legitimate concern, particularly since the Orthodox community does not have to (nor does it) always speak with one voice on major political problems. Sometimes, it may be healthy to present a spectrum of opinions and positions on major issues.

However, this reviewer has the feeling that there is a third factor, unspoken but real, which moved Rabbi Jakobovits to take the stand which he did with its subsequent ramifications. He was spurred to write his letter by an intense dislike of the Begin government and the ideology which it espoused. He admits that the Labor Government, under Golda Meir, was just as adamant as its Likud successor. "Politically, I could not see much difference between him (Begin) and his predecessors (Meir) in their intransigence on matters of substance, whatever variations in tone and tactics."³⁸ Yet, not once during the period of his tenure in office do we hear of Rabbi Jakobovits taking the kind of controversial (if not damaging) positions against the leftist government of Labor. Why not?

His distaste for the principles and positions of Herut dates back more than 30 years.³⁹ Rabbi Jakobovits claims to respect and to admire Menahem Begin on a personal level. However, one shudders when reading a statement describing Begin and his colleagues: "My qualms were particularly acute when men who had a record of violence were elevated to positions of leadership."⁴⁰ The implications of such a statement are clear and beyond any question. It comes, not from the pen of Yasir Arafat or some Arabist in the British Foreign Office, but from the respected Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, and it speaks volumes about the attitude of the writer to Mr. Begin and his colleagues.

In any case, the *Jewish Chronicle* published an alternative peace plan which, in effect, would offer the Palestinian Arabs sovereignty and self-determination. To be sure, there were preconditions which they would have to meet that would demonstrate conclusively their willingness to live in peace with Israel. But the bottom line in this plan was a Palestinian state.

The editorial evoked some criticism, but no outcry. Two weeks later, Rabbi Jakobovits' letter appeared—and all hell broke loose. The *New York Times* headlined it on page three: "Chief Rabbi Assails Israel for Hard Line On Mid-East Peace." There was a tremendous uproar in the American Jewish community. Rabbi Jakobovits claims that virtually all the attacks against him came from Orthodox quarters.⁴¹ That simply is not true. He attempts to brush off the strong protest of Ted Mann, who was chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations at the time, as coming from "the only non-Orthodox organization" to protest, as if the Conference were simply another organizational body like the Orthodox Union or Young Israel. In addition, he argues that the protest was not really serious because Ted Mann, once out of office, was even more sharply critical of Israel's policies than was he.⁴²

Rabbi Jakobovits misses the point altogether. The Presidents' Conference is not just another organizational structure. It represents practically all of the major Jewish organizations in the spectrum of American Jewish life, and its decisions are the result of an agreed-upon consensus. That Ted Mann, once out of office, was critical of Israel is the best proof of this fact. His statement was not issued on his own behalf; it was issued on behalf of the organized Jewish community of America and it represented their—not his—almost unanimous reaction to the implications of the Chief Rabbi's statements.

Sir Immanuel's complaint that he was misquoted and that he had not attacked the Israeli government is sophistry.⁴³ The fact that he attacked the religious establishment in Israel—which he himself declares supported the government position—rather than the Israeli government as such is a specious argument. Really the purpose of the letter was to support the editorial of the London *Jewish Chronicle*, which was intended to criticize and to undermine the position of the Begin government. Simply because Rabbi Jakobovits camouflaged his argument and couched it in religious terminology in no way alters the basic thrust of his letter, which is the creation of a Palestinian state—after proper safeguards, to be sure—but a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria, nonetheless.

His other major defense of the letter is based on his right to dissent. In fact, he dedicates a whole chapter in the book to dissent, in which he analyzes both positions and his own preference.⁴⁴

No one will argue with the Chief Rabbi's right to dissent and to present his own positions even when they contradict those of the majority or even of the democratically elected government of the State of Israel. The only question is when, where, and how that dissent takes place and to whom it is addressed. Certainly, the proper time, many of us will agree, is not at a critical, delicate juncture in Israel's relationship with the United States and Egypt. At the time when the editorial and the letter appeared, President Jimmy Carter was using Egyptian arguments to pressure Israel to make drastic concessions so that the stalled negotiations with Sadat would be resumed. He insisted that Israel must withdraw from all Arab territories and accept the principle of self-determination for the Palestinians before the talks could resume. Recently, Samuel Lewis, former American Ambassador to Israel, delivered a lecture at Tel Aviv University in which he confirmed that there was, at that time, secret collusion between Carter and Sadat "to bend" Begin.⁴⁵ In this tense atmosphere, with Israel under political siege, that editorial and

the supporting letter from no less a person than the distinguished Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth of Nations was like a dagger aimed at the heart (or back?) of the Jewish state.

Even worse, copies of his letter were released to news agencies—that is how it came to the attention of the *New York Times* in the first place. The editorial itself had evoked some civilized debate, as Jakobovits concedes, but no furor, because undoubtedly it had remained within the confines of the Jewish world.⁴⁶ What need was there to “go public” with this statement and share it with the non-Jewish world? Is it surprising that within a few short days, the enemies of Israel were using the statement to attack the Israeli government? Anthony Lewis, that columnist whose hatred for the government of Israel is well-documented, was utilizing Rabbi Jakobovits’ statement to prove that the Jewish people were divided and that they opposed Prime Minister Begin’s policy.⁴⁷

Rabbi Jakobovits likes to identify his position with that of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik.⁴⁸ It is true that the Rav has consistently rejected the notion that the obligation to hold on to Judea and Samaria at any cost is a religious or halakhic imperative. He has insisted that the future of Judea and Samaria is a political-military consideration and that the future of the territory should be determined by those who are the properly constituted authorities, in terms of the best long-term interests of the Jewish people, with the least danger to human life. However, the Rav has never presented his own peace plan (he certainly does not feel that this is the province of arm-chair generals in London and even in New York), nor has he shared his views with the *New York Times*.

In fact, this has been the position of the Rabbinical Council of America from the very beginning. Rabbi Jakobovits implies that the RCA has not followed the lead of the Rav in this matter.⁴⁹ That is absolutely contrary to the facts. The Rav has been and remains the mentor of the RCA in all areas, even in the political arena. The RCA’s position, in this respect, coincides exactly with his. No President of the RCA, to my knowledge, has ever said that Judea and Samaria cannot be returned because of halakhic reasons. The RCA, like the Rav, maintains that only those who are politically and militarily informed, and whose lives depend upon the decision, have the right to make that decision. It is for this reason that the RCA has supported the political positions of the legitimately elected governments of Israel—whether Labor or Likud. If we have had problems with the government on particular issues, we have sought to resolve them internally—through discreet representations—so that externally we would confront the world as one people.

VII

Rabbi Jakobovits also likes to identify his position with that of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, who made an accommodation with the Romans in the year 70 when Jerusalem appeared to be lost.⁵⁰ He contends that Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's position was respected and tolerated and that there were no negative reactions on the part of colleagues who disagreed with his position. In a letter, which he addressed to this reviewer, and which he cites in his book, he states: "There is no record in the Talmud of any sanction, disowning or denouncing rabbis who went against the stream and believed in an accommodation with Rome at one time, or in a rebellion against it at another."⁵¹ The implication is that today's rabbis do not live up to those liberal standards.

History does not necessarily support this contention. In a seminal article on the Patriarchate of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, the late Professor Gedalyahu Alon, of the Hebrew University, points to the interesting phenomenon that there were a number of important elements in the Jewish community who did not accompany Rabbi Yohanan to Yavneh; nor did they support him in his office. Among that group, he writes, were some of the most highly regarded sages—elders of the generation—as well as some of Rabbi Yohanan's leading disciples, who appear to have left him and refused to join him at Yavneh, and who came to Yavneh only when Rabban Gamliel became the patriarch. Alon suggests that the reason for this can be traced to the fact that they did not concur with Rabbi Yohanan's departure from Jerusalem at its critical hour and that they considered this action to be one of making common cause with the enemy. Undoubtedly, they considered this to be an act of betrayal when Jewish fate and future hung in the balance.

Although later generations (including ours) have judged Rabbi Yohanan's actions favorably, "nevertheless many of his contemporaries, who did not have the benefit of hindsight as did subsequent ages, did not find sufficient justification for Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai leaving Jerusalem and making peace with the Roman government. For at that juncture, the nation was still in the middle off the war, when the scales of victory were in the balance . . . and most Jews were in the battle line and trusting to Heaven's mercy. Is it difficult to imagine that many of the people regarded Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai at that time as a seceder from the community in the hour of its distress? When Jerusalem fell, and the Temple was in ashes, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai was not yet cleared in the eyes of the Sages, who remained antagonistic and refused to follow his leadership and collaborate with him."⁵² Clearly, there were rabbis who refused to

overlook Rabbi Yohanan's actions and dissociated themselves from him and his quest during his lifetime.

In a similar vein, Rabbi Jakobovits brings Joshua and Ezra in support of his contention. He writes: "But the preponderant opinion of Jewish history and literature seems to favor conciliation and peace notwithstanding the cost of territorial sacrifices. Even Joshua and Ezra did not complete the occupation of the entire land."⁵³ The implication of this statement is that both Joshua and Ezra, for the sake of peace and tranquility in the land of Israel, willingly made territorial concessions—when they could have fought bitterly and achieved their object—for the sake of conciliation, and that they were willing to forego their greater goal for the greater good.

This reviewer must confess that he is somewhat puzzled by these historical analogies. It may very well be that classical Judaism favors "conciliation and peace notwithstanding the cost of territorial sacrifice"; but in what manner did Ezra and Joshua represent these truths? In what military campaigns was Ezra involved, and in what circumstances did he make these concessions for the sake of peace? Ezra was not a military commander and he fought no wars (except that of the Torah). He was a scribe who was sent by the Persian government, which he had previously served, to make the Torah the constitution of the Jewish people and the law of the land for those who were committed to Judaism. Ezra was in no position to conciliate or not to conciliate in a Judea which, at the time, was nothing more than a Persian province, and where his authority was derived from the Persian king.

Equally surprising is the allusion to Joshua. It is true that Joshua did not complete the conquest of the entire land of Israel, but was that a deliberate decision on his part? Does Rabbi Jakobovits imply that if he could have conquered Jerusalem and its environs and placed all of the land under his control, that he would have refrained from so doing as an act of "conciliation and peace"? This is not my reading of the text at all! I have always felt that the future tragedy of a divided kingdom, with all that it produced, can be traced back to that unsuccessful action by Joshua.

Finally, one of Rabbi Jakobovits' favorite targets is Rabbi Akiva and his role in the Bar Kokhba Rebellion. Rabbi Jakobovits has a tendency to lump Bar Kokhba together with Sabbatai Zevi. He takes great pleasure in citing a book by Professor Y. Harkabi, *The Bar Kokhba Syndrome*, in which the author promotes the thesis that the Bar Kokhba rebellion was a hopeless struggle from the beginning, that it had no chance of success and that this futile uprising led to a terrible catastrophe which sealed the fate of the Jewish people for the following 1,800 years.⁵⁴

Dr. Harkabi's book has been widely criticized by scholars, like the late Prof. Yigael Yadin and Dr. Y. Eldad. Professor Eldad argues persuasively that we may with hindsight think today that the Bar Kokhba revolt was doomed from the beginning; but that is *a posteriori* wisdom. We know much less about the circumstances and events surrounding the Bar Kokhba rebellion than we do of the war of 66–70 against the Romans, because Bar Kokhba did not have a Josephus to chronicle the course of events. But what little we do know clearly indicates that while there were reasons that touched the soul and essence of the Jewish people and led to the rebellion, Bar Kokhba and those who followed him were not blind fanatics who went into battle without any expectations of winning. Quite the contrary! And the fact that they were able to conquer Jerusalem, and hold out for three years, is indicative of more than a fanatic desire to die in a holy but hopeless cause.

But what puzzles this reviewer even more are Rabbi Jakobovits' statements in which he refers to "conflicts between Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues."⁵⁵ In another instance, he writes of the "scorn with which Rabbi Akiva's colleagues ridiculed his claims for Bar Kokhba's messianic mission in regaining Jewish independence from Rome."⁵⁶ The impression that is gained from these statements is that Rabbi Akiva stood alone against his colleagues in support of Bar Kokhba and his messianic pretensions. Nothing could be further from the truth! Who are these "colleagues" who heaped scorn on Rabbi Akiva's claims? The only sage who is mentioned in this vein is Rabbi Yohanan ben Torta, who said to Rabbi Akiva: "Grass will grow from your cheeks before the son of David comes."⁵⁷ What does this statement prove? That there were a great number of sages, much less the majority, that mocked Rabbi Akiva's position or that he stood almost alone?

All that this statement indicates is that there were Pharisees who were opposed to the rebellion and its leadership. As a matter of fact, the prevailing scholarly opinion is that the position of Rabbi Akiva reflected the majority approach of the rabbis to the revolt. Without this support, the war could hardly have begun, much less have lasted for a period of three-and-one-half years. This was a time when the Pharisees represented the Jewish community. Only the unqualified support of the rabbinic leadership can explain the power of the Bar Kokhba rebellion and the unity of the Jewish people—which was lacking during the War of 66–70—behind the leadership of this revolt. Is it likely that the rabbis, who were generally renowned for their moderation, would have supported a war which they believed to be hopeless and lost from the start?⁵⁸

It was in this vein that Maimonides wrote that "it appeared to him (Rabbi Akiva) and all the sages of his generation that he (Bar Kokhba) was the King Messiah until he was killed because of his sins."⁵⁹ We can assume that Maimonides drew his description from sources which preceded him. More than that, as Prof. A. Oppenheimer has pointed out, Rabbi Yohanan ben Torta's statement does not in any way reflect his attitude to the revolt itself. All that it does is indicate his opposition to the desire of those who wanted to project Bar Kokhba as the King Messiah.⁶⁰

The fact is that what provoked the war and gave it its motive force had nothing to do with the messianic pretensions of Bar Kokhba. The rebellion probably arose either because Hadrian had reneged on a promise to rebuild the Temple and instead proclaimed his intention to build a temple to Jupiter where the Holy of Holies had once stood; or because of the decree against the mutilation of the body, which implied a prohibition against circumcision. Whatever the reason, it touched the very heart of Judaism and endangered the future of the Jewish people. One would like to believe that had Rabbi Jakobovits lived during that period of time, he would have expressed his reservations about Bar Kokhba's messianic claim, but he would have joined with Rabbi Akiva, and the vast majority of Jews, in opposing Roman tyranny in a war that was carefully planned and brilliantly executed, and which almost achieved its goal.

VIII

Yet with all of these strictures, this reviewer unhesitatingly recommends this book. It represents a point of view, it states its case with clarity and coherence and it opens the door for further discussion. While the author could have been more sensitive to positions which oppose his own and less certain and more modest in evaluating his own attitudes, the book is highly readable and will undoubtedly arouse much controversy and stimulate some re-thinking of accepted positions. Within that framework, the book obviously has achieved its goal.

NOTES

1. Pp. 120 ff.
2. P. 123. In the Lambeth Interfaith Lecture, which he delivered in October, 1983, he stressed that "corresponding to the emergence of Zionism . . . is the equal and opposite shift from anti-Semitism to anti-Zionism as the principal expression of anti-Jewish prejudice." Cf. p. 124.

3. Pp. 171–172.
4. *Jerusalem Post* (International Ed.), February 1st, 1986, p. 15.
5. P. 160.
6. N. Berdayev, *The Meaning of History*, pp. 86–7.
7. Quoted by S. D. Urbach, in his article: “Messianic Overtones of Religious Zionism,” in *Religious Zionism: An Anthology*, p. 152.
8. P. 160.
9. Pp. 162–3, 235, 236.
10. P. 161.
11. P. 6.
12. Pp. 132–33.
13. P. 133. On p. 266, he qualifies it somewhat, when he states: “Without the antagonism created by religious politics and coercion, the hunger for Jewish values would have made the majority of Israel’s Jews loyal, or at least sympathetic, to Torah ideals long ago.”
14. P. 133.
15. P. 133.
16. *The Rav Speaks*, (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 179–180.
17. Pp. 136–137, 25–26.
18. See for example, F. D. Levine, *Territory or Peace: Religious Zionism in Conflict*, p. 11.
19. Cf. M. I. Nehorai, “R. Kuk’s Attitude towards Religious Zionism,” *Morasha* II, 1, pp. 6–10.
20. P. 140.
21. Pp. 78, 79, 141.
22. The reference to Denver involves a famous story of Rav Kuk and an American Jew. It seems that an American Jew from Denver was terribly upset with Rav Kuk for having urged him to send his children to Erets Yisrael. He reproached him for his advice because everywhere in the *yishuv* he had found violations of Jewish Law and desecration of its values. He came, he said, to bid the rabbi goodbye, as he was returning to Denver with his children. At that point, Rav Kuk interrupted him and said: “I am rather surprised that you, a loyal father, should be willing to imperil the lives of your children. When I was in Denver, I noticed that many dangerously sick people (with tuberculosis) live in the city.” The man laughed and explained: “Rabbi, you are mistaken. The climate of Denver is very healthy, and sick people come to Denver to be cured.” “Exactly,” Rav Kuk smilingly said, “Erets Yisrael possesses a healthy spiritual climate, and for that reason so many ailing souls come here to be cured. Those who are really sound do not have to fear infection.”
23. See *Genesis Rabbah*, 92:3; *Tanhuma Miktetz*, Buber ed., No. 17.
24. P. 141.
25. P. 4.
26. P. 248.
27. P. 257, note 15.
28. Pp. 133–134, 246–47.
29. Pp. 145, 146.
30. P. 145.
31. P. 147.
32. P. 169.
33. P. 65. I have deliberately used the word “conspired” because, in fact, it reflects reality. Rabbi Jakobovits tells of his conversations with the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, with whom he found himself to be on the same “wave length.” He then continues: “He decided to publish an editorial more or less along the lines of the proposal I had submitted to Mr. Dayan nearly a year earlier. . . . I agreed to consider submitting in due course a letter in support of the editorial based largely on religious arguments.”
34. P. 63.
35. P. 64.
36. As a matter of fact, he is so obsessed with the power of the “religious radicals” in Gush Emunim to control events, that he accuses the Labor government, which started the settlement policy in Judea and Samaria, of undertaking this venture as a result of the pressure which Gush Emunim was able to mount in its favor. What a misreading of an

- historical fact and of the susceptibility of the Labor government, with Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan, to the demands of religious Jews! Cf. p. 59.
37. P. 64.
38. P. 59.
39. P. 59.
40. Pp. 175–176.
41. P. 70.
42. P. 70. It is interesting to note that he mentions only two spiritual leaders in support of his controversial positions. One of them is Dr. Arthur Hertzberg, who has consistently criticized the position of Israel's government in the American press and is the darling of the *New York Times* Op-Ed page with good reason; the other is Rabbi Menahem Hacohen, Labor's "Rabbi," who was once referred to by Menahem Begin as a *rav mi-ta'am*. Cf. pp. 79 and 80.
43. Pp. 69, 70.
44. Pp. 174–192.
45. *Jerusalem Post*, January 25, 1986, p. 4.
46. P. 68.
47. This reviewer was president of the RCA at the time of this incident. In response to the *New York Times* report, with its negative implications, he issued a statement—to which Rabbi Jakobovits refers—in which he said that "we find it difficult to believe that the Chief Rabbi would be guilty of deliberately saying anything which could hurt the State of Israel and divide the Jewish world. However, no matter what his intentions, his statement already had precisely that effect. It has already been harnessed and used by Israel's enemies in their propaganda campaign against the Jewish state and has created the erroneous impression that there are deep divisions in the Jewish community." I sent the press release to the Chief Rabbi as a courtesy with an accompanying letter in which I indicated that Anthony Lewis had already used his allegations.
48. Cf. pp. 48 and 67, for example. One is somewhat taken aback to read what Rabbi Jakobovits has to say about the Rav when he disagrees with him. In a letter to Dr. Joseph Burg, then Minister of Interior, written in March 1974, Sir Immanuel writes: "I had pleaded with Chief Rabbi Goren and Rabbi Soloveitchik not to press the 'Who is a Jew' question issue to the point of a major political crisis at this juncture. But evidently they capitulated one by one to the agitation generated by Lubavitch" (emphasis added).
49. In an article which originally appeared in *Tradition*, and which he reprints in this book, Rabbi Jakobovits writes in a footnote: "Remarkably, the known moderate attitudes of this acknowledged leader of modern Orthodoxy in America aren't shared by most of his disciples, now comprising the principal personalities of the modern Orthodox rabbinate in America." Cf. p. 259, note 23.
50. P. 144.
51. P. 179.
52. G. Alon, *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World*, pp. 323 ff. See also Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age*, I, pp. 103–105, where he writes: "While we have no positive evidence to account for the absence of all those Sages from the Jabneh of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, we can reasonably conjecture that many of them opposed his leadership because they disagreed with his position, and especially with his action in submitting to the Romans when he did."
53. P. 67.
54. Pp. 136–137.
55. P. 132.
56. P. 248.
57. *Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit*, IV (68a).
58. *Bar Kochba Revolt*, ed. A. Oppenheimer, pp. 15–16; S. Safrai, *Life and Teachings of Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef* (Heb.), p. 29; G. Alon, *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World*, p. 76; Alon, *Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age*, II, pp. 626 and 630. The one dissenting opinion in this broad consensus is that of Prof. M. D. Herr, who in his "Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrianic Days," which was published in *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, Vol. 23, says on pp. 102–103: "It is difficult to assume that many of the

Sages actively supported Bar Kochba." Nonetheless, even he concedes that "for all of this it cannot be assumed that most of the Sages actively and openly opposed the rebellion. A broad spectrum of opinion ranged between the extreme view of Rabbi Johanan ben Torta at one end and Rabbi Akiba at the other. . . ."

59. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Melakhim*, XI, 2.

60. Cf. *Bar Kochba Revolt*, p. 15.