

David J. Schnall is the author of *Radical Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics: Cracks in the Wall* (New York: Praeger, 1979) from which parts of this paper are abstracted.

## RELIGION, IDEOLOGY AND DISSENT IN CONTEMPORARY ISRAELI POLITICS

Religion and politics have always maintained a complex relationship in Israel. Being a Jewish State whose ideology requires the "In-gathering of the exiles" from the millennial Diaspora, it is no surprise to find religion established and much a part of the fabric of life, there. Nevertheless, much of Zionist theory has been married to liberal nationalism and evolutionary socialism—devoid of or hostile to religious content. The majority of Israeli citizens profess little taste for religious orthodoxy, their degree of traditionalism tending to decrease with greater integration into Israeli life.

Yet the religious community and tradition appear to wield power out of proportion to their numbers. Marriages and divorces are performed according to ritual, intermarriage being officially forbidden. With limited exception, pigs may not be raised nor may pork products be sold. The designation of personal status, carrying with it immediate citizenship, is set within religious dicta. The "who is a Jew" controversy is a direct result of this proposition.

In parliamentary terms as well, religious elements have played an important role, buttressing their hold on such legislation. The National Religious Party has participated in most all of Israel's coalition governments, holding virtual monopoly on the Ministries of Social Welfare, Interior and Religious Affairs. It has gained significant support from the Arab minority who fall under the jurisdiction of their respective religious establishments, as under the Turkish millet system<sup>1</sup>

Thus, organized religion has generally operated within the mainstream of Israeli life — albeit often under stress and in-

ternal tension. Nevertheless, dissent has also been motivated by religious belief and movements of religious radicalism have gained notoriety for their actions. Generally considered marginal, little has been done to study or analyze this manifestation of religious fervor in Israeli politics.<sup>2</sup>

Jewish Orthodoxy in the pre-state period was ambivalent toward the Zionist movement. To some it was considered a holy task to rebuild the Jewish Commonwealth and see that Jewish tradition had salient input toward that end. The Mizrahi and National Religious movements are the outgrowth of that theo-political position. They consequently have little ideological difficulty with political or governmental participation and activity.

A second strain of religious belief was less amenable to the Zionist restoration. It feared a self-initiated "return to Zion," something which had previously been a solely messianic prerogative. The low level of religious observance among Zionist leaders underscored this fear. Many religious sages of pre-WW II Europe opposed the Zionist "heresy" and warned that these non-believers would bring only abomination and destruction.<sup>3</sup>

Extremism within Israel's religious camp has been influenced by both these pre-state perspectives. In particular, two movements have emerged whose thought is motivated by genuine commitment to religious orthodoxy but who have come to diametrically opposing political conclusions. Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful) is the outgrowth of a youth-led fissure within the National Religious Party and has adopted a right-wing, annexationist nationalism. Neturei Karta (Guardians of the City) is a scion of the Hassidic traditions of Eastern Europe and has adopted an anti-Zionist stance — staunchly opposed to the continuation of a Jewish State.

The intent of this paper is to describe and compare the ideologies of these movements as reflected in their thought and the actions taken in their name. In addition, an attempt will be made to infer their significance for the future of religion and politics in Israel. Prior to such a presentation, a brief methodological note is in order.

A simple set of conceptual categories have been chosen to

## *Religion, Ideology and Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics*

help sharpen the analysis.<sup>4</sup> The ideological underpinnings of each movement have been divided into three components.<sup>5</sup> The first, its image of social reality, is termed the "world view." Here is its understanding of the social order and the distribution of power within it. The world view is a descriptive statement of the present political and social environment.

The second is the set of "values and goals" prescribed for society. The ideology of most any dissenting group is geared toward change and these values reflect the content of that change, from whence it shall come and in what order or priority. Values and goals of this sort are fluid and ill-defined, a point to be considered in any categorization. Nevertheless, this aspect of ideology gives its direction.

Finally, one aspect of ideology is its strategy by which this change is expected to take place. Once certain assumptions have been made about the universe and the content of change has been asserted, a course of action must be defined so that goals can be realized. How change will come, when and by what tactic are all issues that arise within this "strategy for social change." In pointed terms, this third component outlines how we are to arrive at point (b) — the goals — from point (a) — the present world view.

### *Gush Emunim: Messianic Dissent*

In many ways, the roots of Gush Emunim are derived from two parallel sources: the first religious, the second secular-nationalist.<sup>6</sup> As noted, among the early leaders of the Zionist movement were a variety of rabbis who united to form the Mizrahi Party at the turn of the century — later to be transformed into the National Religious Party (N.R.P.). With the founding of the State, the party easily entered the mainstream of Israeli life, participating in most every cabinet, sponsoring agricultural enterprises and founding institutions of Jewish learning under state subsidy.

With its participation in the political establishment and the experience of statehood the N.R.P. saw its primary goal as bringing as many aspects of daily life under religious control as possible

including questions of personal status, marriage and divorce, dietary prescriptions for state-run establishments, etc. In return for this hegemony the party was generally docile in matters of foreign affairs, military security or domestic economics.

By the same token, a generation of religious Zionists were being raised within the youth movements of the N.R.P. and its religious schools. The political machinations and compromises of their elders notwithstanding, these students were much imbued with the spirit of activism and a fierce love for the Land. Religion and nationalism were united in a singular sense of purpose and the result was a maximalist politic unbridled by the moderating effects of practical political participation.

Parallel was the renewal of the pioneering spirit among more secular elements after the 1967 War. Organized as the Land of Israel Movement, the group drew its support from within the established parties (both on the left and the right) as well as from various kibbutz alignments (notably the Laborist Kibbutz Hammeuchad). It also included nationalist poets, intellectuals and literary figures, as well as demobilized soldiers.

While the youth of the N.R.P. remained organizationally linked to their party many stalked out to join the people of the Land of Israel Movement in very practical plans for settlement on the conquered territories. In particular, early communities were founded at Kiryat Arba near Hebron, in the Etzion region and in the Golan. Nevertheless, the movement gained little popularity beyond its own immediate circle and fared poorly as an electoral list in 1969. Its ideological impact was considerable, however, in that it made the ground fertile for Gush Emunim, at least partly a spiritual progenitor.

The impetus for the development of the Gush as an independent entity was the 1973 War and the national demoralization which followed in its wake. Though but a faction within the N.R.P. the settlement activists exhibited a spiritual appeal sorely lacking during those gray times, an appeal which transcended party lines. Secular Israelis and those little interested in politics were attracted to the cause of pioneerism though the Party faithful often viewed this development as an amusing anomaly, of little use in the hard world of coalition negotiations following the

1973 election. Clearly, limitation within the N.R.P. was no asset to these dissidents.

The formal founding of the movement may be dated to February, 1974, when several hundred yeshiva students, members of the armed forces and activists gathered at Kfar Etzion. Here the movement adopted its name, a loose organizational structure and severed links with the N.R.P. It soon undertook fundraising activities and parlor meetings, recruited members from sympathetic religious schools and youth groups and directed its message to all who would listen.

### *World View*

It is fair to say that the ideology of Gush Emunim is derived from a devout union of religious Judaism and classical, non-socialist Zionism. Its primary source is the work of Rabbi Abraham Kook as interpreted by his son Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook and propagated at Yeshivat Mercaz Harav Kook, an institution of higher Jewish learning in Jerusalem. Its central concept is a powerful attachment to the Land. Thus:

*Kedushah*, holiness, is a concrete reality, not just a set of legal concepts. Every piece of our land is holy — a present from God. There must be a link between this *kedushah* and that of the Torah and the People. This is the beginning of the Redemption, the time to join these forms of *kedushah*. It is time to confront historic questions in preparation for this Redemption.<sup>7</sup>

The tie to the land is linked to a feeling of impending change: the Divine Redemption is at hand.

The right of the Jewish People to their land is incontestable and not subject to negotiation. Though confirmed by international bodies, the essence of their claim dates to the covenant between God and Abraham of Biblical times. This right is non-transferable: sections of the land may belong to individuals but the Land in its historic and theological sense belongs to the Jewish People and their future generations. The site of ancient kingdoms and holy Temples, an inherent spiritual/mystical connection exists between the People and their home.

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

This line of reasoning follows closely Rabbi Kook's declaration: that the founding of the State represents the beginning of the Messianic Era. Success in reclaiming the land and attracting Jews from the lands of their dispersion are seen as confirmation.

The true Redemption, which is manifest in the complete resettlement in the Land and the revival of Israel in it, is thus seen to be a continuation of renewed settlement accompanied by the ingathering of the captive exiles within its boundaries. This appears as the peak of the actual fulfillment of our inheriting the Land, of its being in our possession and not in that of any other of the nations . . .<sup>8</sup>

In addition to these mystical visions of messianic redemption stands a practical critique of the moral stance and determination of the Israeli leadership. The government has abandoned the qualities upon which the nation was based in favor of a crass materialism and lack of self-confidence. Though difficulty and hardship have been no strangers to Jewish history, there was always a basic faith in the propriety of the cause. Such faith must be renewed.

The critique of Israeli life extends to the social realm as well. Much store is placed in avoiding "productive labor," i.e., in attempting to earn the highest wage in return for the least work. Alienated from the land both physically and spiritually, the nation is left adrift. It has developed a ubiquitous and abundant bureaucracy and a reputation as an international "schnorer" (free-loader).

As might be expected, the election of Menahem Begin and the Likud bloc in 1977 resulted in considerable elation among Gush leaders and supporters. As if to underwrite their euphoria, Begin visited Kadum/Elon Moreh soon after his inauguration. In a moving ceremony with Agriculture Minister Arik Sharon at his side and a Torah Scroll in his arms, the new Prime Minister solemnly declared that their would be "many more Kadums."

The movement has not been entirely satisfied with the settlement policy of the Begin Government, particularly in light of the Camp David summit agreements and the Egyptian peace initiative. Perhaps as much in response to their charges of "foot-dragging" as to his own nationalist sentiments, Begin has recently

## *Religion, Ideology and Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics*

announced that West Bank settlement would be strengthened and renewed within those areas already designated for civilian residence.

### *Values and Goals*

To overcome these problems, the Gush has supported one major goal: "hitnahalut." Almost untranslatable, "hitnahalut" is a combination of settlement and messianism requiring that Jews return to the Land which is their heritage, out of religious obligation and cultural imperative. This is no "right," they argue, which can be bartered or forfeited; it is an obligation growing out of the Divine promise. Indeed, it is pre-requisite to the redemption.

That Israelis often take this obligation all too lightly, that Menahem Begin, despite his illustrious past falls prey to this same malaise, may be traced to the early union of Zionism with socialism. Many pioneers were concerned as much with social experimentation as with land reclamation; their approach was primarily secular. When the immediate problems of survival decreased, pioneering zeal ebbed leaving the following generation with much of the secularism and nothing else.

In the words of a Gush settler at Elon Moreh:

For much of the Zionist movement, socialism was very important — even more important than settling the land. We have changed that order. For us, the most important thing is "hitnahulut" and the social form of our settlement is quite secondary. We exist as Jews only to fulfill our aspirations to Zion.<sup>9</sup>

"Hitnahalut" is also seen as an essential to world peace. The basic ingredient to the Messianic Age is international harmony, a harmony that will be characteristic of the messianic age alone. Since settlement will lead to the redemption and hearken the "end of days," those truly seeking peace should do all in their power to settle the land and secure its borders. Opposition to "hitnahalut" on the grounds that it will impede peace is predicated upon ignorance and contrary to the very moral strength "whose root is the peace of justice."

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

The product of "hitnahalut" is not exclusively spiritual, however. It will also help solve many socio-economic and political problems facing Israel, Gush members claim: A return to pioneering ideals will combat the nation's ills. The question is one of the priority of national over personal needs. Once the order is set to right, morale will ascend.

Only the pioneering spirit can lead to a national rejuvenation that will set hearts afire. It will remove individuals as well as the nation as a whole from viewing only the narrow, personal perspective. This will, in itself, resolve many of the social problems. The economy is depressed because of difficulties whose roots lie in the placement of the purely personal over that which is national.

In the international realm, these arguments are still more acute. The primary *raison-d'être* of the Arab States, Gush claims, is the destruction of the State of Israel — recent peace initiatives notwithstanding. The essential struggle must be with these evil forces and their allies; all other difficulties must be subordinated to it. This is the bitter lesson of Jewish history.<sup>10</sup>

### *Strategies for Social Change*

Strategies adopted by the Gush to actuate their goals are the direct result of its values. Aside from just preaching the importance of settlement, the movement's leadership has joined the rank-and-file in leaving comfortable city residences and moving to undeveloped areas in Hebron, the Etzion region and Samaria. By consequence, it is an informal and flexible leadership which may well be the movement's most valuable asset.

This feature is the envy of even those whose response to the Gush has been cool. The leadership is marked by personal dedication, willingness to sacrifice and responsibility. In the words of an objective observer:

It is hard to find a more authentic leadership than that of Gush Emunim and this is something that their ideological opponents must concede. It is made up of people who not only believe in the need for settlement, but who have in fact carried it out. Extreme politics for them is not a secondary avocation or an addition to their normal lives . . . but rather, a part of their existence.



*Religion, Ideology and Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics*

Grooming and developing such a leadership corps must be viewed as a major tactic.<sup>11</sup>

Gush also wishes to attract those who may not be prepared to found a new settlement. Massive rallies have been held — generally peaceful, though some have resulted in well-publicized confrontations with the army and police. A long march to Jericho attracted thousands of participants and a demonstration of mothers with baby carriages — symbolizing the slaughter of Jewish children — was widely covered by the domestic and foreign press. Despite the religious identification of the movement, participants in such protests have come from all strata of Israeli life.

To bolster its growing popularity, educational programs have been developed. Gush lecturers have been invited to speak at kibbutzim and moshavim throughout the country and have been met with a warm response. Non-partisan in their orientation, they argue that "hitnahalut" is the religious and moral obligation of all Jews. Participation in this holy task has nothing to do with party affiliations.

In addition, the movement has begun successful fund-raising activities. Israeli industrialists have donated sums to individual settlements and representatives are being trained to arrange parlor meetings and programs abroad. Part of the willingness to donate stems from sympathy with the cause while some is the result of the exemplary sacrifice exhibited by members of the movement.

The political implications of settlement seem to motivate even stronger resolve. Government opposition, even from the present administration, is not based upon concern for the Land of Israel or its people. The political leadership is merely interested in maintaining alternatives in attempts at negotiations with the Arabs and the United States. Such political maneuvering is futile and an affront to the religious destiny of the Jewish People.

Gush has therefore set for itself the task of limiting the government's options in the use of occupied territories as a bargaining tool. Though unsettled, these lands are part of historic Eretz Yisrael and will be more difficult to return under the

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

pressure of a large "squatters" movement. Further, the cry for peace is misdirected; it can only come when Jews are settled securely in their land. In this the movement has won patrons within the present cabinet.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Gush is most sensitive to charges that it is a front for the National Religious Party. It has attempted to divorce itself from all forms of partisanship and has publicly attacked the N.R.P. The issue is no longer a political one, but deals with the very existence of the State.

These religious parties are no longer spiritual. They are like merchants in the market place. We are open to any Jew — religious or not. We are not a partisan movement. We are a political pressure group and a spiritual movement in essence.<sup>13</sup>

### *Neturei Karta: Hassidic Protest—*

In contrast to the romantic nationalism of Gush Emunim stands the radical anti-Zionism of Neturei Karta. The name, Guardians of the City, is from a Talmudic reference to the sages and religious scholars of a municipality as its "guardians." Neturei Karta views itself as all that stands between the Jews of Jerusalem and destruction. Only they are true to the age-old teachings of Torah and rabbinic lore.

The history of the group's ideological development is more complex than that of Gush Emunim.<sup>14</sup> Its main center is the Meah Shearim section of Jerusalem though it is supported by wings in Brooklyn and London. The movement is a result of several forces in the religious history of Jerusalem. Its spiritual genesis was the formation of the *Edah Haredit* (religious community), an Ashkenazic body led by Rabbi Moshe Diskin of Brisk and Rabbi Joseph Sonnenfeld, at the turn of the century. The group was largely composed of East European emigrants to the Holy Land and exhibited a cool attitude toward Zionism and a Jewish State.

With the rise of Nazism, Jerusalem's religious community was joined by leaders of the European Orthodox union, Agudat Yisrael, German and Polish refugees who opposed the Zionist movement. Attempts to rescue Jews from the war's horrors,

## *Religion, Ideology and Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics*

however, allowed grounds for cooperation with the Zionist forces and deferred the imminent clash. Further, within Agudist ranks there were many open to Zionist ideology. This was underscored by the founding of Kibbutz Hafetz Hayim by a wing of the Agudah in 1944.

This event signaled a struggle between the anti-Zionist elements within the Edah Haredit and Agudah, and the large body of Agudat Yisrael which seemed to be making peace with the idea of a Jewish State. These anti-Zionists identified themselves with "Neturei Karta" in 1942 and by 1945 gained control of the Edah Haredit Rabbinic Council. A permanent rupture with Agudat Yisrael occurred in 1949 with its organization into a political party. It was later to become coalition partner to an early Israeli government.

Two personalities have had particular influence on Neturei Karta's ideology. Rabbi Amram Blau, a scion of one of Jerusalem's oldest families, was the local leader of the movement until his death in 1974. He rose to the position from his role as an Agudah youth leader in the 1940's. By then Blau had impressive credentials as a religious zealot and rabid anti-Zionist — forged in a "war against Zionism" declared in 1923 and in British jails in the early thirties.

The second of these leaders was Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, successor to the Hungarian Hassidic dynasty of Satmar. Rabbi Teitelbaum, who grudgingly utilized Zionist forces to save himself from the Nazi onslaught, escaped to Palestine after the war. Though he subsequently settled in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, he was accepted as Neturei Karta's ideological and spiritual leader in 1953.

### *World View*

Neturei Karta's ideology reflects its understanding of the relationship between Jewry, the gentile world and God. Any attempt at Jewish independence without Divine intervention is considered heretical; only with the coming of the Messiah will a Torah-true nationalism emerge. Initiative short of this is usurpation and deserves the most vigorous form of punishment.

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

The role of the Jew is to remain passive and satisfied with his lot under non-Jewish rule.

Pretenses toward independence are manifestations of arrogance not only toward God but toward the ruling nations, at whose sufferance the Jewish community exists. Rather than bringing redemption, they only prolong the agony.

In the light of the view of the Holy Torah and of its traditions, the People of Israel in exile repressed its desire to ascend to the Holy Land and stayed apart from any form of nationalism, since it is opposed to the view of our holy sages, but dwelt quietly in the lands of their exile . . . Even more did they keep their distance from such things as a flag or an administrative body that would display the People of Israel as a national entity engaged in politics. Such things would have shown an intention to revolt against the peoples, concerning which the Holy One has warned us under oath.<sup>15</sup>

Zionism is the worst usurpation and affront to the simple passivity of traditional Judaism. Recent tragedies that have befallen the Jewish People are attributable to Zionism. Nazism is alleged to have been a direct result of unwarranted Zionist demands. Both Nazism and Zionism owe their genesis to European nationalism of the nineteenth century and the one has no more Jewish content than the other.

Further, the movement claims that many European Jews might have been saved but for Zionist political aspirations. Joel Brand's attempt to negotiate with Adolf Eichmann for Hungarian Jews in 1944 and the indifference of the Jewish Agency continues to be a *Neturei Karta cause célébré*. Other equally damaging episodes are also prominently detailed in their literature.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, military or terrorist losses to the Arabs are the consequences of Zionist sins. Were it not for their ambitions, England would have permitted unlimited Jewish immigration to Palestine and there would need never have been a 1948 War. Military actions since 1948 might have been avoided but for the expansionist and aggressive nature of Zionism — a display of traits clearly non-Jewish. Any war undertaken without the direction and authority of Torah leadership is little more than murder.

## *Religion, Ideology and Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics*

Aside from the physical and theological horrors of Zionism stands a spiritual one aimed at the very heart of Judaism. No longer the ethical "people of the book," Zionism has made Jews "like all the other nations," a geo-political force identified with the state. Pacifism and transcendentalism have always been basic to Jewish thought but it is to Eastern faiths that the world now turns for its inspiration.

In this sense, Zionists have robbed Judaism of its essence. They have married it to European nationalism or socialism and betrayed the centuries-old yearnings of a people.

As soon as one delves into the essence of Judaism one senses the bankruptcy of Zionism. The latter has lost the love of Zion that characterized Halevi, the Jews of Yemen, the medieval mystics . . . A state and a culture are mutually exclusive, the one dependent upon the many, the other upon quality. The strength of Judaism has always been its rejection of numbers and physical strength in return for the moral perfection of the few. Zionism has taken Jews and made gentiles of them.<sup>17</sup>

### *Values and Goals*

The movement's values are quite simple: Zionist idolatry antagonizes the entire world and discourages Divine Favor. The apparent victories of the Jewish State are only manifestations of the devil. Consequently, the faithful must do all in their power to separate themselves from this national enterprise, limit its influence and pray for its destruction.

The perspective is based upon a Talmudic source. It is recorded that with the destruction of the second Holy Temple the Lord enforced a unique bargain on the Jewish People, in return for their well-being. He demanded that they swear (a) not to return en masse to the Holy Land, (b) to be loyal to the lands of their dispersion, and (c) not to attempt to hasten the redemption. These are fundamentals of Jewish living and basic to the survival of the nation.

Such pacifism is also the prescription for any relationship with the non-Jewish world, something which should in any case be kept to a minimum. A show of strength is unwise for it gives

the gentile “an unnecessary opportunity to talk about us.” The less “they remember and discuss us, the better off we are.” One should never confront the non-Jew contentiously but rather softly and humbly, lest the meeting lead to no-good.<sup>18</sup>

Neturei Karta has called for believing Jews to return to the faith of their people and trust in Divine redemption. The irreligious nature of the Zionist enterprise is confirmation of its heresy. Rather than bringing Jews back to their traditions it has given them a sense of ungodly independence and bravado. The streets of modern Tel Aviv or Jerusalem impress one with the influence of secular Western culture, materialism and decadence. The holiness and purity of the Jew are not to be found.

Consequently, the faithful must separate themselves from this damning influence and protest the flagrant desecration. In its quest for morality, Neturei Karta performs a lonely task, other religious elements having sold their souls for Zionist financial support. There is but one alternative:

to be ever alert to their influence which spreads like a flame, to flee from them and all that is theirs. Neither should one walk with them nor connect himself to them, but rather a wall of hatred should be implanted between us, the better to shut out their impact, lest they move us in their direction, God forbid.

Even the use of Zionist funds for holy purposes is rejected for the overt or implicit strings attached.<sup>19</sup>

Of equal importance is the need to protest transgressions of religious law motivated by Zionist design. State leadership is responsible for desecration of the Sabbath, violations of public decency and morality and the influence of secularism in all aspects of life. Both by active protest and personal model, such manifestations of evil must be destroyed or “the Holy Land will spew you forth from its midst.”

Finally, Neturei Karta fervently awaits the day of the Messiah, when the Divine redemption will occur. Jews as a people are bound to the Torah and its commandments, they argue. In days past they understood this and attempted to penetrate fully “these treasures of holiness” but it was by Divine decree that Jews were exiled and only thus might they be returned.

## *Religion, Ideology and Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics*

Statehood may mean happiness for any other people — but we Jews have been destined for a higher and an essentially different purpose . . . it is manifestly absurd to believe that we have been waiting for two thousand years, with so much anguish, with such high hopes and such heartfelt prayers merely in order to finish up playing the same role in the world as an Albania or Honduras.

The Jewish goal in the world must be to follow the supernatural plan revealed in the Torah in order to fulfill the “higher and essentially different purpose” which destiny demands.<sup>20</sup>

### *Strategies for Social Change*

Despite declarations of pacifism and reticence, Neturei Karta has been a most active ideological movement. Its tactics reflect the desire to demure from Zionist collaboration and protest the indecencies and usurpations perceived in the very nature of Jewish nationalism. This task has led its leadership to petition Arab Leaders, British officials and the councils of the United Nations.

The movement has actively protested the profanation of the Sabbath, military induction of females, performance of autopsies and the opening of a public swimming pool in Jerusalem. They have resigned from even the most basic forms of citizenship, paying no taxes and refusing to vote. Many refrain from using municipal utilities, lest even this be construed as a form of Zionist influence.<sup>21</sup>

Its hatred of Zionism has also led Neturei Karta in almost treasonous directions. Prior to the establishment of the State, its delegation pleaded for an extension of the British Mandate. In 1948, members of the sect refused to participate in battle and sealed their thoroughfares during the siege of Jerusalem. More recently, spokesmen for the movement have indicated their desire for a secular, pluralist state or a Jerusalem under international control, any administration being better than an apostate Jewish one. Short of this, they have requested special refugee status for “Jews who wish to disassociate themselves from the Zionist blasphemy.”<sup>22</sup>

Neturei Karta youth elements have even supported Palestinian

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

terror in the hope that it may bring the fall of the state. It is their position that Jews and Arabs lived in harmony prior to the accession of Zionism and its elimination would return such a lifestyle. In a letter sent to Gerald Ford and Yasser Arafat, the movement declared:

Neturei Karta welcomes the State proposed by the Palestine Liberation Organization in which Arabs and Jews would live together under a government which would insure the blossoming of Judaism just as it did under Moslem rule in Spain.

Though later disavowed, its willingness to serve as advisor to a Palestinian government-in-exile was also declared.<sup>23</sup>

Neturei Karta has asked world leaders to intervene with the Israeli government on its behalf. In addition to petitioning Gerald Ford petitions have been sent to Pope Paul, Kurt Waldheim and Richard Nixon. When a scandal was raised over government attempts to enforce health standards in a Meah Shearim slaughterhouse, formal protest was lodged with the United Nations under Libyan sponsorship. In an attempt to bring their claims to the American people the movement has taken ads in the *New York Times*, asserting:

Those who have suffered or may suffer through Zionist military or political activities should not blame the Jewish People for deeds committed by the Zionists — who have turned their backs on Jewish tradition. Zionist politicians and their fellow-travelers do not speak for the Jewish People. Indeed the Zionist conspiracy against Jewish tradition and Jewish law makes Zionism and all its activities and entities the arch-enemy of the Jewish People today.

Finally, the late Rabbi Amram Blau declared that he would never visit any of the sites taken by Zionist military victory. These included many of Judaism's holiest paces: the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, the Tomb of Rachel in Bethlehem and the Western Wall in East Jerusalem. Indeed, he would not leave Jerusalem at all, even to visit lands that he bought from Arab villagers before the founding of the State.

An exception to his rule, however, caused scandal when Rabbi Blau decided to marry the convent daughter of French Catho-



## *Religion, Ideology and Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics*

lics in 1965. Aside from the twenty-five year difference in their ages, the match was considered unseemly because of her background, and Rabbi Blau was called upon to recant. Ever the iconoclast, he refused and was married in Tel Aviv; the sect would not permit the ceremony to take place in the Holy City. Despite the controversy, it was a tribute to Blau that he was able to maintain leadership of the movement until his death in 1974.<sup>24</sup>

### *On Balance*

Israeli politics has been marked by ideological tension and confrontation. Generally, however, this has remained within recognizable bounds. An attempt has been here made to discuss two movements that have gone beyond these bounds out of the very religio-cultural motivations that frame much of Israeli Jewish life. A few words of summary analysis are in order.

Both movements share common ground in the sources of classical Judaism. They seek justification in its body of religious law and claim the authority of rabbinic decision. Even mystical elements are grounded in common context: the relationship between God, His people and their land. They act upon their convictions with the belief that they will bring Divine Redemption, and one is impressed with their sincerity.

Nevertheless, the two arrive at conclusions diametrically opposed. Gush Emunim, successor to a century of pioneering nationalism, argues that "hitnahalut," a mystical union of culture and settlement, will bring the Messiah. Neturei Karta, born of East European Orthodoxy, views the national enterprise as usurpation and rebellion against Divine prerogative. Their conflicting directions illustrate that Judaism is less a set of systematic principles than a body of law and literature. It may frame thinking, but values and their implementation are left to individual discretion. This may be necessity considering its millennial tenacity in the face of suppression and dire misery.

Aside from common roots, their critiques of Israeli society are also parallel. Both are unhappy with growing materialism and pervasive self-doubt particularly regarding heritage and

spirit. They decry the influence of Western secularism and a loss of a unique Jewishness. Neturei Karta assigns the trouble to Zionism per se, while Gush Emunim blames its very decline. Nevertheless, the similarity in their perception may signify its objective truth. What began as an exciting national experiment in destiny may have become one more example of mundane nationalism and statehood. Which ever posture one accepts, the results are disappointing.

It is interesting to note the growing popularity of Gush Emunim. Unlike Neturei Karta, it represents an activist philosophy preaching spiritual renaissance. It seeks support from those who do not accept the values of prayer and dietary restriction. The issue is Eretz Yisrael and ritual observance is beside the point when "hitnahalut" is discussed. The willingness of many to recapture these pioneering norms may reflect lack of spiritual appeal within their own lives. Unfulfilled by established religion they find satisfaction in mystical/romantic settlement.

Confrontation of these two movements may be seen in yet another perspective: the values of *aliya* vs. those of the *galut*. Gush Emunim has glorified the classical values of Zionism which include self-reliance, independence and national autonomy. The renaissance they seek is grounded in human initiative and a mystical tie to the land. In theological terms, it views the creation of the State out of the ashes of the holocaust, and its subsequent victories and successes, as a Divine omen: the beginnings of the Redemption. The Jewish People can hasten this Redemption by settling and holding their land.

For its part, Neturei Karta has glorified two thousand years of Jewish dispersion. The values of pacifism, simple faith and dependence upon Divine initiative, form the core of its belief. Under oath, the Jewish People have agreed to abstain from national agitation. Those who abrogate this agreement with the Lord bring terror and destruction. The gentile world is still in its ascendancy and Jews would best closet themselves in corporate ghettos awaiting the Messiah. Approaches to the non-Jew should be made delicately and humbly; shows of bravado are characteristically un-Jewish.

Ironically, in evaluating these manifestations of anti-Zionism

*Religion, Ideology and Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics*

and neo-Zionism, the Israeli Government appears to be more disturbed by the latter. Its posture toward Neturei Karta has generally been condescending amusement. The movement harkens to a religious simplicity and innocence which many government leaders can summon from their own past. As a cultural oddity, Neturei Karta recalls a life-style that was brutally uprooted and destroyed. Despite their militant anti-Zionism, therefore, its adherents have been left to themselves, undisturbed over questions of taxation, conscription or municipal participation. Confrontations have occurred only when the movement has moved outside its residential boundaries to protest some form of religious profanation.

Gush Emunim, however, is viewed as a political threat. By the very nature of its ideology, it cannot be contained within the confines of one section or area. Its prescriptions run to the heart of national existence. They spill over to the secular arenas of state security and international diplomacy. At issue is the destiny of the people in their land, played out over territories which are crux of Middle East peace. The Israeli government has decided that it can brook no compromises on its diplomatic discretion. Notwithstanding, Gush has won support from leading political figures who argue its case within the cabinet itself.

Though much is made of the messianic flavor of its rhetoric, government opposition is ironic also because little in the movement cannot be traced to the "State-Religion," political Zionism. Nor is its philosophy different from nation building ideologies—religious or secular—elsewhere. The movement might properly have been directed back into the mainstream. The controversy it has engendered is an indication of the distance between the "charismatic" beginnings of modern Israel and its present "rational-bureaucratic" structures (to borrow from Max Weber).

Jewish religion in Israel enjoys a favored and unusual position. It is established and has "captured" significant areas of political and social life. Consequently, its role has been within the mainstream, supporting an uneasy status quo with secular administrative authorities. Two religious movements, Neturei Karta and Gush Emunim have stalked outside this mainstream, attempting to revitalize Jewish life and bring Divine favor. This

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

has been an attempt to analyze the ideologies and prescriptions of these two movements. Exploratory in nature, the intent was neither exclusive nor conclusive. It is hoped that some light has been shed on the unique theological and social phenomenon that is Judaism, an ancient national faith, in Israel, an infant national enterprise.

### NOTES

1. This article is the outgrowth of a paper presented at the ninth annual conference of the Association for Jewish Studies (December, 1977). Research was carried out under grants from the Lucius Littauer Foundation, the Sigma Xi: Scientific Research Society of America and the City University Research Foundation.

2. The ideological and political role of Jewish tradition in Israel has been well covered elsewhere. See, e.g., Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Atheneum, 1975); S. N. Eisenstadt, et al, (eds.) *Integration and Development in Israel* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Ervin Birnbaum, *The Politics of Compromise: State and Religion in Israel* (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1970); Stephen Oren, "Continuity and Change in Israel's Religious Parties" *The Middle East Journal* (Winter, 1973) pp. 36-54; Alan Arian, "Stability and Change in Israeli Public Opinion" *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring, 1971) pp. 19-35. For a general review of Hebrew Language studies on the topic, see Leonard Weller, *Sociology in Israel* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1974).

3. Some students of Israeli religious life have approached the topic tangentially. See S. Clement Leslie, *The Rift in Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1971) and Norman Zucker, *The Coming Crisis in Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1973). The most important study of religious extremism to date, however, is Emile Marmorstein, *Heaven at Bay* (London: Oxford University, 1969).

4. Walter Laquer, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1972) esp. pp. 407-416. Also Marmorstein, *ibid.*, pp. 71-90.

5. Much of the terminology and conceptualization for this approach has been borrowed from the following works: Kenneth Dolbeare and Patricia Dolbeare, *American Ideologies: The Competing Political Beliefs of the Seventies* (Chicago: Markham, 1971); Gilbert Abcarian, *American Political Radicalism* (Waltham, Mass.: Xerox, 1971); Alexander Groth, *Major Ideologies* (New York: John Wiley, 1971); Lyman Sargent, *Contemporary Political Ideologies: A Comparative Analysis* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1972).

6. This brief review of the development of Gush Emunim is based upon the following sources: the pioneering efforts of Moshe Rohn whose ground-

## *Religion, Ideology and Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics*

breaking study of the Gush first appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* during the Summer of 1976 (and to whom the author is personally indebted); Rael Jean Isaac, *Israel Divided: Ideological Politics in the Jewish State* pp. 45-72; Janet O'dea, "Gush Emunim: Roots and Ambiguities" *Forum on the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel* (Fall, 1976) pp. 36-50 and Avi Ben from "On Fraternal Conflict in Israel" *Bitzaron* (March, 1977) pp. 99-104.

7. Interview with Rabbi Yohanan Fried, head of the Movement's Diaspora Division (July, 1976).

8. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hachohen Kook, "Zionism and Biblical Prophecy" in Yosef Tirosh (ed.) *Religious Zionism: An Anthology* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1975) p. 176.

9. Personal interview at Elon Moreh (August, 1976).

10. Moshe Levinger, Yohanan Fried and Hanan Porat, "Brief Answers to Timely Questions" *Gush Emunim* (March, 1976) p. 34.

11. Ehud Shprinzak, "Notes on the Nature of Extremist Politics in Israel" paper presented to the *Eshkol Institute of the Hebrew University* (May, 1976) pp. 10-11.

12. Most notable is Agriculture Minister Arik Sharon, Chairman of the Joint Government-Jewish Agency Committee on Settlement. It has even been intimated that Sharon will join with Hanan Porat in an independent political list at the next election.

13. Interview with Rabbi Yohanan Fried (July, 1976). It is interesting to note that the N.R.P. was faced with a serious threat of schism from its youth faction on the eve of the 1977 election. It was only by the appointment of Rabbi Drukman, Gush ideologue, to its second place on the party list that such a threat was averted.

14. The history of Neturei Karta has been outlined in the following sources: Marmorstein, *op. cit.*, chapters 4 and 5; Haim Pikrash, "One Hundred Years of Meah Shearim" *Hatzofeh* (4/12/74); Moshe Sheshar, "The Value of the State within the Religious Community" *Hatzofeh* (9/16/74); and "Independence Day: A Day of Mourning for Neturei Karta" *Ma-ariv* (5/3/73).

15. *Mishmeret Homotenu* — Neturei Kara periodical (May 17, 1962).

16. See Yerahmiel Domb, "The Millions that Could Have Been Saved" *The Jewish Guardian* (May 30, 1976) pp. 9-13; also *An Insight Toward "Independence"* — Neturei Karta pamphlet (Jerusalem, 1970) pp. 37-38. For an objective presentation of the Brand affair, see Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-1945* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971) or Nora Levin, *The Holocaust* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1968).

17. Interview with Rabbi Label Weissfisch, retired Neturei Karta spokesman (August, 1976).

18. The Talmudic source is *Ketubot* 111a. The clearest exposition of these views may be found in Joel Teitelbaum, *Ascent of Moses* (New York, 1959); also see Norman Lamm, "The Ideology of Neturei Karta" *TRADITION* (Fall, 1971) pp. 38-53 and Yerahmiel Domb, "Neturei Karta" in Michael Selzer, (ed.) *Zionism Reconsidered* (New York: MacMillan, 1970) pp. 23-47.

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

19. *A Clarification* — Neturei Karta pamphlet (Jerusalem, 1960) p. 2. See also *Mishmeret Homotenu* (July 23, 1959).
20. Yerahmiel Domb, *The Transformation* (London: Natore Karta, 1958) p. 46. See also Herbert Weiner, "The Case for Neturei Karta" *Jewish Digest* (March, 1964) pp. 59-64.
21. See, Amram Blau, *Kingship Shall Revert to Apostasy* (Jerusalem: Hamakor, 1970) pp. 53-57.
22. *Jerusalem Post* (August 28, 1973; June 11, 1974 and January 15, 1976).
23. *Jerusalem Post* (June 4, 1975 and February 18, 1975).
24. *New York Times* (March 12, 1971) and *Jerusalem Post* (May 19, 1976). Also, Menahem Michaelson, "Rabbi Amram Blau: The Eternal Rebel" *Yediot Achronot* (July 7, 1974) and Gila Berkowitz, "Madam Rabanit" *Israel Magazine* (December, 1972) pp. 71-75.