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THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF AMERICA: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

The fifty years which span the life of the RCA are probably the most seminal, the most tragic, the most exciting and the most challenging in the history of the Jewish people. The beginnings of the RCA coincide with the full-scale emergence of Hitler and Nazism, its early development took place during the Holocaust, and its growth and maturation have been co-terminal with the emergence of the State of Israel, the opening of the doors of the Soviet Union, and the projection of Orthodox Judaism on the American Jewish scene. The RCA has responded to all of these major developments. In fact, we could summarize the role of the RCA and its rabbis in America and on the world scene by stating simply that the RCA, in its half-century of existence, has literally created, nurtured and developed the modern Orthodox rabbi, as well as the modern Orthodox community, and has provided them with their philosophy, their structure, and their program.

Let me elaborate. The modern American Orthodox rabbi is a unique phenomenon in the history of traditional Judaism.¹ The East European rabbi operated within accepted historical parameters; his education was limited to Torah study. Secular studies were frowned upon, and the secular world and its influences were virtually ignored.² His American counterpart, on the other hand, faced a different set of circumstances. He had to confront the implications of twentieth-century science and technology, to respond to an aggressive secularism, and to deal with a non-Orthodox rabbinate.

The East European rabbi, who usually found his way into the ranks of the Agudas Harabonim, attempted to ignore the essential challenge which this reality posed and conducted his rabbinate as if he were administering to the Jews in a Polish *shtetl*. He rarely acclimatized himself to the American scene. The gulf between him

and the native-born American Jew grew ever wider. It wasn't only a generation gap, or a language barrier. It represented an inability or an unwillingness to come to grips with the realities which America projected, and which posed a very real challenge to vitalistic Judaism. The East European rabbi, for example, insisted on the sermon in Yiddish; and even when he spoke a fluent English, more often than not refused to deliver his sermons in that language out of fear that this would lead to Reform.

Every change in synagogue life, no matter how unimportant or trivial in halakhic terms, was resisted as the first step to deviation, reform, and assimilation. Rabbi Joseph Lookstein, of blessed memory, used to tell a story that when he first came to Kehillath Jeshurun they used to have spittoons strategically placed throughout the synagogue. One of his first acts was to order the spittoons removed. Whereupon, a special meeting of the Board of Directors was called and he was accused of taking the first step in reforming the congregation.³ Obviously, this orientation and approach undermined the future vitality of American Orthodoxy.

The American-born young men who opted for the Orthodox rabbinate could not dismiss these problems, nor could they minimize the extent of the danger which they implied. They were determined to face this challenge, and they formed the nucleus of the Rabbinical Council of America. It was not easy in those early years, as the Agudas Harabonim, particularly, moved heaven and earth to undermine and to destroy this fledgling organization.⁴ Its struggle for recognition, respect and acceptance was a difficult one, but through dedication, commitment, perseverance and superior leadership, the RCA and its rabbis emerged as the central Orthodox rabbinic voice in American Judaism.

By the mid-fifties, the RCA was regarded as the recognized spokesman of the modern Orthodox community. In this capacity, it moved vigorously into a number of areas wherein the Orthodox community had hitherto feared to tread. It assumed an active role on the political and social scene, and made its voice heard on matters which through the benign neglect of other Orthodox groups had become the private preserve of the secularists and the deviationists. The use of the political process, for example, emerged in the struggle to protect *shehita* when the RCA, together with the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, waged a brilliant battle against other Jewish organizations. The Poage Bill would have severely limited *shehita* because of the ban on shackling and hoisting. One wonders what the outcome might have been if the RCA and the Union, with their particular orientation, had not been on the scene at that crucial period in American Jewish history.

The RCA made its presence felt in a number of different areas. Internally, the RCA fathered the modern Orthodox synagogue, with its decorum, with its English sermon, with its reach-out to youth, and its willingness to use modern techniques to achieve its uncompromising goals of Torah-true Judaism. The rabbis of the RCA were involved in *kiruv rehokim*, outreach, before there was a Baal Teshuva movement. We were instrumental in the phenomenal growth of the National Conference of Synagogue Youth. It was in our synagogues that the NCSY and its imaginative leadership found a home and a base for its local and regional operations; and it was the active support of our colleagues which helped to fuel this extraordinarily successful movement.

In addition, the RCA and its rabbis have written a glorious chapter in the annals of the Day School movement. There is hardly a day school or yeshiva, particularly outside the New York area, in whose formation and maintenance the rabbis of the RCA or their laymen have not been heavily involved, body and soul. It is absolutely no coincidence that those who are most active in supporting synagogue life are precisely the ones who have taken positions of leadership in the day schools and the yeshivot because they understand, and their congregational rabbis have taught them, that there is a mutuality of interest between the “shul” and the school.

The modern Orthodox rabbinate, reflected in the RCA, has from its inception worked hand-in-hand with the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, and we have remained its rabbinical arm from the beginning. Certainly, there have been times when we and they have been at loggerheads; there exists a built-in tension between rabbis and laymen. However, over the years, the leadership of the RCA and the Union have moved to build bridges of understanding and mutual concern. We have endeavored to substitute honest, forthright discussion of issues for confrontation, because we have operated on the principle that there is much more that unites us than separates us, that when we work together the results are always felicitous, and that our energies should be concentrated in fighting our enemies and our challenges—not ourselves. The results, in the long run, have been gratifying.

We, together with the Union, have created one of the most unique vehicles in the practical history of Jewish life, namely, the whole idea of the UO and *kashrut* supervision. The breakthrough in *kashrut* may be the “greatest single success” and “possibly the greatest step forward in this sensitive area in the history of the American Jewish community.” In one fell swoop, the RCA, together with the Union, succeeded in projecting *kashrut* as a community responsibility, and in making the

UO symbol the most accepted and respected throughout the length and breadth of this country and the world. The RCA had to resist the opposition of the Agudas Harabonim, for whose members *kashrut* was a matter of livelihood, and the members of the RCA had to voluntarily forego their rabbinic prerogative of granting individual *hekhsherim*. That they were willing to make this kind of sacrifice in favor of the concept of communal *kashrut* is surely one of the most important successes of the RCA.⁵

The RCA has done more than provide food for the body of American Jewry. Its scholarly rabbinic journals provide intellectual stimulation and spiritual nourishment for the inquisitive mind of the committed Torah Jew as well as thought-provoking ideas for the uncommitted Jew who is in search of his identity and who is looking for the genuine and the authentic in the Jewish faith. *HaDarom* and *Tradition* have fulfilled that function magnificently.

In 1957, the first issue of *HaDarom* was published; fifty-three issues have thus far appeared. *HaDarom*, which from the very beginning and through most of its existence was edited by Rabbi Charles Chavel, of blessed memory, is a Torah journal which has afforded some of our colleagues the opportunity to display their Talmudic erudition and rabbinic scholarship by writing novellae and responsa on contemporary subjects. *HaDarom*, which appears bi-annually, has also presented to its readers biographies of spiritual luminaries of past generations, as well as correspondence, responsa and moral insights of great rabbis which have never before been published. *HaDarom* helped us to establish our halakhic credentials.

Nonetheless, as important as *HaDarom* is, its impact is limited to a circumscribed circle of rabbinic scholars. The real intellectual contribution, on a large scale, is being made by our English-language publication, *Tradition*. *Tradition* first appeared in the Fall of 1958, and its first editor was Rabbi Norman Lamm. Within a few years—in 1962—Rabbi Walter Wurzburger took over the editorship, and ever since that time, *Tradition* has been closely identified with his name. The articles which have appeared in its pages cover the whole gamut of Jewish thinking and Jewish life. Some of Morenu haRav Joseph B. Soloveitchik's most seminal articles—"The Lonely Man of Faith" is one example—have been published in *Tradition*. Jewish theology, history, ethics, halakhic issues, the role of the State of Israel in Jewish life and the position of women in the Orthodox constellation, have been freely and openly discussed from a variety of points of view—and yet within an halakhic framework. One of its most innovative features is the Survey of Halakhic Literature which provides a review of current halakhic contributions on a host of subjects. It is not without good

reason that Milton Himmelfarb once characterized *Tradition* as the best-edited, most informative and thought-provoking journal of all the so called “branches” of Judaism.

The involvement of the RCA does not stop at the borders of the United States and Canada. Our involvement has been world-wide in scope. We have provided dramatic initiatives of far-reaching consequence in the international arena. The RCA was the first rabbinic body to penetrate the Iron Curtain, and it opened the door to religious contact with Russian Jews for the first time since the Russian revolution. In 1956, a five-man rabbinic delegation, headed by Rabbi David Hollander, made an historic visit to Soviet Jewry, reminding them that they had not been forgotten and initiating a new era of relationship with our brethren in Russia. Can there be any doubt that this major achievement played a decisive role in the historic events which were to follow for Soviet Jews?

The RCA took an unequivocal position on behalf of Jewish statehood at a time when other Orthodox elements wavered, thus providing significant Orthodox support for the emerging State of Israel. The RCA, which recognized the supreme authority of the chief rabbinate in Israel, remains today the only significant rabbinic body to continue to so do. The RCA utilized its growing prestige and its wide acceptance in all circles in Israel to intervene, on more than one occasion—and to intervene effectively—on matters that affect state and religion. On every level, internally, nationally and internationally, the RCA has made its presence felt and its voice heard. Truly, we have come of age.

And yet, with all of our success, a careful analysis will indicate that the RCA, and the modern Orthodox rabbinate which it represents, faces a whole series of problems and that, in one respect, our future could be very cloudy and very uncertain unless we are prepared to face up to a series of realities. The organized Orthodox synagogues and their rabbis are under siege and, as a consequence, the very legitimacy of the RCA is in question. There are weaknesses and challenges which must be boldly confronted if we are to survive for the next fifty years.

The first challenge which we must meet, is simply: “What do we stand for?” We define ourselves as a Centrist Orthodox body, some of us a little to its left, some of us to its right. But really, what do we mean by Centrist Orthodoxy? What is it that differentiates us from the right and from the left? And what is it that provides for our religious legitimacy? It seems to me that we have failed to sufficiently articulate our position intellectually and to provide the proper kind of halakhic validation. Little has been done in organized fashion to

articulate our philosophy in terms of the realities of Orthodox Jewish life today. We simply react to attacks and criticism. We do not anticipate and present our own position.

We have permitted the feeling to grow and, unfortunately, this is prevalent even in our own ranks, that our kind of Orthodoxy is a kind of transition. We are good enough to make Jews out of “Yiddishe goyim,” non-observant and indifferent Jews, so to speak, but we lose our purpose, our function, and our efficacy with truly-committed, knowledgeable Torah Jews. We are victims of a perception—and I even hear it many times from our own rabbis—that “they,” whoever the “they” may be in the so-called yeshiva world or in the hasidic world, are the real purists. They are the saintly Jews. They are the ones who come closest to that religious truth which we exalt. Many of us have fallen prey to this kind of propaganda, and we have confused “more *humra*”—more stringency—with “more *frumkeit*”—more religiosity.

We must define ourselves if we are to survive. We have to stress that centrist or modern Orthodoxy is not “conceived in compromise and born in confusion,”⁶ but a legitimate form of Judaism—possibly its most legitimate manifestation historically and halakhically. We should not allow ourselves to be treated as an accommodation but as a proper religious ideal. Rabbi Walter Wurzbarger, in his well-reasoned introduction to “The State of Orthodoxy” which appeared in *Tradition* in the Spring of 1982, quotes Rav Soloveitchik to the effect that “the alleged moderation of Modern Orthodoxy need not point to spiritual inferiority. Instead, cogent religious reasons rather than a readiness to compromise may dictate the adoption of a middle-of-the-road instead of an extremist position.”⁷

Consequently, we have the right to insist that within the framework of Torah Judaism there must be room for a variety of legitimate approaches, that it must be able to encompass such diverse thinkers as Rabbi Kuk and Rav Soloveitchik as well as Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and the Satmar Rebbe. Once we accept objective Divine Revelation and the binding character of Halakhah, we must accept the principle that there are “seventy faces to the Torah.”

We have to project our position intelligently and on halakhic grounds. We must make a case for our legitimacy within the historic, halakhic framework of Torah Judaism. I would like to urge that we set aside a conference or a convention, in the near future, dedicated to just this theme, to address ourselves seriously to it, and to mobilize our best minds in the presentation of what the RCA is and for what it stands. The symposium which appeared in *Tradition* on “The State of Orthodoxy” is a worthy beginning—but only a beginning. What is

obviously required is a sober in-depth analysis and discussion of the philosophy, validity and applicability of Centrist Orthodoxy in the contemporary context.

More than that, one of the major weaknesses of the RCA is its sense of inferiority when it comes to the whole area of *pesak halakhah*, halakhic decision-making. From the very beginning, the RCA was and still is, to a degree, afflicted with an inferiority complex vis-a-vis other rabbinic bodies like the Agudas Harabonim. It is a serious flaw in our organizational makeup. There has always been a feeling that American-born rabbis should feel insecure in making halakhic decisions, in taking halakhic initiatives; and we have deferred, on more than one occasion, to our European-born-and-bred colleagues. To that extent, we are still living in the shadow of the Agudas Harabonim.

The truth of the matter is that our own position as an organization was literally saved by the presence in our midst of Rav Soloveitchik; the salvation of the RCA occurred when the Rav became the perennial head of the Halacha Commission. The Rav's identification with the RCA gave the organization new standing and respect in the Torah world. The Agudas Harabonim could no longer trifle with the RCA and its decisions. The Rav's awesome Talmudic erudition, coupled with his vast secular knowledge, made him the undisputed guide and teacher of the modern Orthodox rabbinate and its lay constituency. No man in our time had wielded such power and such influence on the American Jewish scene.

However, in all candor, we must look ahead to the future to insure our continued respectability in the Torah community. Certainly in today's Orthodox Jewish world halakhic authority is the touchstone for organizational legitimacy. The truth of the matter is that we have within our organizational ranks today fine scholars, particularly amongst our younger men, who could tackle the major and the minor problems which are an integral part of the life of a Torah community.

However, the truth is also that we have not been building up an indigenous authority which will be able to address itself to our halakhic needs. When I was president of the RCA, I had hoped to establish such a body which would be trained and prepared to assume, ultimately, the role of our halakhic authority. Unfortunately, this scheme, or shall I say this dream, of mine was shot down aborning. But with all of that, it doesn't in any way compromise or undermine its efficacy or alter its validity. We must, in the not too distant future, create the apparatus which will prepare younger *posekim*; authorities, who will be able to reflect our position, or, better still, create our position with courage, forthrightness, and unchallenged halakhic authority—if we are to be able to consider ourselves a properly constituted body of

Orthodox rabbis. Without this instrument, and the power which it implies, our very legitimacy is in question.

Our problems go beyond the question of religious authority. The RCA represents the pulpit rabbinate in America. That is the base of our organizational existence. Without it, we would not long survive; at best we would become a carbon copy of the once-proud Agudas Harabonim. In this context, it is clear that the Orthodox synagogue and its rabbi are under serious attack. The organized Orthodox synagogue as a vital, viable force in American Jewish life could, conceivably, disappear from the face of the American Jewish map within the next 50 years—with dire consequences both to the RCA and to Orthodox Judaism. The surprising thing is that the attack against the organized modern Torah synagogue comes not only from deviationist sources (that is still true in smaller communities); even more so today, in larger communities, it comes from the world of the Yeshiva and the proliferation of *shtiebelach*.

As stated, we have played a major role in the development of the yeshiva movement. What we witness, oftentimes, is the phenomenon of that institution biting the hand which has fed and sustained it. I remember Dr. Samuel Belkin, of blessed memory, saying many times that the purpose of a yeshiva was to produce five rabbis and 95 laymen who would appreciate and support these rabbis. We assumed that the yeshiva would produce the people who would take their place in the organized Orthodox synagogue, and would provide a new kind of Torah leadership for the Orthodox community. But that is not what has happened. Unfortunately, this is true of all yeshivot, including my own. I say this with a sense of sadness. Products of Yeshiva University, in this respect, are not much better than those of any other yeshivot. The sad truth is that the world of the synagogue and the world of the yeshiva barely touch. The lines of communication between these two essential pillars of a dynamic Orthodox community are extremely tenuous.

How do the yeshivot prepare their students to assume their positions in the life of the organized Torah community? What kind of attitudes do they implant in young minds in regard to community responsibility? While this may not be true at all times and in all places, the fact of the matter is that there are a number of yeshivot—too many—which inculcate a sense of *bittul*, a sense of condescension in their students to the organized forms of congregational life and its spiritual leadership. In this process, the rabbi is not spared from derision. He is often ridiculed in these circles as a religious technician who has sold “pure Orthodoxy” down the river, for the sake of building the membership rolls of his congregation and enhancing his position.

The result of this approach is that the yeshiva student is taught,

in effect, to denigrate the synagogue, to trivialize the role of the rabbi; and what is even more devastating, in terms of the future of Jewish communal life, some of the best candidates for the rabbinate are turned off and lost to the Jewish community. This is a tragedy when you consider that it is the Orthodox rabbi, particularly outside the New York area, who sanctifies God's name everyday, who struggles to keep Torah communities together and vital, who converts Jews to Judaism, who draws youngsters into the NCSY, and who tirelessly recruits students for the day schools and yeshivot of America. Is it surprising, under these circumstances, that so many products of the yeshiva movement move into the intimate but insular atmosphere of the *shtiebel*, where obligations are minimal, and a sense of superiority in an "all-yeshivish *minyan*" can be projected with impunity?

This is a problem, and it is one that we are obligated to face; we must take a series of concrete steps to redress the balance if we are to survive as *Rabbonim*. The first action which we must take in this struggle for survival and recognition is to upgrade ourselves professionally. The Rav once gave me a powerful insight into the changing character of Orthodoxy. We were talking about my son and his grandson, and he said to me: "When you were a student at the yeshiva, who were your heroes?" and he didn't even wait for me to answer. He said: "Rabbis Leo Jung, Joseph Lookstein, Herbert S. Goldstein. Tell me, who are the heroes of your son," he asked, "and my grandson? Certainly not these people. Their models are the *roshei yeshiva*, the people who represent learning and scholarship." Clearly, that statement has profound implications.

The modern Orthodox rabbi must in fact be a *rav* in the full sense of the word. We must project the kind of scholarship which will gain for us the respect of the yeshiva world. After all, we ourselves are products of that world, and we must reflect its learning and its scholarship on the highest level. In more and more communities it is no longer sufficient for a rabbi to be an eloquent preacher or a fine pastor or a good organizer. He must have all these qualities, to be sure, but he must also project an aura of "*lomdus*," of Jewish scholarship, the perception that he can "learn," and that he knows what to do with a *she'ela*, a question in Jewish law. The fact that Yeshiva University has added a fourth year to its Semicha Program is a response to this reality; and the fact that the Division of Communal Services of Yeshiva has offered a variety of courses to its *musmakhim* who are currently in pulpits reflects their sensitivity to this major problem. It should be noted that this requirement has always been an integral part of the classical definition of the rabbi in Israel.

Beyond that, we have an obligation to upgrade our synagogues. It would be foolhardy to believe that there is no mediocrity in the

Orthodox synagogue today, or that there is no room for improvement in terms of its religious commitment. On the contrary, the problem is that, unfortunately, in too many instances, we have allowed ourselves, our approach and our program to be cast in stone, and are unwilling to make any substantial changes. The fact of the matter is that the Orthodox synagogue must properly take into account a new reality—the young people who are coming out of the yeshivot—and we must accommodate ourselves to that reality in the most positive terms. This recognition should be reflected in our priorities, in our programming and in our conduct.

In addition to that, from an organizational point of view, the RCA has an obligation to re-examine one of the painfully sensitive issues which has continued to plague it since its inception, and which today undermines its claim to legitimacy as the rabbinic representative of the Orthodox community. I refer, of course, to mixed-pew positions. We have always sympathized with those of our colleagues who have had to accept mixed-pew positions, and we have felt their pain as well as their idealism in the field. It is not an easy choice to make. The reasoning has always been that these positions are accepted on condition that they will either be converted to “*mehitsa* synagogues” in a specified period of time, or that the rabbi will then draw the proper conclusions. Certainly it was never meant to give a seal of approval to the concept of a so-called “traditional synagogue” or to perpetuate it. Yet—and this really represents a small, dwindling minority within the RCA—⁸ this is precisely what has happened to the detriment of the standing and the stature of the RCA.

It may very well be that “we endowed the mechitzah with a transcendent significance that we denied to many of the most crucial foundations of Judaism” and that “we invested more raw energy, more political wrangling, more ideological confrontation, more religious polemic, more literature and litigation and lecturing on the issue of Mechitzah than on Mikvah and Shabbat and Kashrut.”⁹ Whatever the truth may be, the fact is that the *mehitsa* has become the wall of separation between the Orthodox and the deviationist movements. Our organizational legitimacy will be judged by many in terms of how we handle this problem.

It is one of the weakest links in our structure, and leaves us exposed to criticism from the so-called “right.” Worse than that, it confuses the layman who is a product of the yeshiva, and even more so, the baal teshuva, because to him this is the kind of inconsistency which he cannot reconcile in terms of definition and goal. It seems clear to me that the RCA must reassess its position in regard to mixed-pew positions, certainly henceforth, if we are to be credible in the eyes of the Torah-true constituency.

At the same time, we must come to grips with the women's issue as it affects the Orthodox rabbinate. The Torah community has chalked up major gains in the last fifty years—particularly in Torah education. But no accomplishment can equal the gains which have been made in the education of Jewish women. Ours is the best-educated generation of Jewish women in Jewish history. Our women know more about Judaism and its sources today than any other group of Jewish women in any epoch of the Jewish people.

That reality is already beginning to have and will continue to have far-reaching consequences for the Orthodox community and the Orthodox synagogue. Sadly, the implications have not been sufficiently understood or explored. There is certainly no room for public relations posturing and grandstanding on this issue or for frivolous responsa that are written superficially and presented as an ukase. What is required is an earnest and mature consideration of the issues involved, the definition of the parameters of women's rights in terms of Torah study, in terms of practice, and even in terms of their role in the synagogue—but only within the halakhic framework. We have to have the courage to make the decisions that should be made in any direction, and then to follow these decisions and their ramifications to their logical conclusions. The women's issue will not disappear by our ignoring it. Whatever our position, it must be honestly conceived and presented, and then it will be accepted by all—men and women alike.

Finally, we must relate to the problem of our relationship to the so-called "right" and the so-called "left" or deviationist communities. If we are, indeed, a centrist body as we claim, we have to define or redefine our attitude to those who are outside our camp, as well as to those elements with whom we may sometimes disagree, but who are committed, like ourselves, to revelational Judaism. We should certainly strengthen our ties with the so-called right, whether it be the yeshiva world or the hasidic world or other organizational structures. When all is said and done, we have much more in common with them than we do with our brethren on the left. There is much more that unites us; and we should look for ways to work together and cooperate with each other—particularly in those areas where it is possible—and to minimize the frictions between ourselves and them. There is no room for provocative statements and declarations intended to hurt and anger them without reason. We may not always agree with their positions and they are not always easy to get along with. In the end, we must, and will, take independent positions on matters that affect all of us, and those positions will reflect our basic philosophy and *weltanschauung*. However, there are ways to do this without exacerbating our relationship with other Torah-true elements.

At the same time it seems very clear to me that we should not sever our lines of communication with our deviationist brethren. We, as a rabbinic body, particularly through the Synagogue Council of America, have maintained an ongoing relationship with the Conservative and the Reform—and we have done so on the basis of ground rules which our halakhic authority has set down for us.¹⁰ At a very crucial time in the history of the RCA, when our relationship with non-Orthodox rabbinic bodies was challenged by the “*issur*,” prohibition, of eleven *roshei yeshiva*, our halakhic authority set down the famous guidelines of “*kelappei huts*” and “*kelappei penim*,” which enabled us to work with other groups in external matters without compromising or blurring the lines which separate the Torah community from those who do not have a similar halakhic commitment.¹¹

We have sat in the Synagogue Council of America with the full knowledge of our halakhic authority and we have scrupulously and conscientiously adhered to those guidelines. It is not and it has not always been easy for us to maintain a relationship with the Conservative and the Reform elements. They have repeatedly thrown obstacles in our way. The patrilineal issue for one, the patently false propaganda which they circulated on the “Who is a Jew” issue for another, are only two of the many problems and issues which separate us absolutely and fundamentally from the Conservative and the Reform.

Yet, with all of that, there can be no argument that, somehow or another, we have to keep our lines of communication open. We are not unalterably wed to the Synagogue Council of America, but there has to be some area, some arena, some avenue which does not impinge upon Halakha or does not give halakhic standing to the deviationists, but at the same time allows us to maintain contact and a relationship with them. They may not be our kind of Jew, but they are Jews, no less than you or I. We have obligations to these Jews as Jews, and we cannot simply write them off as a bad debt. One wonders, whether, for example, the NCSY could have reached out as easily if we and the Union had severed all of our relationships with the deviationist movements. Whether it is this forum or that forum, it seems clear that our love of Jews should be so all-encompassing that we must find the ways and means to continue to reach out with a full heart, and a full understanding of our position, to those elements who have not yet reached our level of commitment.

The next fifty years will be challenging ones for the RCA. The keys to our longevity will remain undeviating loyalty to our principles, our ability to adjust to emerging new realities and the courage and the vision to make the decisions and to take the steps which will insure the continuity of the RCA.

NOTES

1. I have deliberately used the words "unique phenomenon" in describing the modern Orthodox rabbinate. I freely concede that the RCA has no monopoly in the modern rabbinate in trying to come to grips with modernity. There is the model of the German rabbinate, particularly, and the West European rabbinate, generally. However, this does not detract from the uniqueness of the modern traditional rabbinate of America nor the seminaries which spawned it. These institutions, in fact, represent the legacy of East European Jewry and its attempt to cope with the challenge and the threat of Americanism with its "melting-pot" theory. The pioneers of the traditional rabbinate on these shores and the yeshivot which prepared them were themselves either the products of or were influenced by the East European social milieu, and never conceived of themselves as heirs to the West European tradition. Dr. Bernard Revel, the first president of Yeshiva College, may have been compared to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, but he never considered his school to be an extension of the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin; nor did Dr. Samuel Belkin ever equate the "synthesis" of Yeshiva University with the Hirschian doctrine of "*Torah Im Derekh Eretz*." This notion of Yeshiva University as the legitimate claimant to Hirsch's philosophy in our day is of relatively recent vintage and has been eloquently enunciated by Yeshiva's distinguished president, Dr. Norman Lamm, and Dr. Sol Roth, who holds the chair in Yeshiva dedicated to Hirsch. It may well be that Yeshiva has, in fact, a valid claim today to this approach; however this was not the motivation which inspired the pioneers of the institution, which this year celebrates its centenary. Cf. G. Klaperman, *The Story of Yeshiva University* (New York, 1969), pp. 1,133-170; S. Belkin, *Essays in Traditional Jewish Thought* (New York, 1956).
2. The Volozhiner Yeshiva closed its doors, at the beginning of 1892, rather than comply with government regulations requiring it to institute secular studies. The attempt by Rabbi Reines, founder of Mizrachi, to introduce secular studies in his yeshiva in Lida, Poland, in 1882, failed because of widespread opposition in the Jewish community to this idea. It is true that he succeeded in 1905 to include secular studies in his yeshiva curriculum; however, the Lida Yeshiva never gained great acceptance nor the acclaim which was showered upon the other great centers of East European scholarship. Cf. A. I. Schiff, *The Jewish Day School Movement in America* (New York, 1966), p. 3.
3. One wonders what relationship could possibly exist between the removal of offensive spittoons and the "liberalizing" of Torah Judaism. However, the exaggerated and distorted perspective of some traditional Jews was such that any deviation from accepted synagogue practice or structure, no matter how innocuous or unrelated to Halakhah, was considered a danger to the continuing existence of Orthodox Judaism as a viable force on the American Jewish scene.
4. L. Bernstein, in his *Challenge and Mission* (New York, 1982), pp. 127-8, indicates that from the very beginning the RCA had to struggle to assert itself against the opposition of the Agudas Harabonim. He cites the minutes of July 1939, in which "an article by one of the leaders of Agudas Harabonim was read in which the writer declared that only members of the Agudas Harabonim are true Rabbis while all others are deceivers." In September of that year, the Agudas Harabonim "called upon seventeen rabbis who were members of both organizations to persuade the Rabbinical Council to liquidate and become once again an alumni association of RIETS [the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary]."
5. *Idem*, pp. 91-105.
6. Cf. S. Spero's article in "The State of Orthodoxy" which appeared in *Tradition*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Spring 1982), p. 78.
7. Wurzbarger also discusses the worrisome aspects of what he calls Orthodox "triumphalism." Symptomatic of the apparent retreat of modern Orthodoxy in the face of so-called right-wing arrogance, is the "revisionist" theory that the Hirschian philosophy of "*Torah Im Derekh Eretz*" was not meant to be an intrinsic religious ideal, but an emergency measure to preserve the Jewish community which might otherwise have been overwhelmed by modernity. Wurzbarger correctly rejects this position as contrary to Hirsch's own

- formulation. In this, he has an ally in Rabbi Joseph Breuer, of blessed memory, who writes in the first volume of his collected essays, "Anyone who has but a fleeting insight into the life and work of Rav Hirsch will realize that his Torah Im Derech Eretz formula was never intended by him as a *Horo'as Sho'oh*." Cf. *Tradition*, vol. 20 no. 2, pp. 4–5; J. Breuer, *A Time to Build*, vol. I, p. 18.
8. In his testimony in the New Orleans case, Rabbi Solomon Sharfman indicated that less than a third of the RCA membership had mixed-pew synagogues. The number today is considerably less and declining. Cf. Bernstein, *Challenge and Mission*, p. 21.
 9. N. Lamm in *Proceedings of the Forty-First Annual Convention of the Rabbinical Council of America* (1977), p. 7.
 10. In his book, *The Renaissance of the Torah Jew* (New York, 1985), pp. 286–288, Saul Bernstein points to a connection between Agudath Israel and the Synagogue Council of America. He notes that one of the founders of the Synagogue Council was Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein, z"l, one of the leading figures in the Orthodox community and in Agudath Israel. It was he who brought the RCA and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America into the Synagogue Council after its founding in 1926, and he served as the Council's president in the years 1944–1946. He and other lights of Agudath Israel were associated with the Council during its formative years. "After the controversy arose in 1955 the organization's leadership perforce took a contrary position, but the fact that throughout the preceding twenty-nine years no word of criticism of the Synagogue Council of America or questioning of participation in it appeared from this source or any organ thereof is sufficient indication of the original position."
 11. See *Tradition*, vol. 6, pp. 5–29. "Confrontation" was the Rav's first article for *Tradition*.