



Viewpoints, Outlook

Dec. 18, 2006, 8:25PM

Let's be clear: Orthodox Jews deeply pro-Zionist

Shame on pretenders who attended Tehran conference

By RABBI BARRY GELMAN

Last week the Chronicle ran a curious and disturbing picture of a Chassidic Jew embracing Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at a conference of Holocaust deniers.

The picture has outraged Jews all over the world. That embrace represents a betrayal of Jewish sensitivities and a disgrace to the victims of the Holocaust. As the rabbi in the picture appears to be ultraorthodox Jews, it is important to set the record straight as to what authentic Orthodox Judaism teaches on this issue.

The rabbi belongs to a group called Neturei Karta that believes that Zionism is a heresy. They base their views on various Talmudic statements and the warped theological view that the Holocaust was a punishment from God brought about by the advent of political Zionism. In this group's view, only God can create a Jewish commonwealth in the Land of Israel. Any human attempt to do so is viewed as a lack of faith in God. Furthermore, according to their view, the fact that Israel was established, in the main, by nonobservant Jews, forever taints the Zionist endeavor. As such, they believe that the state of Israel is illegitimate and should not exist.

According to them, Israel belongs to the Palestinians. They attended the conference to show "solidarity" with an individual who shares their views.

This view is a distortion of Jewish law as well as a misrepresentation of the sentiments of the vast majority of Orthodox and Ultraorthodox Jews.

Judaism is profoundly Zionist. The Bible, Talmud and the daily prayer service are filled with references to Israel and Jerusalem. For ages, Jews living in exile have longed to return to Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people.

In order to back their claim that Zionism is heresy, the Neturei Karta quote isolated sources and interpret them in ways contrary to most rabbinic authorities. It is a basic premise of Jewish legal theory that certain statements in the Talmud are legally binding (Jewish law) while others are categorized as aggadic (nonlegal) discussions. While important, the aggadic sections are not meant to be normative. This fringe group is so alone in its view that all classic codifiers of Jewish law ignore its arguments. It is important to note this so readers are aware that this group in no way represents Orthodox Judaism.

As far as the issue of showing a lack of faith in God in creating the Jewish state, the members of this group adopt a patently anti-Jewish approach. Of course Jews have always believed that God is the author of history and that he guides the destiny of every person. This, however, is not meant to be an excuse for passivity. Judaism teaches that human exertion to improve the world is not only appropriate, but also necessary. A sick patient is not meant to believe that going to a doctor would deny God's providence. In fact, if he refuses medical attention, he will have violated Jewish law.

The fact is that most prominent Orthodox leaders have accepted and embraced Zionism. Among the Orthodox signers to Israel's Declaration of Independence are the two leaders of the Ultra Orthodox Agudath Israel movement, Rabbi Yizchak Meir Levin and Rabbi Meir David Lowenstein, as well as Rabbi Kalman Kahana of Agudath Israel's labor movement and Rabbis Wolfe Gold and Yehuda Leib Maimon, leaders of the religious Zionist Mizrachi movement.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, one of the most prominent American Orthodox leaders of the 20th century, not only embraced Zionism but also considered the establishment of the state of Israel a divine communication God was literally knocking on the door of the Jewish people. The state of Israel was not to be viewed as heresy, but rather a joint endeavor between God and the Jewish people.

This group has crossed the line by attending the Tehran conference and embracing the monster Ahmadinejad who blatantly says that he wishes to carry on where Hitler left off. Shame on them for betraying their own people. Shame on them for spurning God and his gift of the state of Israel.

In my opinion, despite their dress and outward appearance, they have lost any right to call themselves Orthodox Jews. Perhaps we should even go further and declare about them what Maimonides has said: "The following individuals do not have a share in the world to come — those who separate themselves from the community. A person who separates himself from the community may be placed in this category even though he has not transgressed any sins. A person who separates himself from the congregation of Israel and does not take part in their hardships — but rather goes on his own path as if he is from another nation and not Israel — does not have a portion in the world to come." By abandoning the state of Israel and betraying the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, this group has indeed separated itself from the rest of the nation of Israel.

Let there be no mistake about it: The vast majority of Jews, of all denominations, fully reject the religious and theological views expressed by the Neturei Karta.

Gelman, rabbi of United Orthodox Synagogues, is treasurer of the Houston Rabbinical Association and a member of the Board of the Houston Jewish Federation.



ADVERTISING: [Contests](#) | [Fraudulent Ads](#) | [Information & Rates](#) | [Place An Ad](#) | [Singles In H](#)
CHRONICLE: [Subscribe Now](#) | [Subscriber Services](#) | [Buy Photos](#) | [Chronicle in Education](#) | [Corrections](#) | [F](#)
SERVICES: [Copyright Notice & Privacy Policy](#) | [Help](#) | [Registration](#) | [Report a Problem](#) | [Site Map](#) |

