

ization and devolution), we remain quite clear regarding what Judaism requires in the broader realm of action on behalf of the public interest.

The emergence in recent years of a number of new organizations that reflect that clarity—the Jewish Fund for Justice, American Jewish World Service, Jews for Racial and Economic Equality (in New York), the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (in Chicago), the Jewish Metropolitan Organizing Project (in Minneapolis) along with the *Tikkun Ha'ir* program of the Jewish Community Relations Council in Boston, substantial Jewish participation in Habitat for Humanity and any number of local volunteer programs—indicates our continuing availability for and involvement in mending the world. The work of that mending remains, for most of us, our personal commitment, our religious conviction, and our political

inclination. From that we may infer that most Jews will experience relief if and when liberalism is restored as a coherent and plausible political doctrine. †

Liberalism and the jews—an appeal from the perplexed

M. Michael Sharlot

I confess to being amazed at the persistence of the traditional voting pattern of American Jews. Why do Jews vote so differently from similar European immigrants who divide their votes between the parties in roughly even, if shifting, proportions? Is the answer to be found in the continuing enigma of what it means to be a Jew as contrasted with being an Italian or a Pole? We and the world around us have never successfully unraveled the twisted skein of religion and ethnicity/nationality.

Are Jews “liberals” because of our faith? This is unconvincing inasmuch as I suspect that the most religious, in the sense of the most Orthodox, are the least likely to adhere to the dominant liberal ethos as expressed by *The New York Times* or *Tikkun*. Indeed, although I make no claim to knowledge of Torah and Talmud, I am as skeptical of claims that Judaism embodies the Democratic Party platform of 1968, as I am that the New Testament is the source of the Contract with America.

In both cases it seems a terrible distortion and misuse of religion, with its concerns about the relationship between man and God, the effort to perfect one's own soul, and the ultimate explanation of existence, to use it to resolve questions of the desirability of raising the minimum wage or of night basketball.

Seeking The Font Of Jewish Liberalism

Part of my difficulty in understanding the phenomenon of persistent Jewish liberalism lies in the disparity between the values of the current version of American liberalism and those values which dominated the lives of our ancestors. Life in Eastern Europe was permeated by the values of personal responsibility, observance of the dictates of the religion, stable marriage, devotion to children, communal self-help, and behavioral norms of thought vital to the survival of the group. In contrast, liberalism insists on: government as the source of succor

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Nina Beth Cardin, Editor

for all unhappiness; government as an instrument for the compelled self-improvement of the individual; active hostility to the public expression of religious belief; excusing moral and ethical lapses; the elevation of a rampant individualism to the virtual exclusion of respect for traditional morals and mores; and a belief that it is societal forces—susceptible to infinite reshaping by government—rather than personal failings which explain the persistence of evil.

The values that suffused Jewish life in the past seem to me far more consonant with conservative views than with those of liberalism. Yet the voting pattern persists.

I suggest that the explanation for the anomalous pattern of Jewish voting is not to be found in our religion but rather in our experience as a people in this century. Let me suggest two distinctive features of the American Jewish experience which may help to explain. One is the paradoxical anxiety which many Jews seem to feel about their security despite three centuries of life in a nation that may be, as to matters of faith, the most tolerant in human history. The second is the special connection masses of American Jews have felt to the struggle for Black liberation.

Afraid To Let Go Of Fear

As to the question of anxiety, it is as though the extraordinary freedom enjoyed by Jews in America to practice their faith, or, indeed, not to, and to form organizations to give voice to shared interests, has not assuaged sensitivities reflective of life in the Pale of Settlement. Many Jews, including intellectual leaders, seem unable to accept that, whatever the tolerance of America for different faiths, this is in a very deep sense a Christian society and nation. The fears associated with that ineluctable fact have given rise to a devotion to the Constitution's Establishment clause worthy of the most militant atheists. The Establishment clause of the First Amendment, with all of its judicial accretions, has been embraced by the Jewish community as a bulwark against the danger that the *de facto* status of America as a Christian nation will become *de jure*.

In my view the danger of this, given our nation's history of religious pluralism, is largely imaginary. Moreover, it is strange for this clause to have become an icon for a people who, in the final analysis, are defined by a shared historical, religious experience. Whether or not these fears are realistic or the devotion to this constitutional provision is consonant with the history and values of Jews, I would suggest that a significant part of the Democratic party's attraction is its perceived commitment to upholding and strengthening this clause.

As to the relationship, albeit unrequited, with African Americans, again the Democrats are seen as more deeply committed to the cause. It was undoubtedly a noble chapter in American Jewish history that so many individuals and organizations played an important role in redressing some of the altogether legitimate grievances of Black Americans. Perhaps this cause resonated with our ancestral memories of the Exodus, reviewed each year at the *Seder*. Perhaps it was motivated in part by the continuing sense of insecurity in the *galut* which made identification with the plight of another marginalized group not only noble but self-protective.

Back To The Future

With regard to both of the social phenomena set out above, the Democrats have been seen as the paladins of the fears and hopes of American Jews. But in my view it smacks of arrested development for these concerns to define and constrain the voting behavior of an extraordinary majority of American Jews. These concerns, however worthy or understandable, are utterly inadequate definitions of the totality of our lives as individuals or as a group. There are other important values steeped in our traditions which must be refurbished and inculcated for the good of our nation, our society and our progeny. I would only ask that Jews consider the possibility that conservatives may be better allies in carrying our this vital task. †

A new liberalism for the 1990s?

Richard T. Foltin

Thirty years ago, Professor Theodore Lowi asked (in his book entitled, ironically for the theme of this publication, *The End Of Liberalism*) questions that still resonate: "What kind of government, what ends of government, what forms of government, what consequences of government?"

As Americans and as Jews, we are in the midst of a fundamental rethinking of the proper role of government. The three decades since Professor Lowi asked those trenchant questions have demonstrated that not every government program intended to deal with societal problems has been well advised and, more crucially, that

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