Modern Orthodoxy in the 21st Century: Lecture IV: "Inclusiveness & the Ideal of 'Klal Yisrael' in the Teachings of Rabbi Soloveitchik

Rabbi Moshe Shulman
Shaarei Shomayim Congregation, Spring 5766

Selected Bibliography
• Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik; As Posek of Post-Modern Orthodoxy, Rabbi Dr. Wurzburger, Tradition, vol 29, 1994.
• Some Comments on Centrist Orthodoxy, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, Tradition 22(3), 1986
• Orthodoxy, the Synagogue, and the American Jewish Community, Covenant, And Commitment; Selected Letters and Communications, Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, Nathan Helgof ed.

5. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, On Orthodoxy and Non-Orthodox Movements, Community Covenant and Commitment ch 21 (pp. 145-146)

The conclusion above is very simple. When we are faced with a problem for Jews and Jewish interests toward the world without, regarding the defense of Jewish rights in the non-Jewish world, then all groups and movements must be united. In this area, there may not be any division, because any friction in the Jewish camp may be disastrous for the entire people. In this realm we must consider the ideal of unity, as a political-historical nation, which includes everyone from Mendes-France to the "old-fashioned" Jew of Me'ah She'arim - without exception. In the crematoria, the ashes of the hasidim and pious Jews were put together with the ashes of the radicals and the atheists. And we all must fight the enemy, who does not differentiate between those who believe in God and those who reject Him.

With regard to our problem within [the Jewish community], however, - our spiritual-religious interests such as Jewish education, synagogues, councils of rabbis - whereby unity is expressed through spiritual-ideological collectivism as a Torah community, it is my opinion that Orthodoxy cannot and should not unite with such groups which deny the fundamentals of our weltanschauung. It is impossible for me to comprehend, for example, how Orthodox rabbis, who spent their best years in yeshivot and absorbed the spirit of the Oral Law and its tradition, for whom Rabbi Akiva, Maimonides, Rav Mosheh Isserles, the Gabn of Vilna, Rav Hayyim Brisker and other Jewish sages are the pillars upon which their spiritual world rests, can join with spiritual leaders for whom all this is worthless....
May 5, 1954

Mr. Philip Fleischer
27 Judith Road
Newton, Mass.

Dear Mr. Fleischer,

Please excuse the delay in answering your letter. The reason for my not replying promptly was due to a feeling of reluctance on my part to refuse to serve as an honorary sponsor of a testimonial dinner in honor of Rabbi and Mrs. Shubow and also marking the occasion of the dedication of the new Temple "Bnai Moshe." Frankly speaking, I was faced with a very unpleasant situation. On the one hand I was eager to accept your invitation. I cherish my long association with Rabbi Shubow and I consider him a dear and distinguished friend whom I hold in great esteem because of his many talents and fine qualities. It is self-evident that if the dinner were being given only in honor of Rabbi and Mrs. Shubow I would consider it a privilege to serve as one of the sponsors.

On the other hand, however, this reception, to my regret, will also serve as an occasion to celebrate the completion and dedication of the new temple. Let me say unequivocally that I do recognize the importance of this new house of worship for the Jewish population of Brighton as a means of communal organization and unification. I also appreciate the unselfish efforts on the part of the members and leaders which made such an undertaking possible. Their pride in having attained their goal is fully warranted. You in particular have manifested a strong sense of community awareness and devotion to Jewish causes for which you should be congratulated.

Yet, all this does not justify my serving as a sponsor of a dinner at which the dedication of this temple will be celebrated since the latter will, in all probability, have a mixed seating arrangement which is in my opinion not in consonance with our time-honored Law. The requirement for separate pews is almost a truism in our religious code and I have neither the right nor the desire to sanction either by word or by silence a departure from this tradition and appreciate my hesitance in accepting an honor which would be in direct opposition to my inner convictions.

Please convey my regards to Rabbi and Mrs. Shubow and wish them, on my behalf, many years of joy and happiness.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph Soloveitchick