

דו"ח מאמר יקה

A BIMONTHLY REVIEW OF TRENDS AND EVENTS IN AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE

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Edited by Sonya F. Kaufer

"MOONIES" AND OTHER CULTS: WHAT'S A NICE JEWISH KID DOING THERE?

At American airports these days, travelers often are accosted by young men and women aggressively soliciting funds for the Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, the Jesus People, the Hare Krishna, the Foundation Faith or some other strange religious group.

Most of these sects--the latest of many far-out faiths that have had their day under American religious freedom--address themselves to educated white middle-class people under 30. Some of them are quite menacing; they have been accused of destroying their followers' independent will through "brainwashing," based on isolation, regimentation and overwork, and making them break all family ties for the cause.

Jews for Jesus teach that a Jew can accept the Christian messiah while remaining ethnically Jewish. The Unification Church preaches doctrines hostile to Jews and Judaism; yet, like some of the other sects, it seems to attract Jews in disproportionate, though not large, numbers.

The Unification Church is run with an iron hand by the Rev. Moon, a Korean who came to the U.S. in 1973. The number of his followers ("Moonies") is anyone's guess; estimates vary from 2,000 to 30,000. (A membership rally in New York last June fizzled and turned into a brawl.) Through dozens of front groups, the church is involved in various inter-religious undertakings that lend it a measure of respectability.

Moon's church is rich--far richer than airport and street solicitors could make it, though many of them gross hundreds of dollars a day. It owns U.S. real estate worth millions, has bought into banks and is starting a daily newspaper in New York. Much of this wealth derives from businesses Moon owns in Korea; but some may come from the repressive South Korean government, which is suspected of using the "Moonie" operation as a cover for espionage and other illegal acts in the U.S. A Congressional investigation now threatens the Moon church's tax exemption.

Last December 19, in a full-page ad in *The New York Times* (cost: more than \$12,000), Moon offered friendship to his "Jewish brethren"--condemning anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, affirming Jewry's right to survive and recognizing Israel as a "haven." The ad was probably meant to answer an analysis by the American Jewish Committee, which had found a very different attitude in Moon's basic text, *Divine Principle*.

In that volume, the Jews are pictured with all the old myths present-day Christianity seeks to uproot: as faithless, corrupt and lacking spirituality; as Satan-inspired persecutors of Jesus; as a people from

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which God's heritage was taken away. (One formerly Jewish "Moonie," Dan Fefferman, says the church considers the Holocaust victims a Jewish "indemnity" for Jesus' death--but he insists it is not anti-Semitic!)

AJC has now challenged Moon to cleanse his teaching of anti-Jewish slurs; Christian and Jewish leaders have declared his church to be anti-democratic, anti-Jewish and in conflict with Christian teaching; parents of both faiths have organized to retrieve their children from Moon's sect and others--sometimes by questionable methods like kidnapping.

Why are Jews beyond their number involved in all this? Probably because Jews are overrepresented in the middle class, to which the sects appeal. The forces driving them are those other cultists also name: disenchantment with materialism or directionless freedom; boredom in humdrum jobs; a wish to integrate work, faith and fellowship; the security of discipline and defined goals; and a quest for direct religious experience.

Presumably, those who join the sects have not been taught, or have not taken the trouble, to look deeply enough into their own traditions for what they seek. How to make these traditions as meaningful to them as the offbeat cults is a question parents, educators and clergy, both Jewish and Christian, continue to ask themselves.

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Activism Plus Analysis: The Jewish Women's Movement Today

After four or five years of hard-hitting activism, American Jewish feminism finds its organizational structure strained but its intellectual basis deepening. The 1,500-member Jewish Feminist Organization (JFO) has gone through an internal crisis that cost it half its directors; on the other hand, publications have sharply increased in number and scope. In institutional life, the picture is similarly mixed.

Women's drive for equality in the synagogue has reached a plateau, reports Anne Lapidus Lerner in the forthcoming *American Jewish Year Book*. In the Reform and Reconstructionist branches, a few women have recently become rabbis or cantors, and 35 of 215 Reform rabbis now in training are female. But with an oversupply of young rabbis, women find it especially hard to get appointments. Lay functions remain pretty well fixed: Men are ushers, women host the Oneg Shabbat. Most religious textbooks still show women only in home-bound, sex-linked roles.

About half the Conservative congregations now call women to the Torah and over one-third count them toward a *minyan*. On the other hand, Conservative women cannot yet become rabbis, and the Conservative youth movement has not carried out equal-rights policies recommended by its parent body. As for Orthodox congregations, a few now allow women to wear the *tallit* or set up a separate *minyan*, but segregation at services is actually growing stricter, and women remain barred from Talmud studies.

In synagogue lay leadership, women have merely inched forward; it was news last June when an Orthodox *shul* in New York elected its first woman trustee, and as of 1975, only 5 per cent of Reform synagogue presidents and vice presidents were female. More has been achieved in communal and philanthropic bodies, where the absence of women from decision-making jobs was documented in surveys by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds and the American Jewish Committee in 1972-74. Women are

now better represented in middle and top management. The American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the American Section of the World Zionist Organization have female top executives.

The religious counterculture bubbles with innovation. In *havurot*--informal communities devoted to study and worship--women are wholly equal. Some universities have women-centered courses, often improvised, or women's *minyanim* that grapple with new ritual. At least four new *haggadot* have been written; new ceremonials mark the female cycle, pregnancy or the birth of daughters. ("O sister! May you grow into thousands and myriads / May God make you as our mothers Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah.")

A new Jewish feminist quarterly, *Lilith*, with over 6,000 charter subscribers, has gone through two issues. In the first, Betty Friedan, the dean of American feminism, discusses the stifling of women's potential in the Jewish middle class ("You were supposed to marry the doctor, not be one"); in the second, 10 women respond to the question, "What choices and changes have you made to live life as a Jewish feminist?"

Among new books, *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, edited by Elizabeth Koltun, is an anthology of current writings. *The Jewish Woman in America*, by Charlotte Baum et al., surveys the cultural and economic roles of women in the immigrant era, as mirrored in stories and novels. The same subject is examined in social and political terms, under the same title, by the historian Rudolf Glanz. Clearly, the status of Jewish women interests others besides members of the women's movement.

In the view of some, feminism threatens destruction to the Jewish family and community. Others note that the movement, even while challenging some of Jewry's accepted ways, seems to deepen its adherents' Jewish values. In any case, more and more women and men realize things will not be the same as they were decades--or millennia--before now.

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Something for Everybody: Jewish Periodicals in the U.S.

Like everybody else in the United States, Jews get their news mainly from the general press, radio and television; but these media are supplemented by some 180 specifically Jewish periodicals. Ranging from amateurish to brilliant, from scholarly to fiercely activist, the Jewish journals reflect a community that is vital, self-analytical, terrifyingly articulate, and infinitely varied in its views and interests.

Commentary, published monthly by the American Jewish Committee, is one of the country's most influential opinion journals, reaching beyond the Jewish community to leaders in government and elsewhere. Political and social issues are also analyzed in AJC's *Present Tense*, the Theodor Herzl Foundation's *Midstream* and the independent *Moment*.

The Orthodox, Conservative and Reform communities all publish significant journals on religious affairs. National bodies like the American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith and Hadassah issue ambitious magazines for their membership. For dissenters from conventional opinion there are *The Jewish Spectator* (an enduring gadfly), the new *Lilith* (see "Activism...", this issue), and *Davka, Response and Interchange*, edited by young men and women with strong Jewish commitments. Many universities have Jewish student papers, served by a news bureau of their own.

Publications in Hebrew are few, though the weekly *Hadoar* has just been joined by a new daily, *Israel Express*, addressed mainly to the 350,000 Israelis in the U.S. Readers of Yiddish have a wider choice, for all that the imminent demise of the language is regularly predicted. Many of the older Jewish labor, political, cultural and research organizations publish all-Yiddish papers and several large groups give Yiddish some space in their publications, as do at least three children's magazines. In New York, two Yiddish dailies--the *Forward* and the *Morning Freiheit*--survive. (*Forward* readers often see stories by the world-famous Isaac Bashevis Singer before they appear anywhere in translation.)

English dominates the 80 or more Jewish weeklies published in 32 states. Heavily dependent on local advertising, and varying in size from eight to 80 pages, they reach about a third of all Jewish families. Their front pages usually feature news of the Middle East or Soviet Jewry, often taken verbatim from Jewish Telegraphic Agency bulletins; the rest of the paper consists mostly of local news, columns on Jewish religion or history, book reviews, recipes, children's pages, stories on social and cultural events, and, of course, "personals" ("Shomer Shabbas gentleman in fifties seeks Shomer Shabbas lady; object matrimony").

New York has four such weeklies in English plus one in German (*Aufbau*), with a combined circulation in the hundreds of thousands. The most professional in format and style is *Jewish Week--American Examiner*, which doubles as the house organ for the New York campaign of the United Jewish Appeal and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. The biggest and most sensational, the *Jewish Press*, has an office in Israel and appeals to Orthodox Jews on the political right, with columns by Menachem Begin and Menachem Porush. The *Jewish Post and Opinion* is part of a nationwide chain of six; the *Jewish Journal* is a relative newcomer.

The more sophisticated American Jews tend to make light of the Jewish weeklies for failing to conduct investigative journalism or to print serious intra-Jewish criticism. Still, the weeklies continue to find a sizable audience, as do more prestigious journals, in a community with a virtually limitless appetite for the printed word.

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Briefs: Columbia University manpower expert Dr. Eli Ginzberg predicts American Jews will remain above average in socio-economic status....A Museum of American Jewish History has been opened in Philadelphia's historic district by 200-year-old Congregation Mikveh Israel, with city and Federal aid....The American Association for Jewish Education has issued a teaching guide on the American Jewish experience for use in public high schools. (This may interest Israeli educators, in view of an AJCommittee-sponsored study last year indicating a need for improved teaching of the same subject in Israeli high schools.)

This newsletter, which seeks to provide some insights into American Jewish life not generally available in the Israeli press, is designed to deepen understanding between Jews in Israel and Jews in the U.S.--for the benefit of both. The views reported are not necessarily those of the American Jewish Committee or the Jacob Blaustein Institute. Your comments and suggestions will be most welcome. Please send them either to the Publications Service at American Jewish Committee headquarters in New York or to the Committee's Jerusalem office.