

Rabbinic Responses to Nonobservance in the Modern Era

By

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Hirsch emphasized that the covenant of everlasting priesthood was granted to Phineas for demonstrating by means of his zeal that there are values that supersede unity and peace:

God has promised His true peace not to weakness, the weak acquiescence which allows events to take their course, which is bold only where there is no resistance and will advocate the good cause only when it meets with general approval and needs no defenders; He has not promised the covenant of His rule to those who proclaim "peace, peace at any price." He has promised it to those whose highest and ultimate aim is true peace in Heaven and on earth. He has promised it to the zeal of Phineas, to the very man who is assailed by all the zealous adherents of a false peace as if he were a disturber of the peace; to him who in the name of God opposes every mocking departure from the law of God, the only power before which everyone has to bow; to him whose aim is to assert for the Law of God the sole rule over the acts and consciences of men.¹⁰⁵

The compromise of other values is too high a price to pay for unity and there do exist overriding concerns in the face of which the ideal of unity must be swept aside.

SECESSION

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, German Orthodoxy became embroiled in an internal dispute which, in essence, involved a judgment of the extent to which communal unity could be preserved when it came into conflict with ideological principle. The most radical response to the emergence of Reform institutions was the policy of secession adopted and vigorously advocated by

¹⁰⁵Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, trans. L. Grunfeld (London: Soncino Press, 1959), 2:293.

Samson Raphael Hirsch.¹⁰⁶ The Jewish community in each city was organized as a *kehillah* recognized by the government and supported primarily by a tax earmarked for religious purposes, which was levied upon Jew and Christian alike. The governing board of the *kehillah* was responsible for the administration of religious, educational, social, and philanthropic institutions and organizations. The establishment of Reform institutions under the aegis of the *kehillah* evoked a reaction from Hirsch demanding that the Orthodox withdraw from the *kehillah* and establish their own independent institutions. Hirsch contended that membership in the communal organization constituted a form of endorsement or, *de minimis*, conferred legitimacy upon the ideological positions espoused by the institutions sponsored by the *kehillah*. Accordingly, Hirsch asserted that *halakhah* forbids such endorsement or conferral of legitimacy and hence ruled that formal association with any organization that denies the fundamental principles of Judaism is forbidden. It must be noted that in formulating this position Hirsch emphasized that his policy demanded, not disassociation from individuals, but secession from a communal system that he viewed as an institutionalized expression of heresy.¹⁰⁷

However, as a practical matter, Hirsch was unable to act on his

¹⁰⁶See the valuable discussion in Liberles, *Religious Conflict*, 165–226. It is commonly assumed that separation as a policy of the Orthodox community began in the 1870s with Hirsch. In fact, the idea of autonomous religious communities each practicing Judaism in accordance with its own dictates dates from an earlier period and was viewed as a *desideratum* by exponents of Reform. Thus in the 1830s Abraham Geiger maintained that the only manner in which the Reform movement could move forward at a suitable pace was by obtaining permission to form autonomous religious organizations apart from the general community. See Abraham Geiger, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, vol. 5 (Berlin, 1878), 54–55; and Wiener, *Abraham Geiger*, 99–100.

¹⁰⁷*Offener Brief an Sr. Ehrwürden Herrn Distrikus-Rabbiner S. B. Bamberger in Würzburg* (Frankfurt am Main: I. Kaufmann, 1877), 6ff. This letter was included in *Gesammelte Schriften von Rabb. Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Frankfurt am Main: I. Kaufmann, 1908), 4:316–43. An English

convictions immediately. Under German law, registration and membership in the local *kehillah* was automatic and a Jew could renounce membership only upon conversion to Christianity or upon a declaration that he was *kofessionslos* (without religion), a declaration that was widely regarded as tantamount to a renunciation of Judaism. Hirsch correctly considered this law to be an interference with the fundamental principle of freedom of religious conscience. As long as the law remained in effect the members of Hirsch's community had no choice but to retain their compulsory membership in the umbrella *kehillah* even after forming the autonomous *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft*.

In 1873 the Prussian Parliament promulgated a law that enabled Christians of different denominations to disassociate themselves from the established church and to form their own religious communities. For Hirsch, passage of this law was the harbinger of a new era and signalled the possibility of establishing an independent and proud community that would be able to tap additional sources of revenue to be utilized in achieving enhanced spiritual and communal accomplishments.¹⁰⁸ To Hirsch, secession was a logical step

translation of this document as well as of Bamberger's response and Hirsch's counterreply may be found in Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Collected Writings*, vol. 6, *Jewish Communal Life and Independent Orthodoxy* (New York and Jerusalem: Philipp Feldheim, 1990), 198-317.

¹⁰⁸In the implementation of a policy such as secession, the sociological realities are often more dispositive than the theoretical or philosophical arguments. Liberles (*Religious Conflict*) quite correctly underscores the fact that secession was not "the cause of the strengthening of Orthodoxy in Germany. . . . Rather it was an expression of that strength." He concludes:

All Orthodox leaders including Bamberger welcomed the law of separation, but only Hirsch approached it from a perspective of strength. For the others it was a guarantee of minority rights; for Hirsch it represented the right to be fully independent; . . . for Hirsch, emancipation was an opportunity. In that he was unique, as early as 1836 and as late as 1877. [pp. 225ff.]

since he was sincerely convinced that "within none of the Christian churches is there a deeper cleavage than between Reform Judaism . . . and Orthodox traditional Judaism."¹⁰⁹ Hirsch immediately began to lobby for a similar right to be granted to Jewish citizens. With the assistance of an influential statesman, Eduard Lasker, Hirsch finally succeeded in this endeavor. On July 28, 1876, the Prussian Parliament passed the Law of Secession granting Jews the right to withdraw from the organized community without renouncing Judaism and the concomitant right to form independent Jewish communities.

Following promulgation of the Law of Secession, Hirsch urged his congregants to secede from the established Jewish community of Frankfurt since it was now legally permissible for them to belong to the Orthodox community exclusively. Some congregants followed Hirsch's directive; however, a large number elected to remain within the general *kehillah* as well. To a large extent it was the relative newcomers to Frankfurt who followed Hirsch unconditionally while members of many of the older Frankfurt families who had a deep attachment to the historic *kehillah* and its institutions chose to maintain dual membership. Many of the latter were particularly loath to surrender their burial rights in the communal cemetery in which their forebears were interred.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹*Denkschrift über die Judenfrage in dem Gesetz betreffend den Austritt aus der Kirche* (Berlin, 1873), 6. The essay was published anonymously but later included in Hirsch's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt, 1908), 250-65.

¹¹⁰See Liberles, *Religious Conflict*, 215-17. Of interest are analyses and reminiscences of the events in Frankfurt contained in *Historia Judaica* 10:2 (October 1948). In three articles—[Saemy Japhet], "The Secession of the Frankfurt Community under Samson Raphael Hirsch" (100-22); Isaac Heinemann, "Supplementary Remarks on the Secession from the Frankfurt Community under Samson Raphael Hirsch" (123-34); and Jacob Rosenheim, "Historical Significance of the Struggle for Secession from the Frankfurt Jewish Community" (135-46)—the developments in Frankfurt are discussed by natives of the city who were intimately involved in its

A very tense situation developed within the Frankfurt community, a situation that became exacerbated when the renowned Rabbi S. B. Bamberger of Würzburg issued a ruling supporting the decision of those who chose to remain within the general *kehillah*.¹¹¹ Much of the material contained in Bamberger's rebuttal

communal affairs. All three accounts provide intriguing background data but are highly subjective. An insight into Hirsch's thinking on secession and into the distinctions in approach between Hirsch and Hildesheimer may be obtained from the exchange of correspondence in Ezriel Hildesheimer, "Mi-tokh Hiluf ha-Mikhtavim beyn Maran R. Ezriel Hildesheimer Zatzal u-beyn Maran R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch Zatzal u-Mekoravav," in *Yad Sha'ul: Sefer Zikaron al shem ha-Rav Dr. Shaul Weingort*, ed. J. J. Weinberg and P. Biberfeld (Tel Aviv, 1952), 233-51.

¹¹¹Rabbi S. B. Bamberger, *Offene Antwort auf den an ihn gerichteten offenen Brief des Herrn S. R. Hirsch* (Würzburg: I. Frank'schen Buchhandlung, 1877). The sole rabbinic personality of stature to oppose Hirsch was Bamberger. Citation of Ettlinger's view by R. Zevi Yehudah Kook as recorded in *Hatzofeh*, December 29, 1972, is an obvious error of fact since at the time of the dispute between Hirsch and Bamberger over secession, Ettlinger was no longer alive. The rejoinder of David Henshke, "Mahloket le-Shem Shamayim," *Ha-Maayan* 13:4 (1973): 41-51, is very much to the point. Henshke also cites a similar error in Judah Leib Maimon, *Ha-Raiyah* (Jerusalem, Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1965), 123.

In a communication to Bamberger urging the latter to reverse his ruling regarding the Frankfurt community, Maharam Schick (*Teshuvot Maraham Shik, Orah Hayyim*, no. 306) conceded that Hirsch had overstated the case in condemning as sinners those who did not join the secessionists since there were many devout individuals who hesitated to take that step for reasons that were entirely sociological in nature. Maharam Schick expressed his personal view, confirmed by his own experience, that, quite apart from the halakhic considerations involved in the question of secession, continued association with the nonobservant in a common *kehillah* structure would, in the course of time, prove deleterious. Furthermore, he stated that he was the recipient of a "tradition" handed down by Hatam Sofer that one should "distance oneself as much as possible from them and their cohorts and not be in one association with them."

of Hirsch's position, although intriguing and of weighty halakhic import, is a *non sequitur*. The only salient point is a fundamental and empirical disagreement with regard to whether continued participation in the *kehillah* did, or did not, constitute endorsement and legitimization of the views and policies espoused by institutions supported by the *kehillah*. Bamberger contended that the nature of the association with the Frankfurt *kehillah* was such that continued membership could not be construed as legitimization of heresy.

However, Bamberger was prepared to endorse retention of membership in the *kehillah* only in circumstances in which the Orthodox would be granted total autonomy in conducting the affairs of their own synagogues and religious organizations. As late as February 1877 he endorsed Hirsch's call for secession in Frankfurt¹¹² and reversed his position only when such autonomy was guaranteed by the *kehillah*. With regard to other communities in which the fundamental demands of the Orthodox were not granted, Bamberger ruled unequivocally that secession was not merely permissible but mandatory. In a responsum concerning the question of secession, Bamberger's son Simchah notes explicitly that only when the specified conditions were met did his father "agree that there is no obligation to separate from the Reform congregation in accordance with his reasoning. However, when these considerations are absent, his opinion has been recorded three and four times, namely, in the matter of Karlsruhe, Vienna, Wiesbaden and Frankfurt, that it is incumbent upon the law-abiding to separate themselves from the Reform congregation."¹¹³

Later, after concessions had been granted to the Orthodox community in Frankfurt assuring them of autonomy in matters of

¹¹²Bamberger, *Offene Antwort*, 14.

¹¹³*Teshuvot Zekher Simchah*, no. 230. Republished in Rabbi S. B. Bamberger, *Teshuvot Yad ha-Levi*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1972). For a fuller analysis of Bamberger's position as well as of other considerations reflected in both sides of the dispute, see my "The Frankfurt Secession Controversy," *Jewish Action* 52:1 (Winter 1991-92): 22-27, 51-52.

religious practice, Bamberger ruled that *Austritt* (secession) was not mandatory in that community under the then prevailing circumstances. However, he did not view *Austritt* to be either forbidden or repugnant. He simply recognized the cogency of the familial, social, and emotional motives for remaining within the *kehillah*. While he fully recognized that remaining in the *kehillah* would minimize divisiveness within the community and provide opportunities for positive influence over others, he did not raise continued association to the level of an ideological imperative. Not so the leaders of the Frankfurt *kehillah*. For them secession was a breach of the unity of the community and unity was not only a cardinal principle but one with regard to which there could be no disagreement. Although tolerant of diverse theological positions with regard to all fundamentals of Jewish faith and practice, they regarded unity as the one dogma to which all must subscribe: "There will be no end to sectarianism if every tiny faction which does not agree with the forms recognized by the majority has the right, on that account, to withdraw from the whole."¹¹⁴ Later, they wrote, "The religion of the majority alone, according to the principles of Judaism, is the true and legitimate religion."¹¹⁵

From that point on, the German Orthodox community was sharply divided. Following Hirsch's policy of *Trennungsorthodoxie* (separatist Orthodoxy) Jewish communities in several cities, notably those of Berlin, Wiesbaden, Darmstadt, and Mainz, established separatist Orthodox congregations. On the other hand, a large segment of Orthodoxy, whose position was considerably strengthened by Bamberger's sanction, chose to administer their own Orthodox institutions under the auspices of the overall community. Proponents of the latter policy, which came to be known as *Gemeindeorthodoxie* (communal Orthodoxy), established such com-

¹¹⁴From a memorandum of the Frankfurt *kehillah* board to the city Senate in 1854, cited by Liberles, *Religious Conflict*, 179.

¹¹⁵From a memorandum of the Frankfurt *kehillah* board to the city Senate in 1858, *ibid.*

munal arrangements in many towns, notably in Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Breslau.¹¹⁶ Frequently, the very threat of secession appears to have had a significant effect in prompting the *kehillah* to accommodate the concerns of the Orthodox.¹¹⁷ Cer-

¹¹⁶Despite the wealth of analytic comment in Noah Rosenbloom's *Tradition in an Age of Reform: The Religious Philosophy of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976), that work is marred by a partisanship that moves the author to interpret objective data in a manner that is not compelling. In particular, Rosenbloom's account of the controversy over secession is flawed. Rosenbloom is certainly entitled to regard secession as having been an unwise policy. But labeling Hirsch's action as "heedlessness" (p. 117) is hardly an appropriate designation if Hirsch believed he was "heeding" a higher imperative. The portrayal of those in other communities who followed Hirsch's secessionist policy as "malcontents" is also entirely unsupported and without basis in fact. Rosenbloom writes, "As expected, Hirsch's action was emulated by malcontents in other communities in Germany, such as Baden, Karlsruhe, Darmstadt, Wiesbaden, Giessen, Cologne, Bingen and Strassburg" (p. 119). The implication that those who—correctly or misguidedly—followed this policy were misanthropic, dyspeptic individuals, unhappy because of petty concerns or jealousies, can only reflect an unscholarly bias.

¹¹⁷Although, as noted above (n. 108), Liberles maintains that the Law of Secession was a manifestation of the strength of the Orthodox, its enactment certainly served to enhance that strength (cf. Liberles, 211). While the situation in Austria was not identical to that in Germany, the threat of *Austritt* served to curb radical Reform tendencies in that country as well. The Austrian government rejected a petition presented by the Orthodox members of the *Schiffschul* in 1872 for permission to secede and form a separate community. Nevertheless, the possibility that the Orthodox might eventually obtain such permission and act upon it influenced Vienna's Jewish communal leaders to desist from introducing ideological reforms in the communal synagogues. See Marsha L. Rozenblit, "The Struggle Over Religious Reform in Nineteenth-Century Vienna," *AJS Review* 14:2 (Fall 1989): 209–21. Significantly, Rozenblit demonstrates that the fear of loss of tax revenue was an important factor in the ultimate decision (p. 219).

tainly this was the case in Frankfurt itself where the various concessions granted the Orthodox within the *kehillah* were surely the result of the desire to limit the number who seceded. This rift within Orthodoxy did not heal with time and the two camps remained separate and distinct until the Holocaust decimated German Jewry.

Much has been written regarding the respective merits and failings of both approaches. The separatists have been taken to task for engendering a tragic waste of resources and for promoting divisiveness and disharmony. Hirsch's defenders, on the other hand, have maintained that were it not for the Law of Secession and the viable option of establishing autonomous Orthodox communities even *Gemeindeorthodoxie* would have been unable to wrest any concession from the general communities which were dominated by Reform elements. Very much to the point are the remarks of the Lithuanian rabbinic authority Rabbi Hayyim Ozer Grodzinski. R. Grodzinski hesitated to offer a definitive opinion with regard to what he viewed as a dispute whose resolution was contingent upon familiarity with the details of the local situation and subsequent determination of the wisest course of action under the circumstances, but nevertheless declared that in his opinion Hirsch's action was necessary for the preservation of Orthodoxy:

There is no doubt that the sage and saint Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, of blessed memory . . . did a great thing in founding the admirable and outstanding *Religionsgesellschaft* which became an exemplary Jewish community. Had the God-fearing not separated themselves by means of a separate *kehillah*, due to their minority status they would have become submerged within the general community—[a development] which did not occur when they separated and developed on their own. Then even the general community was forced to improve itself and to conduct the general institutions in a sacred manner.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸Ahi'ezer: Kovetz Iggerot, 1:243.

Whatever arguments may be presented in favor, or in criticism, of the wisdom and value of Hirsch's policy, several important points must be emphasized in the interests of historical accuracy. Hirsch's argument against enforced membership in, and taxation on behalf of, an overall religious superstructure was based upon considerations of freedom of conscience and infringement of basic civil liberties. Freedom of religion, argued Hirsch, entails not only freedom to desist from a form of worship which runs counter to an individual's convictions, but also freedom to refrain from actively supporting such forms of worship and the propagation of theological tenets offensive to a person's convictions. Thus, Hirsch claimed that the legal right of secession was based upon the fundamental principle of freedom of religious conscience which includes an individual's right to form his own independent community.

It is a distortion of fact to contend that Hirsch's practical policy of separation from the larger Jewish community was indicative of a lack of concern for individuals who did not accept the teachings of traditional Judaism.¹¹⁹ Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters*, published in 1836, and a significant portion of his subsequent writings were addressed precisely to the questing and the nonobservant. Ultimately, the policy of separatism did in fact lead to an attitude of introversion and to an unfortunate erosion of interest in the well-being and welfare of the wider community. However, Hirsch himself cannot be faulted on that account. Quite to the contrary, Hirsch castigated those whose concern was limited solely to the religiously observant. Most revealing is Hirsch's discussion of the scriptural narrative of Abraham's quest for ten righteous men within the city of Sodom. He notes:

The idea of a righteous man in the midst of Sodomite depravity which Abraham visualizes, for whose sake the city might be saved, is not one who keeps to his own four walls, in haughty pride of his superiority gives up the masses and just looks on at their ruinous moral lapses, who thinks he has done

¹¹⁹See the discussion in David Henshke, *Ha-Maayan* 13:4 (1973): 44-47.

quite enough if he saves himself and at most his own household. Yea, such a one Abraham would not class as righteous. He would not consider that he had at all fulfilled the duty which lies on every good man in bad surroundings. The ruin of the masses whom he had long given up would leave such a man cold. He might even possibly feel a certain smug satisfaction in it. That is not Abraham's "righteous man" out of consideration for whom the salvation of the city should be effected. His righteous man is to be found "in the midst of the city" and in lively connection with everything and everybody. He never leaves off admonishing, teaching, warning, bettering wherever and however he can. He takes everybody and everything to heart; he never despairs, he is never tired of trying, however distant the hopes of success may be. These are the righteous ones whom he presumes must be "in the midst of the city" who would feel grief and pain at the death of each individual of these thousands. . . .¹²⁰

Moreover, in formulating his position, Hirsch emphasized that his policy demanded, not disassociation from individuals, but secession from a communal system that he viewed as an institutionalized expression of heresy. In effect, Hirsch argued that the admonition "Do not associate with the wicked, even for purposes of Torah" (*Avot de Rabi Natan* 9:4) is not applicable to the heretics of the modern era and ruled that heretics and *apikorsim* such as those with whom the Sages forbade all form of social contact no longer exist in our time. The religious views of the nonobservant of modern times have been shaped by parents, educational institutions, and a climate of opinion over which they have no control. They are the products of their culture and are not to be held responsible for what they are.¹²¹ From a halakhic perspective they are to be considered in a category identical to those *apikorsim* and Karaites of whom Maimonides declared in *Hilkhot Mamrim*:

¹²⁰Commentary on Genesis 18:24, English translation by L. Levi (London, 1959), 325-26.

¹²¹Cited by Hirsch, *Collected Works*, 6:207.

However, the children and grandchildren of these errants, whose parents have misled them, those who have been born among the Karaites who have reared them in their views, are like a child who has been taken captive among them, has been reared by them, and is not alacritous in seizing the paths of the commandments, whose status is comparable to that of an individual who is coerced; and even though he later learns that he is a Jew and becomes acquainted with Jews and their religion, he is nevertheless to be regarded as a person who is coerced for he was reared in their erroneous ways. Thus it is those of whom we have spoken who adhere to the practices of their Karaite parents who have erred. Therefore it is proper to cause them to return in repentance and to draw them nigh with words of peace until they return to the strength-giving Torah. [3:3]

Perhaps the best exposition of the arguments both for and against secession may be found in the previously cited letter of R. Hayyim Ozer Grodzinski. R. Grodzinski recognized the cogency of both positions as well as the sincere positive intentions of the protagonists. He wrote:

Regarding the question of association with sinners, in the opinion of the separatists they see in this a great danger to Judaism that [people] will learn from their actions and by their proximity they may influence the future generation in a negative manner. It is axiomatic that a matter that concerns the foundations of Judaism involves a grave proscription. However, in the opinion of the accommodationists, they see in this matter a great *mitzvah*, not to estrange a large portion of the Jewish people and bring them merit, and they see no loss in this for the faithful who are separated with regard to religious needs. And, thus, this does not involve a question regarding which one says, and do you tell an individual, sin in order that you bring merit to your friend? For, in the opinion of the accommodationists, this does not entail any sin or

transgression, rather, to the contrary, it is a *mitzvah* to bring merit to the many. Accordingly, what the separationists see as a great transgression in uniting, in this, the accommodationists see a *mitzvah*. The doubt, according to this, is in the very act itself, whether it is a *mitzvah* or a transgression.¹²²

What was apparent to R. Hayyim Ozer Grodzinski, writing in the early part of the twentieth century, has become even more evident as the events of recent history have vindicated the arguments of both proponents and opponents of secession.¹²³

¹²²*Ahi'ezer: Kovetz Iggerot* 1:243-44.

¹²³Hirsch was not moved to formulate the policy of *Austritt* in the 1870s because of disinterest in the welfare of the nonobservant. His teachings and writings were addressed to that constituency and his concern for them was very real. However, if there is a shortcoming to be ascribed to the remarkable *kehillah* in New York City that has inherited the traditions of Frankfurt am Main, it is an insularity and isolationism, which is not the cause, but the product, of *Austritt*. Lack of contact over a period of years is bound to decrease a sense of concern and ongoing interest. With the passage of decades the *kehillah* has increasingly focused in an inward direction and has had little contact with individuals of different religious outlook and orientation. The result has been a sad loss for the wider Orthodox community. The standards, integrity, cohesiveness, and faith of the *kehillah* have produced outstanding educational and communal institutions greatly benefiting both residents of its environs and the entire city. But the general Orthodox community in the United States, not to speak of those beyond the pale of Orthodoxy, has not had the benefit of its guidance or leadership.

On the other hand, the ability of the *kehillah* to recreate itself on these shores after dislocation and war, despite relatively meager financial resources during its early years, and to develop into a community that is a model *kehillah*, stands as a tribute to the staunch advocates of *Torah im derekh eretz* among its adherents and to their total commitment to its religious ideals. It is a singular community in which the word of *Rav* remains unquestioned law, *kevod ha-rabbanut* is a meaningful phrase, and the label of the community, *K'hal Adas Jeschurun*, stands for a level of religious probity and reliability that is acknowledged by the entire spectrum of Orthodox Jewry.

Nevertheless, since as R. Hayyim Ozer Grodzinski noted, the decision to secede from the wider community is to be reached on the basis of a variety of considerations that depend on the needs and problems of the particular locale, the philosophy and rhetoric of secession of the 1870s may be sorely out of place in the 1990s. Of interest in this regard is a statement of a number of rabbis of the London Orthodox community issued in 1979 in opposition to joint communal programs to be undertaken under the auspices of Orthodox Jews in association with Jews in Liberal-Reform congregations. Noteworthy is not so much the decision itself, which may or may not be compelled by halakhic and/or socio-religious considerations, but the language in which it is couched. In a publication addressed to the broader general community, the Orthodox rabbis state: "Anyone who imagines that these dissenters can be brought back into the fold by consorting with them is deluding himself and misleading others. Indeed, such conduct will repel the Orthodox and those awaiting proper spiritual guidance."¹²⁴

This is not a halakhic pronouncement but a descriptive statement of fact. Is this a statement that had validity in the 1980s? Will it be valid for the 1990s?

SELF-CRITICISM

Rare, but not entirely absent, in rabbinical writings of this period is the expression of a sense of responsibility bordering on guilt on the part of the rabbinic leaders themselves for the failings of the generation. In the earliest responsa focusing on Reform collected and published in *Eleh Divrei ha-Berit*, R. Eliezer of Triesch turned to his colleagues and admonished that the movement for reform in religious worship served as a sign that the Orthodox were indeed found wanting in precisely that aspect of religious life. If there were inadequacies in ritual and communal life it was rabbinic leaders

¹²⁴The Jewish Chronicle (London), April 20, 1979, 21.