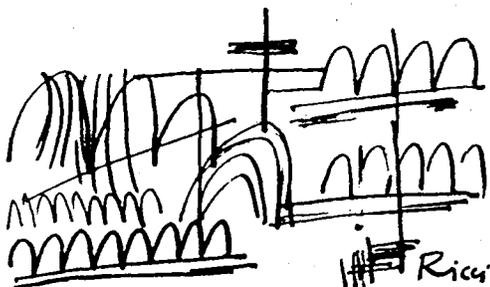


HOLY DAYS IN HABANA

plausible, reason for believing that it would somehow resolve the problem of maintaining a world order in which American interests would be preserved. Why should the example we set at home affect Chinese aspirations in Asia? Why should the example we set at home affect the prospects of nuclear proliferation? How would a benign example on our part resolve the conflict between the Arab states and Israel? There is something touching in the belief for which history, including our own, provides little basis, that we can do by example what we cannot do by precept."

One can agree in part with those critics who attack the "globalist" and Messianic aspects of postwar American foreign policy, even if one thinks that they often mistake rhetoric for action. But reflection suggests that their understandable fear of nuclear war and their fury over America's Vietnam involvement vitiates both their analysis and their prescription of neo-isolationism. It is past time for "The End of Either/Or." America has no choice between power and development politics abroad, and it has no choice between concentrating primarily on domestic or foreign policy. The world environment will continue to be turbulent for the remainder of this century. Carleton concludes his discussion of the question cited above, "Were Americans Prepared for World Leadership?" with the following questions: "Would the Americans see the world crisis through? Would they dare to do otherwise? How successful would their leadership be?" He is, like all other students of American foreign policy, critical of various aspects of this nation's effort over the last quarter of a century. But he concludes his book by predicting "... the American Presence (in world affairs) would likely increase rather than diminish during the closing decades of the twentieth century." It remains to be seen, of course. But rational analysis suggests that if the emotional backlash to Vietnam and legitimate concern with pressing domestic problems combine to produce a significant decline in America's presence, neither this country's "primary" nor "secondary" interests would be served. Hopefully, the Nixon Administration and public opinion will not be heavily influenced by the arguments of the neo-isolationists.



Few accounts of the post-revolutionary religious situation in Cuba have included the state of the much-diminished Jewish community on the island. Last fall, Rabbi Everett Gendler, formerly of the Jewish Center in Princeton and who has served congregations in Latin America, spent the "Holy Days in Habana." A record of his trip, which first appeared in the Winter issue of Conservative Judaism, is reprinted in part below.

"Tell me, Rabbi: before, when there was crime, corruption, prostitution, killings, our Jews seemed content to be here; now that there is a decent government which is doing something for *all* the people, most of our Jews leave. Is that right, Rabbi? Is that what our religion teaches?"

I had been in Cuba only four days when this question was asked me, just after services the second morning of Rosh Hashanah, by the *baal tefilah* of the Sephardic congregation in the Vedado section of Habana, a gentle-voiced man whose *kavanah* had impressed me during the services and whose question now sharply challenged me. Its challenge was due partly to the man who posed it, obviously a dedicated and involved Jew, and partly to what I had already seen and felt in and around Habana: a vitality of spirit, a dedication to the welfare and education of youth, and a cooperation and sharing which I had felt elsewhere only in Israel.

The question was, on reflection, somewhat surprising as well. Cuba, after all, purports to be a Communist experiment, and we all associate communism with an anti-religious orientation which is sometimes, as in the case of the Soviet Union, anti-Jewish as well. I had heard that Cuba was different, as indeed it turned out to be, but at that point I had not yet fully grasped to what an extent it is its own independent social experiment, with special features and particular qualities not found elsewhere. As I was quickly to discover, however, these directly affect the Jewish situation and make of it also something quite unusual.

There are, for example, still functioning in Habana, despite the departure of nearly 9,000 of its pre-revolutionary 10,000 Jews, the five congregations which existed in 1958; three in Vedado, a coastal section of Habana with some luxury hotels, quite a few high-rise apartments and many fine homes; and two in Old Habana, the port and commercial section of the city

with narrow streets and a closed-in, old-Spanish atmosphere. I had the opportunity to visit and participate in the services of each of these congregations during the High Holy Days. . . .

Speaking with many Jews of varying outlooks—some sympathetic to the revolution, some neutral, some hostile—I found unanimous agreement on one point: the revolutionary government of Cuba has been beyond criticism in its respect for and consideration of Jewish religious needs. In most cases, of course, the government has been neither interested nor involved, but in such matters as cemeteries, religious personnel, or ceremonial articles from abroad, some coordination has been necessary. How has this been handled?

From the president of the Patronato [an Ashkenazic synagogue], from the journalist who heads the Zionist youth group, from a Presbyterian minister, from a Quaker, and from others as well, I heard the name of "Dr. Carneado" spoken with considerable respect and sympathy. And so one morning I met with Dr. José F. Carneado, head of the Committee of Revolutionary Orientation and member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, the 126-man body which is ultimately responsible for the governing of Cuba today. As he describes it, Dr. Carneado, by training an attorney and journalist, inherited his present voluntary religious "post" quite by accident. "Questions would come up about some religious matter or other, and there being no one really to turn to, sometimes they were referred to me. It happens that I knew people in the various religious communities, and after I had discussed particular questions with them the problems seemed to be resolved each time rather happily. Anyhow, I am now the religious 'expert' on the Central Committee."

Before my arrival I had heard that Cuban society was an informal and in many ways a surprising experiment: that relations with the Vatican were very good; that full and proper diplomatic relations with Israel were maintained; that religious groups, though challenged by elements in the atmosphere, had great freedom; and that Cuba was far different in these respects from the Soviet Union with its coercive expression of communism. After meeting Dr. Carneado, whose appreciation of Jewish culture extended even to the place of schmaltz herring in folk gatherings, I could well understand why, despite the points of tension and challenge, involved members of functioning religious communities in Cuba today feel no overt hostility from the revolutionary government.

After a two-hour conversation with another member of the Central Committee, I had the impression that this flexibility and non-doctrinaire approach to

many issues was not simply an accident connected with the personality of Dr. Carneado, important as that may be. For in the case of this member as well I was struck by the attempt of the Central Committee to temper its goals by contact with people in Cuba who were not members of the Committee and not members of the Communist Party, and to check its procedures frequently by field studies and on-the-spot inquiries. Whether this estimable pragmatism is sufficiently widespread is a question asked by some Cubans, and I myself fear that a deteriorating world political situation is likely to harden some of these present Cuban flexibilities. Nonetheless, it was refreshing to encounter such open attitudes toward domestic and foreign affairs among responsible officials.

Despite all this, of course, the great majority of Jews have left Cuba, and among those remaining there are still some who hope to leave. Why is this? The reasons seem fairly obvious. Radical changes in the economic system adversely affected many Jews in trade, commerce, and certain branches of manufacturing. Others, who came during the interval between W.W. I and W.W. II with the intention of joining relatives in the United States when quotas would permit, remained because of economic opportunities in Cuba; when these opportunities were diminished, the original intention of joining other members of the family reasserted itself. Some found the new form of government excessively arbitrary and some of its development policies mistaken or foolish; others wanted no part of anything designated "Communist." Some missed the ties with the United States which had been the mainstay of their existence, and others, especially among the elderly, now found conditions too difficult because of shortages and the unavailability of familiar items. All of these reasons are comprehensible, and despite monthly government compensations which many Jews receive for nationalized businesses or industries, it is hardly appropriate for one who enjoys all the comforts and advantages of life in the United States to question those who have left or who want to leave Cuba. To us their departure is understandable enough.

To rest content with this level of understanding, however, may be to render ourselves a disservice, for the question with which this report began is not entirely answered by the above reasons, at least not religiously. For the question, expanded later in fuller conversation, was asked by a man who has experienced economic and personal hardships as a result of the revolutionary changes, and it is both penetrating and significant.

The questioner, born in Turkey in 1908, lived in

Cuba from 1923 to 1928. After spending 1928 to 1937 in the United States, he returned to Cuba and opened a jewelry shop. When business deteriorated, after the revolution, he had to make a choice: do something else, or leave Cuba. He decided to remain, found a job teaching English at a public school, and now lives with his wife in very modest circumstances, commuting an hour-and-a-half each day via two buses to and from his teaching post. He is a serious Jew, an active participant in Jewish communal life, and a dedicated human being. His composite question is spelled out below.

"Rabbi, we used to have plenty to eat, whatever we wanted, and little children went hungry all over Cuba, just like they do today all over Latin America. We had all we wanted, my wife didn't have to work, she didn't have to stand in line, we didn't have rationing but the poor went hungry. Today we don't have what we used to, but we have enough. Tell me, Rabbi, isn't that what our religion teaches?" . . .

"Rabbi, you see these shoes? They aren't the quality of the shoes I used to have, but they are shoes. You know, Rabbi, I used to wear good shoes and on the streets of Habana I saw plenty of people with no shoes. Tell me, Rabbi, have you seen anyone here in Habana or anywhere in the country now without shoes? No, everyone has shoes now. Which is better, Rabbi, according to our religion, then or now?" . . .

"Rabbi, little girls used to walk the streets of Habana as prostitutes, and teen agers sold themselves to Americans for food and we merchants made money, not from prostitutes, God forbid, but from the system, from the atmosphere. Today there are no prostitutes, no vice, no Americans, no business. Which is better, Rabbi?" . . .

"Rabbi, people talk about dictatorship now. Do you know what it was like then? Do you know how many people the government shot? How many it arrested? But we were comfortable, we were well off, so we didn't notice. Now there are things I don't entirely agree with, but this government is more fair than you can imagine. And look what it does, Rabbi, with the little we have: look at the schools, the full-scholarship students, the child-care centers. Look at the chances for the poor to study, look at the chances for adults to study, look at everyone studying. It's a big *heder*, Rabbi; doesn't our religion like that?" . . .

"Rabbi, you don't know how ignorant and sick the *campesino* (rural peasant) used to be. He couldn't read, he couldn't write, he didn't have much work, he couldn't afford a doctor. Look at him today. He can read. Who taught him? Youth from the city who went to the country, to remote areas by horse or mule, and lived there three or four or six months. Do you know

what that did for the youth? And for the *campesinos*? There are clinics in the countryside now, and doctors, and *campesinos* live like people. *Tzelem elohim*, Rabbi? Do you know what that used to mean? People were so backward, so ignorant, so like animals, who could use the term? And now? They are like human beings. Doesn't our religion believe in that, Rabbi?" . . .

"Rabbi, we say we believe all men are brothers, but we don't live that way. I win, you lose; I profit, you suffer. That's how we used to live here, and when the revolution first happened, I thought communism was something evil, a curse word. But slowly I've changed my mind, and I see that here at least it means we help one another, we gain or we lose together, we eat or we go hungry together. Is that bad, Rabbi? Is that evil? Isn't that what our religion teaches?" . . .

"Rabbi, what does it mean to be a Jew? Does it mean only to live in a country to make money? Does it mean to leave when we're no longer privileged? Does it mean only to take, or to give only for profit? Should we be comfortable when others aren't? Don't misunderstand me, Rabbi, we weren't the worst before; compared with some we were nothing. But tell me, Rabbi, shouldn't we have stayed? When you tried to take away all our technicians, all our doctors, all our dentists, all our educated people, shouldn't we Jews have stayed? Who needed us, you wealthy Americans or the poor Cubans? Who, Rabbi? Was it right? Is that what it means to be a Jew today? Tell me, Rabbi." . . .

What should I have answered? And how should I have responded to several other Jews who, albeit less passionately, asked similar questions, and who related the biblical tradition to the Cuban experiment in rather startling—and, I must admit, somewhat convincing—fashion?

Numerically, the Cuban Jewish community is much diminished, and it will likely be reduced yet further by continuing emigration. Institutionally, despite basic governmental respect and consideration, it faces powerful challenges from the whole spirit of Cuban life today, and like other religious communities both there and elsewhere it must develop new relevance for society if it is to survive as a vital part of life. Yet personally, for a small number of deeply dedicated and intensely aware Jews, Cuba represents, at this period of its history, a vivid re-enactment of the desert period of our own people, a period of radical change, severe trial, and the formation of a new generation of human beings. Strange as such notions may be to our established ways of thinking, and

despite some misgivings which I have about certain elements of the Cuban experiment, it seems to me, on reflection, that this seemingly perverse judgment of this tiny minority of Jews may yet prove more correct than the prevailing negative assessments of the Cuban experiment.

Why do I say this? Because nowhere in the Western Hemisphere have I seen a society in which there is such morale, such social dedication, such feelings of fellowship, such concern for children and young people. Nowhere have I seen in practice such a radical interpretation of human brotherhood expressed in the attempt at economic equality and sharing (not yet fully achieved) which converts from theory to fact the notion of our human interdependence. Nowhere outside of Israel have I seen such social concentration on education or such respect for teachers and learning, and nowhere else have I seen such attention and resources focused on the previously poorest and least esteemed.

Please do not misunderstand. It is not utopia; it is not the ideal society; it has harsh, non-libertarian features and many problems. Life is severe at the moment: shortages, rationing, long hours of hard work, due partly to the U. S. blockade (the resultant suffering and deprivation will, I think, one day be a source of shame to all of us) and partly to some apparent errors in development schemes and social planning. There are serious questions to be raised as well about various aspects of the society, among them the basic one of whether such a total transformation can avoid rigid totalitarianism.

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Yet whatever the answers may be, and whatever the outcome of the Cuban experiment, this much at least seems clear to me: it is appropriate and important that there be further contact between members of the Cuban Jewish community and members of the United States Jewish community.

For Cuban Jews it would represent a continuation of the experience of fellowship with the largest and nearest Jewish community, a fellowship which would do much to reduce their painful sense of isolation. ("You are the first rabbi from the United States to visit us in eight years; why did you wait so long?")

For us, in addition to the fulfillment of a responsibility, it would be a moving and challenging introduction to a society at once dynamic, disturbing, and inspiring: an introduction which could contribute greatly both to our understanding of the plight of other developing nations and to a broadened understanding of the meaning of our own religious tradition in the world today.

The Author Replies

Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir: Professor Hans J. Morgenthau has written in the March issue of *worldview* to dispute a position I attributed to him in "Old Year Out, New Year In" (January). He comments: "I have long since been inured to misrepresentations of my point of view, but this account is so utterly and obviously false that I must set the record straight. From the moment I first warned against our involvement in Vietnam . . . I have consistently taken the position which Mr. Stillman says I have not taken, i.e., that the Vietnam war is militarily unwinnable, politically aimless, and morally dubious and that the issues at stake do not bear on the vital interest of the United States."

I have no wish to perpetuate a controversy since he has done much good work, but Prof. Morgenthau cites three of his articles (Asia: The American Algeria, July, 1961; Vietnam: Another Korea, May, 1962; and Bundy's Doctrine of War Without End, November, 1968) to bolster his contention that I have misrepresented him. But what actually did I say? That "after all, it was not so long ago that *serious* critics of official policy (among them Hans Morgenthau and the editorial board of the *New York Times*) held that the *real* folly of the Vietnam war was not that it involved the United States in an unwinnable contest in which its real interests were only problematically engaged, but that it risked escalating to an ultimate nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union." (The quotation is as the original but the italics are now supplied.)

I have not read all of Prof. Morgenthau's dicta on the Vietnam war; but unfortunately for his case, his researches into his own writings appear also to be incomplete. "Old Year Out, New Year In" is about the pernicious habit of political exaggeration which afflicts even the *serious* critics of official policy. I do not argue that Prof. Morgenthau never made a sane analysis of the American dilemmas in Vietnam, but that he fell victim to the habit of fevered analysis. For the fact is that in the *New Republic*, May 1, 1965, Prof. Morgenthau *did* argue that the war in Vietnam would lead to a clash between the Americans and the Soviets—an argument I regarded at the time, and certainly do now, as patent nonsense.

I quote from his article: "Having just returned from the Soviet Union. . . . [I find] the Soviet attitude toward American policy is one of despair, alarm, and