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sented on *The Humanist's* terms. Process theology, Christian socialism, and "ecumenical" thinkers like Hans Küng and John Hick, for example, have come in for praise. And one recent article, "How to Hold Your Own Religious Service Without Mentioning God" (even humanists apparently need death rituals) sounds distressingly familiar to those who keep up with feminist theologians—such as Gail Ramshaw Schmidt, a Lutheran feminist and author of *The Gender of God*, who is on the editorial board of the influential Catholic journal, *Worship*; or Sister Mary Collins, a member of ICEL and Catholic University's religious studies department who is now working on the ICEL translation of the Psalter.

"Whether the inherent tension [between liturgical traditions and feminist consciousness] will generate cohesion within the historical religious traditions and, more profoundly, create new possibility for life on the planet it is premature to judge," Sister Mary informs readers of her lead essay in *Women at Worship* (Westminster-John Knox Press, 1993). "Meanwhile, wherever feminist consciousness is emerging, people are gathering to explore ritually and then to embody fully a future of relationships different from what has long been believed to be the truth of things."

Some may find such declarations from a Catholic nun who is not only in good standing in her order, but a highly influential faculty member of the American bishops' own university and a long-time member of their International Commission on English in the Liturgy to be—well—*amazing*.

(Readers interested in the bishops' debate on the liturgy can read a complete transcription, "What the bishops said," in *Voices*, special edition, prepared and sent as a service to the bishops. Limited copies available from Women for Faith and Family, P.O. Box 8326, Saint Louis, MO 63132. \$7 donation requested.)

(Correction: The title of last month's column should have read, *Credimus? Oremus!*) ❖

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JUDAISM TODAY

Why Jews Have Flourished in America

By Daniel Lapin

NO COUNTRY has been a more stalwart friend of Israel than America and no other society has been more hospitable to its Jewish population. It is hard to think of another nation in which a Jewish community has enjoyed a longer period of tranquillity and affluence. The bond that has always existed between America and her Jews is so conspicuous that it has even attracted the attention of other people.

For instance, during the past decade, nearly a dozen books have been published in Japan that describe the extraordinary prominence that Jews enjoy in America. These popular volumes upset some Jewish organizations, who then accused Japan of anti-Semitism. This charge was hard for Tokyo to understand, since fewer than one percent of Japanese have ever knowingly encountered a real live Jew. It is quite possible that these books were not anti-Semitic, but rather the result of a simple observation that would be clear to anyone who was not a recent immigrant from Tierra del Fuego: American Jews are disproportionately represented in our country's elite.

There have, of course, been many instances of anti-Semitic discrimination over the past few hundred years. Yet it seems churlish to harp on these, given the many Jews who can still remember the terror of the frequent Saturday night pogroms in Eastern Europe. Not to mention what it might have been like to have been a German Jew during the period 1930-1945.

Alongside the heart-stopping uncertainty of daily life that most European Jews experienced over the past few hundred years, getting derailed by a Jewish quota for medical school or not being allowed to buy a home in some choice neighborhood, hardly ranks as a serious problem. Life has certainly been good for American Jews. The question is why?

For over 2,000 years, Jews have immigrated to and settled in whatever countries were then occupying center stage of world history. When Babylon dominated the known world, Jews lived there and brought the Babylonian Talmud into being. Later, when the Persian Empire ruled, Jews lived there, too, as the Biblical book of Esther describes. During the heyday of the Roman Empire, great Jewish communities arose that survived everything the centuries flung at them, except Hitler. Until Spain unceremoniously ejected them in 1492, Jews enjoyed their golden age while Spain enjoyed hers. While the sun shone upon the British Empire, the chief rabbi of great Britain traveled the pink parts of the world map, and was treated like a dignitary. In each case, for a short slice of history, the wandering Jew would find a resting place for his weary feet.

SOME of these resting places were more hospitable than others; many were downright painful, but they were the temporary abode that God had arranged for His people. Yet when two world wars finally left America as the mightiest economic and military power in the world, the American Jewish community achieved maturity and emerged as the healthiest and wealthiest of all Jewish communities. The hospitality that Jews have enjoyed in America is unparalleled in recent times, and perhaps even in all time. The question is, why?

One argument often advanced is that the hospitality enjoyed by America's Jews has been the result of the size of the American Jewish community, as well as its economic and political influence. In other words, America has been good to her Jews because their power has allowed her little alternative. In addition to demonstrating astonishing ingratitude, this argument is as wrong-headed as claiming that turning on street lights causes the sun to set. Even a

moment's humble reflection reveals that American Jews have achieved affluence and political prominence precisely because of the security and tranquillity they have enjoyed for so many years. The question is, why has America treated its Jews so differently from almost everyone else?

One clue is that the most visible enthusiasm for Judaism often comes from precisely those politicians who can hardly be said to preside over major centers of Jewish culture. For example, it is hard to make the case that Senator Helms supports Israel in order to placate the large number of Jewish voters in North Carolina. No, clearly something more profound lies behind several hundred years of affinity and friendship between America and Judaism. The question is, what?

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THE ANSWER is that in the history of the world, only two nations were founded on an idea rather than on a land. Judaism was founded on monotheism and America was founded on freedom. Furthermore, there are only two peoples that foreigners can join with all subsequent rights. Try becoming accepted as a naturalized Englishman, French man, Swiss, or Japanese. Yet if one becomes an American or converts to Judaism, one becomes a full American or a full Jew with all rights, save one. As a convert to Judaism, one cannot become king, and as a naturalized American, one cannot attain the presidency.

Shortly after the founding of both the American people and the Jewish people, each experienced a horrendous civil war. Strangely enough, both the war between the North and the South and the war between Judah and Israel were over moral issues, and both allowed their respective people to continue to grow and prosper.

Only America and Israel have opened their doors to immigrants from around the world who share their beliefs. Both countries are unique in that their populations mostly comprise immigrants.

The founders of America, the Pilgrims, were called "separatists." Sim-

ilarly the early Jews, Abraham and his family, were called "Ivrim"—Hebrews, or in English—"separatists."

Early arrivals in both America and Israel found the lands to be populated by pagans who knew nothing of God Almighty; in one case, native Indians, and in the other, Canaanites. Both people built their capital cities in a manner designed to guarantee equal access for all. Neither Washington, D.C., nor Jerusalem belongs exclusively to any one state or tribe.

Jacob launched the Jewish people by replacing his son Joseph with Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Menashe. "They will be to me like Reuben and Shimon" said Jacob, thus changing the 12 tribes into 13. Similarly, the 12 original colonies waited for Rhode Island to join in before launching their great enterprise. The founding fathers knew that the number of elements required for the founding of a holy nation had to be increased from 12 to 13.

This important idea of unity having its origin in 13, found its way onto our currency. The phrase expressing it, *e pluribus unum*, printed above the eagle on the one dollar bill, contains thirteen letters, as does the phrase *annuit coeptis* printed above the pyramid. There are 13 layers of stone in that pyramid, 13 stars above the eagle's head and 13 stripes upon its breast. There are 13 arrows clutched in one talon, and the olive branch in the other contains 13 olives. And all this symbolism of *thirteen* is found on the one dollar bill. In Hebrew, which associates a numerical value with each letter of the alphabet, the world for "One," *Echad*, possesses a numerical equivalent of 13.

Benjamin Franklin once proposed that the Great Seal of the United States should depict the Israelites crossing the Red Sea on their way to the Promised Land. William Bradford, the second governor of the Plymouth Colony, was a fluent scholar of Hebrew and studied the Old Testament in its original. Several founders proposed Hebrew as an official language of the United States, and a commencement speech at Harvard University was commonly delivered in Hebrew well into the twentieth century.

The hospitality that Jews have enjoyed in America is unparalleled in recent times, and perhaps even in all time. The question is, why?

The intrinsic similarity between these two great nations was not lost on the early Americans. Neither is it lost on their descendants, so many of whom still share a devotion to the Judæo-Christian principles that fueled our earliest visions. Robert Frost's *The Gift Outright* and John Winthrop's *Citie on the Hill* are only two examples out of many that reflect awareness of this deep spiritual bond linking Judaism and the American dream.

If America's support for Israel were based entirely on political expediency, that support would originate from the State Department. It does not. Instead, it springs from the heartland of America as a reflection of the abiding love so many Americans have for the Judæo-Christian tradition.

The graciousness extended by most Americans towards their Jewish friends is not the result of having been intimidated by those friends into a mood of sullen acceptance. It is a wholehearted embrace based on belief in a sentiment best expressed by the Scriptural words, "and I will bless those that bless you and those that curse you, will I curse" (Genesis 12:3).

Most Americans revere those words, as they do God Almighty Who spoke them. American Jews have always been the beneficiaries of that sentiment. The joyous serenity of living as an American Jew is safe only for as long as most Americans continue to subscribe to that Biblical sentiment. ❖

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