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**THE FRAGILITY OF RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE:  
ACCOUNTING FOR ORTHODOX  
ACQUIESCENCE IN THE BELIEF IN A  
SECOND COMING**

In the last seven years, we have witnessed a watershed in the history of Judaism that cries out for explanation. With minimal resistance, in the full view of world Jewry, two propositions from which every mainstream Jew in the last millennium would have instantly recoiled have become legitimate options within Orthodox Judaism:

1. A specific descendant of King David may be identified with certainty as the Messiah even though he died in an unredeemed world. The criteria always deemed necessary for a confident identification of the Messiah—the temporal redemption of the Jewish people, a rebuilt Temple, peace and prosperity, the universal recognition of the God of Israel—are null and void.

2. The messianic faith of Judaism allows for the following scenario: God will finally send the true Messiah to embark upon his redemptive mission. The long-awaited redeemer will declare that all preparations for the redemption have been completed and announce without qualification that the fulfillment is absolutely imminent. He will begin the process of gathering the dispersed of Israel to the Holy Land. He will proclaim himself a prophet, point clearly to his messianic status, and declare that the only remaining task is to greet him as Messiah. And then he will die and be buried without redeeming the world. To put the matter more succinctly, the true Messiah's redemptive mission, publicly proclaimed and vigorously pursued, will be interrupted by death and burial and then consummated through a Second Coming.

While the vast majority of Jews continue to perceive these as alien propositions, and the Rabbinical Council of America has declared that there is no place for such doctrines in Judaism, the assertion that contemporary Orthodox Jewry effectively legitimates these beliefs rests on a simple observation: A large segment—almost certainly a substantial majority—of Chabad hasidim affirm that the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who was laid to rest in 1994, did everything subsumed under proposition two and will soon return to complete the redemption in his capacity as the Messiah. Adherents of this

belief, including those who have ruled that it is required by Jewish law, routinely hold significant religious posts with the sanction of major Orthodox authorities unconnected to their movement.

These range from the offices of the Israeli Rabbinate to the ranks of mainstream Rabbinical organizations to the chairmanship of Rabbinic courts in both Israel and the diaspora, not to speak of service as scribes, ritual slaughterers, teachers, and administrators of schools and religious organizations receiving support from mainstream Orthodoxy. Shortly after signing a public ruling that Jewish law obligates all Jews to accept the messiahship of the deceased Rebbe, a Montreal rabbi was appointed head of the rabbinical court of the entire city. In summer, 2001, one could pick up a flyer in Jerusalem advertising a program for children run by a local Chabad house that begins with the logo of the Jerusalem Department of Torah Culture and ends with the slogan, "May our Master, Teacher and Rabbi the King Messiah live forever." For much of Orthodox Jewry, the classic boundaries of Judaism's messianic faith are no more.

I take it for granted that a typical Orthodox Jew ten years ago would have questioned the sanity of anyone asserting that adherents of such posthumous messianism would be recognized as Orthodox rabbis in perfectly good standing. If this assumption is correct, then the current status quo represents a startlingly swift, profound transformation. I refer not to the messianist belief itself but to the failure of mainstream Orthodoxy to marginalize the believers. What can account for such acquiescence in a community that prides itself on strict adherence to tradition and often denies that social factors play any significant role in shaping its beliefs and practices?

Let me begin with a broad, theoretical consideration and then move to a constellation of more specific factors that render this development not merely comprehensible but so ineluctable that efforts to roll it back face almost insuperable hurdles. I do not command sufficient expertise in the comparative sociology of religion to set up rules of general applicability governing such transformations. It seems to me, however, that Chabad is marked by a combination of characteristics critical for making this sort of religious upheaval possible. Both an in-group and an out-group, it is sufficiently self-contained, even sectarian, to generate a deviationist ideology and sufficiently integrated to make that ideology an acceptable option within the larger community.

On the one hand, Chabad hasidim see themselves as bearers of an expression of Judaism radically superior to all others. It is through their leaders that the progressive revelation of the inner Torah has taken place; it is their rebbes who have been the potential messiahs of recent generations; it is their emissaries who are the agents of the redemptive process, destined to be granted front row seats near the Messiah when

he comes;<sup>1</sup> it is to a location adjoining their headquarters in Crown Heights that the ultimate, heavenly Temple will descend before moving to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> The sense that they are different not only facilitates the creation of a theology undisciplined by mainstream consensus; it leads mainstream Jews to minimize the impact of that theology because it is perceived as marginal and hence not threatening.

On the other hand, Lubavitch hasidim engage in outreach to all Jews, emphasize the value of loving all of Israel, make highly sophisticated use of mass media, retain ties with other hasidim and Orthodox Jews even as they refrain from participating in many common endeavors, hold posts integrated into the warp and woof of Orthodox communal life, and establish deep reservoirs of sympathy through activities that almost all Orthodox Jews cannot help but admire. Thus, their beliefs can decidedly change the Jewish religion writ large.

Within this framework, then, let us turn to specific causes, reasons, and rationales—stated and unstated—for the effective Orthodox decision to allow this process to unfold.

#### THE IDEAL OF UNITY AND THE AVOIDANCE OF COMMUNAL STRIFE

The point is self-evident. Every practicing Jew has heard countless sermons about the imperative to love one's neighbor, particularly one's Jewish neighbor. At the barest minimum, the annual Torah reading about Korah's rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16–17) generates discourses about the severe prohibition against fomenting disputes within the community. While rhetoric about this value cuts across all Orthodox—and Jewish—lines, it is especially compelling for Modern Orthodox Jews, who maintain cordial, even formal relations with other denominations and pride themselves on embracing an ideal of tolerance.

The impact of this tolerant self-image, which borders on self-definition, can cut very deep. It is nurtured not only by a positive ideology but by disdain for the narrowness and intolerance that are seen as quintessential traits of the orthodoxies of the Right. It is reinforced by humorous putdowns whose power to mold as well as express self-perceptions should not be underestimated. Thus, a widely repeated joke explains that God serves Leviathan fish at the messianic banquet out of solicitude for those participants who will not eat the meat because they do not trust God's *shehitah*. Modern Orthodox Jews who have made a habit of poking fun at the Traditionalist Orthodox for divisive hyper-religiosity are now faced with the prospect of evaluating the status of Lubavitch *shehitah* in light of the belief of some hasidim that the Rebbe is not only the Messiah but pure divinity. Even the few who take this matter seriously can find it psychologically impossible to don the

mantle of those they see as religious fanatics and engage in the very behavior they have been mocking for years.

From the perspective of the abstract principles of Orthodox Judaism, the argument from tolerance and unity is beside the point. A few weeks after the Torah reading about Korah, very different sermons are preached about the zeal of Phineas (Numbers 25). No Orthodox Jew believes that everyone committed to the Jewish community has the right to serve as an Orthodox rabbi irrespective of his religious outlook because of the value of unity. To resort to this principle is relevant only after one has concluded that Lubavitch messianism is essentially within the boundaries of Orthodoxy. Since this is precisely what is at issue, the argument begs the question, and its powerful appeal is rooted in a different instinct to which we now turn.

#### ORTHOPRAXY AND APPEARANCE

Though my presentation in this scholarly venue is academic in substance and largely irenic in tone, it is no secret that I have pursued a rhetorically charged campaign to change the widespread Orthodox indifference to this development. Two distinguished academic observers of contemporary Orthodoxy have chided me for incurable naiveté in imagining that matters of faith play any significant role in the community. Anyone who looks and acts the way Lubavitch hasidim do will be treated as an Orthodox Jew. Period. A traditional talmudist in full agreement with my position told me, "If the messianists looked like you, people would react differently." Similarly, two other academics argued that issues of faith can be relevant, but only when the deviations come from the left, that is, from a group seen as more modernist than that of the critic.

In several conversations with fully Orthodox Jews, both Traditionalist and Modern, I have heard formulations that come close to an unalloyedly orthoprax position, to wit, that any Jew who observes the commandments remains within the fold. It is no accident that enemies of Lubavitch through the years have laid special stress on deviations from the straightforward requirements of *halakhah*. This argument rests upon Chabad justifications for not sleeping in a *sukkah*, not eating the third Sabbath meal, waiting till well into the night to recite the afternoon prayer upon the Rebbe's return from his father-in-law's gravesite, and, on one occasion in 1991, delaying the morning prayer on *Sukkot* till 3:30 p.m.<sup>3</sup>

The theoretical superstructure of Orthodoxy insists on the importance of doctrinal as well as behavioral criteria in defining membership in the group.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, my critics are certainly correct in arguing

that an instinct placing almost exclusive emphasis on observance of the commandments has played a key role in discouraging a serious, effective reaction to Chabad messianism. In pre-modern times, when visible conformity to ritual standards was taken for granted, it could not overwhelm all other criteria in determining an individual's communal standing. For contemporary Jews, full observance of Orthodox law is so clearly seen as an unambiguous marker that theology can become virtually irrelevant.

This instinct extends even to areas of belief that technically impinge on *halakhah*. Observers cannot imagine that some Lubavitch hasidim really maintain beliefs about the Rebbe's divinity amounting to *avodah zarah*, which roughly means the formal recognition or worship as God of an entity that is in fact not God. Sociologically, then, a proviso needs to be appended to this definition: such recognition or worship is *avodah zarah* provided that the believer is someone other than a Sabbath-observing Jew wearing a wig or a black hat. Judaism, which was once a great faith, has become an agglomeration of dress, deportment, and rituals.

This very point about external appearance and ritual observance was made in *Yated Ne'eman*, a newspaper published in Israel by one group that does delegitimize the messianists and, indeed, all of Chabad—the followers of R. Elazar Menachem Schach of the Ponevezh yeshiva in Bnei Brak.<sup>5</sup> The challenge, said the author, is to transcend externals and recognize the illegitimacy of these superficially Orthodox Jews. This sector of Israeli Orthodoxy and its counterparts in some American yeshivas do not act on this issue because they believe they have already acted.

#### THE BALKANIZATION OF ORTHODOXY, OR THE ORTHODOXY OF ENCLAVES

Why do such Jews remain relatively passive at this point despite the evident ineffectiveness of their efforts in the wider community? While part of the explanation lies in despair born of frustration and another conflicting part in a rose-colored belief that by now everyone sees that R. Schach was correct, there is a deeper issue that plays a very important role in other sectors of the Orthodox community as well. The challenge of modernity and the growth of religious deviationism have impelled much of Orthodoxy to turn inward. One consequence of this orientation has been the attenuation of the instinctive sense of a Jewish religious collective extending beyond one's own group. Moreover, and very much to the point, "group" does not even refer to Orthodoxy as a whole but rather to a much smaller entity.

The main focus of many Orthodox Jews is on their own subgroup, *anshei shlomeinu* in the terminology of hasidic communities, *yeshiva layt* in non-hasidic groups, and so on. Consequently, the argument that something called Judaism, even Orthodox Judaism, has changed because of the legitimation of Lubavitch messianists, invokes categories that have lost much of their force. I do not mean to suggest that Orthodox Jews—even in Traditionalist circles—have entirely rejected their responsibilities to the larger community, but instincts have undoubtedly changed. The question posed—even in Modern circles—is, “Does anyone in my immediate environment believe that the Rebbe is the Messiah?” If the answer is no, then the rise of this movement becomes a curiosity or at most a mildly disturbing development. A blinkered, myopic question produces a blinkered, myopic response.

ORTHODOX INTERDEPENDENCE, OR THE  
INTERLOCKING OF THE ENCLAVES

Paradoxically, another critically important explanation stands in stark contrast to the psychology of balkanization, namely, the reality of interdependence. Lubavitch messianists, for all their sectarianism, are so entwined in the larger Orthodox community—and even the Jewish community as a whole—that excision is extraordinarily difficult.

I have had more than one conversation in which an Orthodox Jew would argue that Lubavitch is after all a relatively small, ultimately peripheral movement and then agree under questioning that he or she would have considerable difficulty living without it. Rabbinic courts headed by messianist rabbis interact regularly with other courts. How should they be regarded? Scores of Israeli rabbis holding posts throughout the country have signed a halakhic ruling requiring belief in the messiahship of the Rebbe.<sup>6</sup> How easy would it be to remove them from office? Messianist rabbis play a significant role in countries throughout the world. How realistic is it to propose that they be marginalized? A respected, Lubavitch-run *kashrut* organization is the supervisor of choice for restaurants full of messianist propaganda. How does one deal with it? Rejecting Lubavitch ritual slaughter or refusing to attend a messianist synagogue would cause no little inconvenience to religiously observant travelers—Orthodox and non-Orthodox—and require significant modification of vacation plans. How realistic is the expectation that concern with a matter of abstract theology will change established behaviors? A significant number of Jews reside in places to which most Jews merely travel. How can they be expected to react to the assertion that the food, the synagogue, and the school upon which they rely have suddenly been rendered unacceptable?

The matter is complicated further by the fact that not all Lubavitch hasidim are messianists and not all messianists endorse a theology of *avodah zarah*. It is much easier to accept false assurances that a majority maintain Orthodox beliefs than it is to take the very difficult steps implied in the previous paragraph. Rather than face these consequences, Jews force themselves to conclude that second-coming messianism promoted by people whose services they need is not really second-coming messianism, that legitimation is not legitimation, that *avodah zarah* is not *avodah zarah*. Of all the causes of inaction, this is the most intractable, and it may well result in a permanent and profound transformation of Judaism.

#### “GOOD THINGS”

“But they do so many good things.” I cannot count the number of times I have heard this sentence or its equivalent. Some of these “things” are acts of kindness that are not specific to Judaism; others involve the teaching of Torah and the successful dissemination of Jewish rituals to the proverbial four corners of the earth. Much of the loyalty to Lubavitch on the local level flows from personal relationships established with Jews of all stripes—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, even secular—in need of an understanding heart, a sympathetic ear, a favor large (sometimes very large) or small. In an increasingly impersonal society, Lubavitch emissaries exult in the joy of others and empathize with their sadness, forging bonds that cannot be broken by mere theology. On the ritual level, they not only encourage the wearing of *tefillin* and the lighting of Sabbath candles; they provide travelers with kosher food, a Passover seder, a prayer service, and more. The beneficiaries of this largesse cannot help but feel the most profound gratitude.

Once again, looking at this consideration through a purely theoretical Orthodox prism renders it highly problematic. If the recognition of Lubavitch messianists as Orthodox rabbis really destroys the parameters of Judaism’s messianic faith (as it surely does), then the issue needs to be framed in global terms. You can gain ten thousand (or one hundred thousand, or one million) additional observant Jews at the price of accepting a fundamental change in a core belief of Judaism. Are you prepared to pay that price? Posed in the abstract to an Orthodox audience, this should be a rhetorical question. But people are rarely motivated by abstractions or by concern for the course of history writ large. How, they ask, can we not be impressed with this selfless family that has established a synagogue in a spiritual wilderness and persuaded people who would have lost their Jewish identity entirely to

observe the Torah? In such a struggle between heart and mind, the mind stands little chance.<sup>7</sup>

#### TRANSIENT INSANITY

I have heard the assertion that the messianists are crazy no less frequently than the argument that “they do good things.” Sometimes this appears to mean that because the belief is insane it will surely not last and should therefore be treated with benign—or malign—neglect. In this version, the contention is problematic but coherent. In most cases, however, the word *meshugoyim* (crazy people) or *meshugaas* (craziness) seems to be intended as a self-contained argument. Because they are crazy, they cannot be taken seriously and should be ignored—or even supported for their “good things.” Precisely because it is so difficult to assign a coherent meaning to this argument, it reveals once again the operation of a deep instinct that seeks any avenue to avoid the unwanted conclusion that messianists should be excluded from Orthodoxy.

Most people who proffer this argument appear to agree that the messianist belief stands in contradiction to the classical Jewish messianic faith. But if this is so, it is difficult to see how the “fact” that it is also a form of craziness qualifies the believer to be a rabbi, judge, principal, or teacher. Does the very fact that it is crazy somehow make it compatible with Judaism?<sup>8</sup> Imagine a colloquy in which someone objects to hiring a messianist rabbi. A supporter of the appointment responds, “It is true that he maintains a profoundly un-Jewish belief, but this drawback is neutralized by a countervailing consideration that works in his favor. He is crazy.”

Moreover, the large majority of messianists are not crazy in any clinical sense; to suggest that they are is crazy. The non-messianists in Chabad face daunting obstacles in their efforts to interpret teachings of the Rebbe that appear to point to his messiahship. Against this background, for a hasid to defend the messianist position through a variety of learned and complex strategies is decidedly not a violation of the canons of reason. An outside observer is, of course, free to argue that belief in the resurrection of the dead, or in a personal Messiah, or, for that matter, in God, is itself irrational. By that criterion, however, all serious Orthodox Jews (and, for that matter, Christians) are crazy.

This is not to deny that the percentage of unbalanced individuals is probably somewhat higher in the messianist population than in the Jewish population as a whole. Extreme doctrines like the belief that the Rebbe is fully alive can easily elicit contemptuous jokes, and this too is an important factor in preventing serious responses. The assumption

that only *meshugoyim* could possibly believe that the Rebbe is the Messiah also contributes to a dramatically unrealistic underestimate of the extent of messianism in Chabad. After all, say many observers, since I know that Rabbi so-and-so is a perfectly normal person; it follows that he could not possibly be a believer.<sup>9</sup>

The association of messianism with insanity also bears on the confident predictions of the inevitable, imminent disappearance of belief in the messiahship of the Rebbe. The fact that a religion called Christianity, which also believes in a dying and resurrected redeemer, has not yet disappeared ought to give at least some pause to these prognosticators. Let me reinforce this point by adducing a much more recent and hence even more apt example.

Mormonism was born in modern times as a dramatically deviant form of Christianity. It makes highly problematic historical assertions about relatively recent events. Its theology makes that of Lubavitch messianists appear like the very soul of rationality. It has a sophisticated, well-educated constituency. It sends emissaries to the ends of the earth to make converts and is, I believe, the fastest growing religion in the world. Whatever one thinks of the rationality of the first generation of believers, children brought up in such a faith can surely accept it without damage to their rational faculties. If Mormonism flourishes, why is Chabad messianism necessarily condemned to extinction?

I will not hazard a prediction as to the medium- or long-term survival of this belief. Menachem Friedman, the most distinguished sociologist of Orthodoxy in Israel, believes that in a leaderless movement, the group with the most fervent message is likely to prevail. If so, then all the worldwide institutions of Chabad will eventually be mobilized to spread this version of Judaism. However that may be, I certainly do not see what will destroy this faith as long as the rest of Orthodoxy legitimates messianist rabbis and the bulk of the Chabad educational system remains in messianist hands. Confident prognostications of imminent demise fly in the face of reason.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE WANING OF A CHRISTIAN THREAT AND THE ATROPHY OF JEWISH MESSIANIC INSTINCTS

With the decline of a pervasive Christian threat, familiarity with messianic texts and sensitivity to messianic deviationism has waned to the vanishing point even among learned Jews. Jewish polemical texts are not part of the Orthodox curriculum nor (outside Chabad) are treatises dealing with redemption. Moreover, I think that the celebrated observation that many Orthodox Jews no longer trust the traditions with which they were raised is also germane to this development.<sup>11</sup> In previ-

ous generations, Jews would have paid little attention to messianist sectarians who “proved” that their belief is acceptable by pointing to one line in *Sanhedrin* 98b. Now, unbound by a consensus once imbibed by every Jewish tailor and shoemaker with his mother’s milk, and oblivious of a rich polemical literature, they function as *tabulae rasae* for every unfamiliar text introduced to them. While they will not go so far as to embrace the belief in the Rebbe’s messiahship, they can be persuaded that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with it.

#### JUST ANOTHER CHANGE

Finally, several people who understand very well that Lubavitch messianism has no legitimate precedent in Judaism have nonetheless chided me for attributing so much significance to this development. After all, they say, I am a historian, and a historian of ideas no less. I should know better than most that beliefs change, that religions evolve. Hasidism itself was an innovation. Religious Zionism was an innovation. Why must I remain in a state of arrested development, embalmed in the world of the Barcelona disputation?

I am inclined to think that this argument is not a primary cause of Orthodox inaction because it appeals only to the most modernist worldview within Orthodoxy. Some Lubavitch hasidim, however, have also mobilized it for polemical purposes. Since it involves an issue of religious judgment and has been posed to me in a personal way, I take the liberty of injecting an overtly personal response into this analysis.

It should not be necessary to say that historians are permitted to have commitments to abiding principles. The decision to study history is not a decision to embrace change as one’s supreme value. All religious traditions have boundaries, and any adherent of such a tradition faces the challenge of deciding whether or not a particular innovation subverts core elements of that tradition. Here is my response to one of these critics:

I consider this issue [especially] serious for roughly the following reasons: 1–It involves a key element in the understanding of one of the *iqqarei ha-emunah* (fundamentals of the faith). 2–Comparable movements throughout Jewish history have been thoroughly, vehemently, angrily delegitimated by *klal Yisrael* [the Jewish collective]. I refer both to the movements that persisted after the candidate’s death and the movements that died with his death precisely because their posthumous survival was unthinkable. 3–Denial of such a belief has been a part of the very definition of Judaism in innumerable confrontations with the Christian mission. Accepting it as a harmless enthusiasm awards victory to Christianity on a fundamental matter of principle. 4–It has led to *avodah zarah* in both past instances and shows signs of doing so again.

## THE DIFFICULTIES OF “STARTING A FIGHT WITH LUBAVITCH”

Finally, there are pragmatic obstacles that beset any effort to delegitimize this belief and its adherents. Lubavitch messianists are the dominant part of an influential movement with impressive human, financial, and political resources that defends its interests vigorously. Few people have the stomach to pursue a campaign that will cause them to be publicly labeled—as I can testify from personal experience—haters, dividers, liars, heretics, egotistical seekers of fame and fortune, ignoramuses, snakes, asses, and pigs. The reluctance to “start a fight with Lubavitch” is palpable, particularly on the part of those whose institutions might lose support from Chabad sympathizers or whose positions might even be jeopardized. Since a large majority of Orthodox Jews rely on a very small number of rabbinic authorities to make decisions of such moment, it is only necessary to deter a relative handful of people from taking action.

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A phenomenon that appears at first, uncritical glance to be inexplicable turns out upon examination to be overdetermined. Primarily social factors abetted at critical points by religious sensibilities can sweep away a central doctrine of a well-established faith with a millennial history of withstanding the most severe pressure. Had this change been imposed from without, Orthodox Jews would have resisted at all costs. But it came from within, and to this point it has prevailed.

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## NOTES

This article is an adaptation and elaboration of chapter 13 of my *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization: Oxford and Portland, Oregon, 2001). The first few paragraphs, which set the stage for the subsequent analysis, are adapted from the book's introduction.

1. Note the little vignette in *Kfar Chabad* 731 (Eve of *Sukkot*, 5757; Sept. 27, 1996), where the Rebbe tells the discouraged wife of an emissary, “We are on the verge of being privileged to experience the coming of the Messiah. You must decide where you want to be at that time—pushed far back among the masses or together with the emissaries who see the face of the king and sit first in the kingdom.”

2. See R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Kuntres be-Inyan Mikdash Me'at Zeh Beit Rabbenu she-be-Bavel* (Brooklyn, 1992).

3. With respect to the first two issues, the problem was less with the practice itself than with the seemingly principled rejection of the requirement. On that *Sukkot* day in 1991, see Binyamin Lipkin, *Heshbono shel Olam* (Lod, 2000), pp. 112–113.

4. See my review of Menachem Kellner, “Must a Jew Believe Anything?” *Tradition* Vol. 33, No. 4 (Summer, 1999), pp. 81–89.

5. See Natan Ze'ev Grossman, in the Hebrew *Yated Ne'eman*, March 13, 1998, pp. 15, 22.

6. *Hatzofeh*, January 17, 2000.

7. Arguments for the delegitimation of Lubavitch messianism can, of course, also appeal to the heart, and I have attempted in other forums to evoke such emotions to the best of my ability. See, for example, *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*, where I argue that Orthodox Judaism has effectively declared that “on a matter of fundamental principle our martyred ancestors were wrong and their Christian murderers were right” (p. 75).

8. For those concerned with the posthumous destiny of people who might be heretics, the assertion that they are crazy can serve as mitigation. This, however, does not appear to be the primary context in which the argument is used.

9. It is not uncommon for ordinary Orthodox Jews to find themselves subjected to analogous misperceptions. Many years ago, a non-Jewish colleague in my department took it for granted that I did not follow a bizarre practice that she had just been told about, to wit, that Orthodox Jews will not drink wine handled by Gentiles. Somewhat more recently, two Jewish colleagues asked me about an article in the *New York Times* describing a *shatnez*-testing laboratory in Brooklyn. When I proceeded to show them the non-*shatnez* label in my jacket, they managed to remain polite but were clearly non-plussed to discover that a person who usually appeared reasonably sane actually adhered to such outlandish regulations. All this notwithstanding the fact that I wear a yarmulke at work and make my Orthodox affiliation clear in more ways than I can recount.

10. The failure to take this development seriously has led more than one person to suggest that I stop wasting my time on it. A very distinguished scholar who is an observant Jew urged me to remain focused on the area where I do important work, the Middle Ages. In other words, I should spend all my time studying what is really significant, namely, Jewish arguments against Christianity in the Middle Ages, rather than diverting my attention to the trivial issue of whether Jews still believe those arguments. I wonder what this scholar tells his students about the uses of history.

11. See Menachem Friedman, “Life Tradition and Book Tradition in the Development of Ultraorthodox Judaism,” in *Judaism from Within and from Without: Anthropological Studies*, ed. Harvey Goldberg, (Albany, 1987), pp. 235–255; Haym Soloveitchik, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Tradition*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Summer, 1994), pp. 64–130.