

## QUACKS AND REAL AMERICANS: SOLOMON SCHECHTER'S ANTI-MORMONISM

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*Our heavenly Father is more liberal in His views, and boundless in His mercies and blessings, than we are ready to believe or receive...*

– Joseph Smith<sup>1</sup>

*The love of God's creatures must include all human-kind, regardless of religion and race. The narrow-mindedness that sees whatever is outside our people as impure and contaminated is one of those terrible blights that destroys any good structure.*

– Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook<sup>2</sup>

The esteem and veneration with which Professor Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) is celebrated as “a world-class scholar”<sup>3</sup> and as the pioneering founder of the central institutions of Conservative Judaism<sup>4</sup> constitute a florid and copious panegyric which, it might fairly be said, runs afoul of its subject's own standards of critical analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> “Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith and the church historian's staff (1976), Section Five (1842-1843), p. 257. Quoted by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, General Conference Address, April 13, 2012, coinciding with the seventh day of Passover 5772.

<sup>2</sup> Middot Ha-Raayah, Ahavah, #5.

<sup>3</sup> Mel Scult, “Schechter's Seminary” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, (New York: JTSA, 1997), vol. I, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to reorganizing and serving as President of the Jewish Theological Seminary and recruiting its faculty, Schechter was founder and President of the United Synagogue of America (later renamed United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism), and, until his death, its ho-

In his introduction to Schechter's collected *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers*, Rabbi Louis Finkelstein, Schechter's student and eventual successor as President (and then Chancellor) of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, wrote:

In Solomon Schechter, modern Judaism produced a figure comparable in depth of understanding, breadth of learning, originality of thought, force of personality, genius for organization, brilliance of vision, and religious insight, to the foremost personalities of post-Talmudic times.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Finkelstein pays tribute to Schechter's "astonishing genius,"<sup>6</sup> describing him as "fearless, determined, confident, energetic and resourceful,"<sup>7</sup> admired by his contemporaries for his "kindliness of spirit, a charitable forgiveness of errors, a profound love."<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Neil Gillman,<sup>9</sup> who served JTS variously as Professor of Philosophy and Rabbinical School Dean, asserts that

Schechter represented in his very person the kind of integration that was at the heart of everything the Seminary stood for... he was open-minded intellectually and traditionalist in his practice.<sup>10</sup>

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norary president. He also played a decisive role in the founding of the Rabbinical Assembly, the professional organization of Conservative rabbis.

<sup>5</sup> *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers by Solomon Schechter*, (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1959), p. ix.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Gillman (1933-2017), gifted teacher and theological mentor to generations of Conservative rabbis and adult education students, died while this article was in final revisions. See *New York Times* obituary, November 28, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Neil Gillman, *Conservative Judaism: The New Century* (Behrman House, 1993), p. 46.

Similarly, Mel Scult, Professor of Jewish Thought at Brooklyn College, reports that “people of all kinds were easily attracted to his powerful persona, his sense of humor, and his tolerance for the opinions of others,” coupled with his “strong intellectual leadership.”<sup>11</sup>

Schechter’s storied “kindliness of spirit” and “tolerance for the opinions of others,” alas, had their limitations. This becomes clear in his April 26, 1903 address, delivered at the dedication of the Seminary building. Included among his celebratory remarks and scholarly insights is a mean-spirited and vituperative attack leveled against the still young Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or “Mormon” Church). While Schechter does not explicitly name the Mormon Church as the object of his theological rebuke, there can be little doubt as to his meaning:

This country is, as everybody knows, a creation of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, and the Bible is still holding its own, exercising enormous influence as a real spiritual power, in spite of all the destructive tendencies, mostly of foreign make. Nay, it is this very excess of zeal and over-realization of the presence of Biblical times which unfortunately enabled quacks to create new Tabernacles, with new Zions and Jerusalems, and to proclaim themselves as second or first Moseses, and even to profit their followers with caricature revelations. But these are only the excesses. The large bulk of the real American people have, in matters of religion, retained their sobriety and loyal adherence to the Scriptures, as their Puritan forefathers did.<sup>12</sup>

Decrying “new Zions and Jerusalems,” Schechter directly assails the very heart and structure of the Mormon Church, summarized in the tenth of its thirteen Articles of Faith, which declares in part: “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent...” Schechter’s reference to “Tabernacles” also has

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<sup>11</sup> Mel Scult, *ibid.*.

<sup>12</sup> Solomon Schechter, “The Seminary as a Witness” in *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers by Solomon Schechter*, (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1959), pp. 48-49.

specific application to the Latter-day Saints. Tabernacles, with far less restricted access than Mormon temples, serve Latter-day Saints in a variety of ways: gatherings social and religious, and as the venue for formal Church meetings. While Salt Lake City's Tabernacle (where President Theodore Roosevelt later spoke in May 1903) is the Church's most famous, there were already nearly 80 such Church facilities in Schechter's time.

In this context, the "quacks" assailed by Schechter can only be understood to refer to Mormon Church leaders, and "second or first Moseses" as a reference to martyred Church founder, President, and Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., and, perhaps, his successors. The "caricature revelations" which Schechter derogates would include the Book of Mormon and its scriptural complements, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. Perhaps Schechter was familiar with the view articulated by his contemporary, Mark Twain, who esteemed the Book of Mormon as "chloroform in print."<sup>13</sup>

"The over-realization of the presence of Biblical times" is a disparaging summary of the Book of Mormon's asserted 1000-year history, dating to the emigration of a group of Israelites from Jerusalem to North America prior to the destruction of the First Temple, around 600 BCE. That history was the substance of the revelation reported and eventually published by Joseph Smith in 1830.

Schechter unfavorably contrasted Latter-day Saints with "the real American people" – an audacious distinction on the part of a Romanian Jew who had arrived to assume Seminary leadership barely one year prior to this address and was himself without benefit of the "Puritan forefathers" he so reverently acknowledged. Schechter wryly mocked the Book of Mormon and its Latter-day Saint adherents' principled abstention<sup>14</sup> from intoxicants by his assertion of the "sobriety and loyal adherence to Scripture" of those he deemed "real Americans."

The Latter-day Saint doctrine that Native Americans are descended from among the original Israelite immigrants may account for Schechter's assertion that "the history of the United States does not

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<sup>13</sup> See Steven Epperson, *Mormons and Jews* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> See "The Word of Wisdom," *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 89.

begin with the Red Indian, and the genesis of its spiritual life is not to be traced back to the vagaries of some peculiar sects.”<sup>15</sup>

Even Schechter’s discussion of specific challenges facing the Seminary he led and the students it trained coopts terms evocative of the Mormon Church. Lamenting the necessary evil of institutional concern with “the ultimate material success of the alumni,” Schechter warns:

Let us not be too successful. For it is this consideration of ulterior motives which is responsible for the fact that latter day Judaism is almost entirely devoid of the element of saintliness.<sup>16</sup>

That is to say, if latter day “saints” had a place anywhere in the religious landscape of “real Americans,” it was Solomon Schechter’s aspiration that they be among those ordained and served by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America!

The Seminary dedication was a major media event. “President Schechter’s” address concerning the Seminary’s “mission” was reprinted in its entirety in the next day’s *New York Times*.<sup>17</sup> What factors and concerns motivated Solomon Schechter to include his anti-Mormon jeremiad, extended, detailed, and acerbic, at the inauguration of the Seminary’s campus? What compelled Schechter so publicly to deride the “excesses” of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which he deemed to be “destructive” and “unfortunate?”

Schechter’s reasoning must be considered in the context of the era. 1903 was a trying time for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. “Objections to overt violence against the Mormons were few, of no practical effect, and muted by agreement with its ends.”<sup>18</sup> Just one week before printing the Schechter address, the *New York*

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<sup>15</sup> Schechter, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, April 27, 1903: “Jewish Theological Seminary Dedicated.” Subheadings included: “Large Assembly in the Hall of the Institution in Harlem,” “American Conservatism Praised,” and “\$500,000 For Endowment.” Remarks by Jacob Schiff and Cyrus Adler were also published as were excerpts from a speech by Judge Mayer Sulzberger.

<sup>18</sup> Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 27.

*Times* ran a brief article (dateline Cooperstown, New York) concerning an incident in which, "brandishing a broom, Mrs. S.A. Douglas of Franklin, Delaware County, ordered a Mormon missionary from her steps." The *Times* reported that "the residents of Franklin will now make a concerted effort to drive them out of town."<sup>19</sup>

The "band"<sup>20</sup> of missionaries in Cooperstown (which, as future home to the Baseball Hall of Fame would come to represent that which is wholesome and unifying and quintessentially American) fared better than a certain coreligionist the previous year. In 1902, a "missionary caught organizing a Sunday school in Arkansas was tied to a tree and given thirty lashes with promise of worse if he returned."<sup>21</sup>

Joseph F. Smith, namesake<sup>22</sup> and nephew of Church founder Joseph Smith, Jr., became President of the Church in 1901. It may well be the elevation of the younger Smith from among the Church hierarchy to which Schechter referred in his dedication address: "I am also inclined to think that any attempt towards the centralization of spiritual power into the hands of a man or a body of men will only prove injurious to the country."<sup>23</sup> As Church President and Prophet, Smith summarized the challenges facing his besieged community of faith:

We have been looked upon as interlopers, as fanatics, as believers in a false religion; we have been regarded with contempt, and treated despicably; we have been driven from our homes, maligned and spoken evil of everywhere.<sup>24</sup>

Smith lamented the

thousands upon thousands of innocent people in the world whose minds have become so darkened by the slanderous reports... that they would feel they were doing God's service to deprive a member of this Church of

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<sup>19</sup> "Brandished Broom at Mormon," *New York Times*, April 19, 1903.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>21</sup> Flake, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith also bore the name of his maternal uncle, Joseph Fielding.

<sup>23</sup> *Seminary Addresses*, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Flake, p. 31.

life, or of liberty, or the pursuit of happiness, if they could do it.<sup>25</sup>

Latter-day Saints were also very much in the news during the period leading up to Schechter's speech with the April 11, 1903 death of Brigham Young, Jr. The son of Joseph Smith's immediate successor, Young was President of the Church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, which, together with the Church President and his two counselors, form the highest doctrinal authority and governing body of the faith.

Solomon Schechter was certainly aware of local anti-LDS measures. In 1903, New York City Mayor Seth Low, formerly President of Columbia University (and for whom its iconic, domed Low Library is named), revoked permission for LDS elders to preach in the streets. Similar measures, ominous in historic retrospect, were taken during the same period by government officials in Germany.<sup>26</sup>

Anti-LDS sentiment and the precarious standing of the Church in American society found their most dramatic and public expression, however, following the January 1903 election of Reed Smoot as the United States Senator from Utah. Smoot, elected as a Republican, was one of the twelve Apostles of the LDS Church. Opposition to Smoot's candidacy and, notwithstanding his lawful election, to seating him in the United States Senate was swift, widespread, and protracted. President Roosevelt himself was on record as opposing the election of a Church Apostle<sup>27</sup> – if not necessarily a Mormon per se – to the Senate.<sup>28</sup> A broad alliance of Protestant churches overlooked denominational differences, historic rivalries, and mutual antagonism to unite in their opposition to seating Smoot. Rev. Charles L. Thompson, leader of the Presbyterian Church, set the tone, stating that if Mormonism "is not to be educated, not to be civilized, not to be reformed – it must

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>26</sup> See Flake, p. 33. See also "Mormon Appeal to Kaiser," in *New York Times*, April 27, 1903.

<sup>27</sup> "President Does Not Want Mormon Apostle in Senate," *New York Times*, January 10, 1903.

<sup>28</sup> Roosevelt would, in fact, develop a close and productive working relationship with Smoot, a function of the character and professionalism of both men, as well as the President's calculated approach to securing Utah's electoral votes.

be crushed.”<sup>29</sup> The Baptist Home Mission Society also took a leading role in the anti-Smoot effort.

At the Church’s biennial general conference held in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle just weeks before Schechter’s dedication remarks, President Smith addressed the unrest in the Senate, describing Smoot’s detractors as “contemptible hounds.” In Senator Smoot’s presence, Smith denounced

the lying, hypocritical, sneaking, cowardly wolves in sheep’s clothing that go through the world seeking to stir up strife and trouble for the righteous. They seek to bring the wrath and ire of the Nation down upon us.<sup>30</sup>

Protestant opposition to Smoot precipitated formal Senate proceedings, tasking a fourteen-member panel to consider his admission or ouster.<sup>31</sup> The alliance of churches arrayed against Senator Smoot may well have had more to do with the perceived loss of Protestant dominance in American society than with any objection about Smoot himself. Smoot’s “arrival in Washington was a very public signal that freedom to be religious could no longer mean freedom to be one of the varieties of Protestantism”<sup>32</sup>—a cultural shift catalyzed by increasing rates of both Jewish and Catholic immigration to the United States.

While individual Catholics and Jews were to be found among Smoot’s antagonists, there was little organizational opposition to Utah’s Senator from among these religious communities. One telling case of Jewish participation in the widely Protestant campaign is that of Isidor Rayner, United States Senator from Maryland, who opposed seating Smoot. Rayner explained that “the reason he voted against the Senator was that he is a Jew, and he felt that the Christian people of his State would have felt that he took advantage of his position to slap the Christian religion had he voted for the Senator’s retention.”<sup>33</sup> Prior to his own election to the Senate, Rayner had served three terms in the House of Representatives, and as Maryland’s attorney general. His biographical sketch in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* describes him as “a nom-

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<sup>29</sup> Flake, p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> “Attacks Smoot’s Accusers,” in *New York Times*, April 7, 1903.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People* (Random House, 2012), p. 157,

<sup>32</sup> Flake, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.



inal member” of Baltimore’s Har Zion Congregation, noting that he “married a Christian and was buried in a Unitarian ceremony.”

In addition to (or perhaps so as to obscure) territorial and partisan concerns with a perceived diminution of Protestant privilege, religious leaders opposed to Smoot focused their rhetorical and political efforts (both before and after his election) on improper ecclesiastical entanglement with civil governance and the historic LDS practice of polygamy. Typical of the 3100 petitions<sup>34</sup> sent to Washington protesting the seating of Senator Smoot was one from the Ministerial Alliance of Salt Lake City, insisting:

[T]he election of Apostle Reed Smoot to the United States Senate would actually be the election of the will of the Mormon first Presidency and twelve apostles to that body... Apostle Smoot cannot make an important move without getting permission or taking counsel of the quorum of Mormon high priests to which he belongs... He must act first as a Mormon apostle and second or third as a citizen of Utah and patriotic American.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that the monogamous Reed Smoot had never been party to a plural marriage did not prevent salacious innuendo or spurious charges of polygamy from being lodged against him. Rev. J.L. Leilich, head of Methodist missions in Utah, conveyed a sworn statement to the chairman of the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, demanding that Smoot be denied his seat. Rev. Leilich swore – with absolutely no basis in fact – that “Reed Smoot is a polygamist... The said Reed Smoot has lived and cohabited with both his legal wife and his plural wife in the State of Utah and elsewhere, as occasion offered.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite his own conventional marriage, Smoot was attacked on the basis of his association with a Church that (prior to its formal renunciation of the practice in its 1890 “Manifesto” and President

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<sup>34</sup> See Harvard S. Heath, “Smoot Hearings” in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> See “Oppose Mormon Candidate,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1902.

<sup>36</sup> “Anti-Smoot Fight Opens: Missionary of Salt Lake Files Charges, Claiming the Senator-elect Is a Polygamist,” *New York Times*, February 27, 1903.

Smith's still more stringent "Second Manifesto" of 1904<sup>37</sup>) had permitted polygamy. "Have you ever practiced or countenanced polygamy?" he was asked in an interview on the eve of his election. "I never practiced polygamy," he responded. "Did you believe in polygamy before the manifesto was issued?" Reed answered with care: "As an American citizen, I claim the right to believe as I please, so long as it does not interfere with the rights of any citizen." In fact, though he never practiced plural marriage, Smoot's mother, a convert to Mormonism, was the fourth plural wife of Abraham O. Smoot, who, following their marriage, had been arrested and tried as a polygamist. The interview appeared in *The New York Times* on November 7, 1902, under the politically unenviable headline, "Smoot Denies Polygamy: Mormon Apostle, Candidate for United States Senate, Says He Never Had a Plurality of Wives."

Clearly, Smoot's antagonists were hoping, simply by creating the illusion of impropriety, to repeat their successful 1900 campaign to deny his seat in the House of Representatives to Utah's B.H. Roberts, who had indeed practiced plural marriage.<sup>38</sup> "Mr. Roberts should have been seated first and tried later," Mr. Smoot proffered.<sup>39</sup> The campaign against Smoot was ultimately unsuccessful, though often rancorous Senate hearings, exploring in extensive detail not the senator's character or qualifications but the prescribed doctrines of his faith, continued until February 20, 1907. Matthew Bowman writes:

For four years the Senate investigated polygamy and its persistence, the content of the endowment ceremony (many senators were troubled at the prayer for vengeance for "the blood of the prophets"), Brigham Young's attempts to establish economic communalism, and most centrally the authority of those men Mormons revered as prophets.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The second manifesto, which imposed excommunication on polygamists, was issued during the course of the Smoot hearings, though after the Schechter address.

<sup>38</sup> See "Polygamist's Wife Barred," *New York Times*, May 1, 1902.

<sup>39</sup> "Smoot Denies Polygamy..." *New York Times*, November 7, 1902.

<sup>40</sup> Bowman, p. 158.

The LDS Church was depicted as a “religious monopoly”<sup>41</sup> — an accusation at times lodged against the Roman Catholic Church, as well. Ultimately, Smoot’s good standing in the United States Senate was affirmed by a vote of 47 to 28. “Nine Republicans broke ranks to vote against their colleague from Utah; three Democrats crossed party lines to vote for him.”<sup>42</sup>

“Ironically, Joseph F. Smith had hoped that sending Smoot to Washington as an ambassador of sorts would cool rather than stoke apprehension of Mormons.” Though the desired effect was certainly not immediately forthcoming, in the end, Smith’s vision prevailed. Senator Smoot served with distinction for 30 years and as an Apostle of his Church until his death in 1941. “Perhaps more than any other individual, Reed Smoot molded and shaped the positive national image the Church was to enjoy throughout the twentieth century.”<sup>43</sup>

If the political vulnerability of the LDS Church and rampant anti-Mormon sentiment in Schechter’s New York, in the nation’s capital, and around America motivated and perhaps even animated his 1903 remarks, they were not the only factors weighing on him that April morning. The infamous Kishinev pogroms took place on April 19 and 20, 1903, just a week prior to Schechter’s Seminary dedication address. The pogroms initiated a fearful wave of Jewish emigration, and sparked outrage throughout the international Jewish community.

The anti-Jewish riots in Kishinev, Bessarabia,<sup>44</sup> are worse than the censor will permit to publish. There was a well laid-out plan for the general massacre of Jews on the day following the Russian Easter. The mob was led by priests, and the general cry, “Kill the Jews,” was taken up all over the city. The Jews were taken wholly unaware and were slaughtered like sheep. The dead number 120[,] and the injured about 500. The scenes of horror attending this massacre are beyond description. Babies were literally torn to pieces by the frenzied and bloodthirsty mob. The local police made no attempt to check the reign of terror.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Flake, p. 145.

<sup>43</sup> See Harvard S. Heath, “Smoot Hearings” in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>44</sup> Now Moldova.

At sunset the streets were piled with corpses and wounded. Those who could make their escape fled in terror, and the city is now practically deserted of Jews.<sup>45</sup>

According to a centennial commemoration of the pogroms, "1300 homes and businesses were looted and destroyed[,] and 2000 families were left homeless."<sup>46</sup> *The Jewish Forward* reported the massacre with the headline "Rivers of Jewish Blood in Kishinev."<sup>47</sup>

A public meeting to protest the massacre was held in an East Side Manhattan synagogue on April 27, 1903, the day following the Seminary dedication.<sup>48</sup> It stands to reason that the matter was already widely known in the Jewish community, and the synagogue gathering well publicized by the time Schechter delivered his remarks. Indeed, the pogrom must have been a topic of wide conversation, concern, and consciousness among his listeners.

It seems clear that Kishinev also had a profound impact on Schechter himself. In the year that followed, Schechter frequently addressed the issue of anti-Semitism. On May 16, 1904, he delivered a lecture in which he surveyed the long history of anti-Jewish brutality, beginning with *Contra Apion*, Flavius Josephus' first century defense of Judaism, and lamenting that such acts of hate and violence had been "raised to the dignity of an 'ism,' and the term 'Anti-Semitism' was invented."<sup>49</sup> In his remarks he refers to the literature of anti-Semitism as "actual vivisection, without the relief of anaesthetics,"<sup>50</sup> echoing some of the most graphic imagery of Hayyim Nahman Bialik's poetic response<sup>51</sup> to the Kishinev attacks, published in the summer of 1903.

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<sup>45</sup> "Jewish Massacre Denounced," *New York Times*, April 28, 1903.

<sup>46</sup> J.J. Goldberg, "Kishinev 1903: The Birth of a Century," *The Forward*, April 4, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>48</sup> Such protests were also held in London and Paris. See "Jewish Massacre Denounced," *New York Times*, April 28, 1903.

<sup>49</sup> "Rebellion Against Being a Problem," in *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers by Solomon Schechter*, (Burning Bush Press, 1959), p. 67.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>51</sup> "A tale of cloven belly, feather-filled... of how a dagger halved an infant's word." See "Upon the Slaughter" and "The City of Slaughter" in *Complete Poetic Works of Hayyim Nahman Bialik, Translated from the*

In May 1904, presiding over his first Seminary commencement and ordination exercises, Schechter adjured graduating rabbis, "It will be your duty to defend Israel against these unjust attacks."<sup>52</sup>

It is a sad and bitter irony that, at the dedication of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, which would in time place interreligious dialogue at the very heart of its public activities and institutional persona, bigoted and intolerant invective against a community of faith was given so prominent a platform. In his gratuitous attacks on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Schechter, alas, embraced the morality of the mob, lending his stature as a "world class scholar" and the prestige of the institution he led to widespread, populist prejudice, discrimination, and violence. Perhaps, like Senator Isidor Rayner, Schechter feared offending the Christian majority by taking an opposing position, however principled or appropriate.

It is a further irony that Schechter aligned himself with a Protestant coalition for which territorial and market share concerns were only thinly veiled by a campaign of righteous indignation regarding the history of polygamy in the LDS Church. Schechter knew well that Jews in Muslim-majority countries still practiced polygamy, as they would to some extent until the massive Sephardic migration to the State of Israel in the 1950s. No doubt he witnessed the phenomenon first-hand during his storied and personally defining travels to Egypt and the Cairo Geniza.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps Schechter's anti-LDS remarks were designed to defend preemptively against precisely such charges.

More ironic still is that the Seminary, together with the Conservative Movement Schechter molded and championed, would evolve in much the same social and religious manner as the Protestant churches which joined forces against Mormonism and Senator Smoot. They

spent the rest of the century edging toward accepting a wider variety of consensual relationships among adults,

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*Hebrew* (ed., Israel Efros, *The Histadruth Ivrit of America*, 1948), translations by Abraham M. Klein, pp. 127-143.

<sup>52</sup> "The Reconciliation of Israel," in *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers by Solomon Schechter*, (Burning Bush Press, 1959), p. 76.

<sup>53</sup> For a full account of Schechter's involvement with the Geniza, see Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* (Jewish Encounter Series, 2016).

while the Mormons moved in the opposite direction to become aggressive defenders of the traditional family structure.<sup>54</sup>

That process of increasing inclusiveness in matters of romantic relationships and standards of sexual conduct remains at the forefront of Conservative Movement concerns, culture, and branding.<sup>55</sup>

There can be no doubt that Schechter's Seminary dedication audience was shaken and still reeling in the wake of the horrific pogroms in Kishinev. Might they not reasonably have expected the Seminary President to address these concerns in his address? Indeed, he did. By so caustically impugning the legitimacy of the Mormon Church, Schechter unscrupulously if effectively exposed a religious minority yet more unpopular, and even more vulnerable to abuse in 1903 than the Jewish community. If among "real Americans" the inhumane instincts that moved the mob in Kishinev were brewing, Schechter made clear that another, more newly besieged object for their brutality was readily available: a "caricature" faith "injurious to the country" – with its own Moses and Zion and Jerusalem.

Well over a century after the events of 1903, negative attitudes toward The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are rife among American Jews. Professor Jacob Neusner typified Jewish anti-LDS

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<sup>54</sup> Flake, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> In addition to relaxing prohibitions uniquely binding on those of priestly descent (see Isaac Klein, *Responsa and Halakhic Studies* [KTAV, 1975]), see also Elliot Dorff "'This Is My Beloved, This Is My Friend': A Rabbinic Letter on Human Intimacy" (Rabbinical Assembly, 1996), which acknowledges the potential for sanctity in non-marital sexual activity. See also Elliot Dorff, Daniel Nevins, and Avram Reisner, "Homosexuality, Human Dignity and Halakhah" (Rabbinical Assembly responsum, 2006), as well as "Rituals and Documents of Marriage and Divorce for Same-Sex Couples" by the same authors. More recent, much publicized if as yet unresolved discussions in the Conservative Movement have focused on intermarriage, as well as the solemnization of relationships in a manner which retains some of the language, forms, and appearance of marriage, but is designed specifically so as to obviate the legal complexities and consequences of that traditional institution.

sentiments in his stated opposition to Brigham Young University establishing a campus in Jerusalem:

Nothing they do is selfless. Everything they do has the single goal of converting everyone they can. Pure and simple. The proposed BYU Center will provide access, not only to Israeli Jewry but also (and especially) to large numbers of foreign, including American, Jewish youth who study in Jerusalem.<sup>56</sup>

To his great credit, Professor Neusner changed his outlook and grew beyond these early misgivings. Indeed, he later published a learned article in *BYU Studies*.<sup>57</sup> Having observed both the worthy comportment of Latter-day Saints at the Jerusalem facility, and having developed warm personal and professional relationships with Latter-day Saint colleagues, Neusner explicitly framed his scholarly contribution as a contrite corrective. Neusner invoked the 1841 Prayer of Orson Hyde<sup>58</sup> (offered 19 years before the birth of Theodor Herzl), dedicating the Land of Israel for a future Jewish State:

Let the Land become abundantly fruitful when possessed by its rightful heirs... Inspire the hearts of kings and the powers of the earth to look with a friendly eye towards this place... Raise up Jerusalem as its capital, and constitute her people a distinct nation and government...<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Egal Feldman's *Dual Destinies: The Jewish Encounter with Protestant America* (University of Illinois Press, 1990). Also cited in Alfred Kolatch, *Great Jewish Quotations* (Jonathan David, 1996).

<sup>57</sup> Jacob Neusner, "Conversations in Nauvoo about the Corporeality of God," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996-97), pp. 7-30.

<sup>58</sup> Elder Orson Hyde (1805-1878) was an early Church leader, original member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from 1847-1875. His Dedicatory Prayer was offered on Jerusalem's Mount of Olives. Hyde added to his blessing a prescient warning that a merciless and mortal enemy, bent on the wholesale destruction of the Jewish People, would arise in Europe. See Epperson, pp. 149ff..

<sup>59</sup> These words appear in Hyde's November 22, 1841 letter to Brother Pratt, as reproduced at "Orson Hyde's Dedicatory Prayer of

Further, Neusner observed:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sent not only missionaries, but also apostles bearing the task simply to pray, even in Jerusalem, for the return of Israel to Zion. To the merit attained by the dreaming of that dream and the saying of that prayer, we of holy Israel have to respond. And I take it as my task on this occasion to do so.<sup>60</sup>

While the transformation in Professor Neusner's thinking about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints represents a personal philosophical and political sea-change, his original derogation of Church motives continues to characterize a dynamic prevalent in the American Jewish community. His penitence remains, alas, an exception, not yet deemed a worthy example to be widely emulated.

It is impossible to determine to what degree Solomon Schechter's Seminary dedication address contributed to Neusner's early views, nor to the suspicions and distrust that too often characterize American Jewish attitudes toward the LDS Church. What is clear is that, at one of the most momentous milestones in the history of the Conservative Movement and its flagship academic institution, Schechter trafficked in hate speech. Under the cover of a fashionable prejudice, he shamefully lent respectability to the very species of triumphalist religious bigotry that had excited attacks on Jews throughout our history and, more to the point, in the days immediately preceding his remarks.

It is left for the "latter day" disciples of Solomon Schechter — the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Conservative Movement, the Jewish Day Schools bearing his name across the continent and educating thousands of elementary and high school students, the Schechter Institutes in Israel together with their allied Rabbinical School and other educational bodies — to acknowledge this historic offense and to effect a *tikkun*: that is, to undertake meaningful, contrite, and redemptive

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dedication on the Mount of Olives," as accessed at [http://www.nyx.net/~cgibbons/orson\\_hyde\\_prayer.html](http://www.nyx.net/~cgibbons/orson_hyde_prayer.html) on June 12, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Neusner, p. 7.



“corrective measures” in response. In shaping the future course of American Jewish relations with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, may American Jews be guided by the insight of Solomon Schechter in a far worthier moment. Discussing the tradition that, in the hereafter, we will be asked in our final reckoning whether we related to others with due humility and an appropriately deferential sense of submission, Schechter counsels:

Man should accordingly perceive in his fellow-man not only an equal whose rights he is bound to respect, but a superior whom he is obliged to revere and love. In every person, it is pointed out by these saints, precious and noble elements are latent, not to be found with anybody else.<sup>61</sup>

Such an attitudinal reorientation in the American Jewish community would more closely align with the clarion call of martyred South African anti-Apartheid activist, Steve Biko:

We regard our living together not as an unfortunate mishap warranting endless competition among us but as a deliberate act of God to make us a community of brothers and sisters jointly involved in the quest for a composite answer to the varied problems of life.<sup>62</sup>

“Real Americans” were not constrained to await the wisdom of a sensitive moral luminary suffering under South African Apartheid for this insight into the challenge of navigating cultural differences and religious diversity. As early as 1785, American Founding Father

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<sup>61</sup> Solomon Schechter, “Saints and Saintliness,” in *Studies in Judaism, Second Series* (Jewish Publication Society, 1908), p. 169.

<sup>62</sup> This statement was included in a paper titled “Some African Cultural Concepts,” which Biko delivered at a conference convened by the Interdenominational Association of African Ministers of Religion (IDAMASA) at the Ecumenical Lay Training Centre in Edendale, Natal in 1971. Steve Biko (1946-1977), father of five, and known as the “Father of Black Consciousness,” died at the age of 30 after being severely beaten while in South African police custody. His life is the basis for the 1987 film *Cry Freedom*.

and Declaration of Independence signer Benjamin Rush<sup>63</sup> prayed for the day “when the different religious sects, like the different strings in a musical instrument, shall compose a harmony delightful in the ears of heaven itself!”<sup>64</sup>

Would that such an affirming spirit of congenial mutuality had informed the 1903 Seminary dedication! May it increasingly guide all those grappling to overcome entrenched and insidious historic patterns of prejudice and distrust toward neighbors practicing different faiths. Among those seeking such illumination, may those Americans who celebrate the glories of the Mosaic Religion come increasingly to celebrate America’s glorious religious mosaic, as well.

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<sup>63</sup> Benjamin Rush (1746-1813) was a delegate to the Continental Congress, signer of the Declaration of Independence, civic leader in Philadelphia, and a renowned physician who served as Surgeon General of George Washington’s Continental Army and is recognized as among the leading early pioneers of American Psychiatry. It was Dr. Rush who famously facilitated the reconciliation of John Adams and his erstwhile Vice President, Thomas Jefferson, after the former Presidents, friends, and compatriots had become bitterly estranged.

<sup>64</sup> See William Lee Miller, *The First Liberty: Religion and the American Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), p. 6. Also quoted in Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Bible* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), p. 297.

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