

Trouble in Paradise

by Jack R. Fischel

Lancaster County in Southeastern Pennsylvania is well known as the home of the Amish. Thousands of tourists flock yearly to Lancaster County to visit towns with such exotic names as Blue Ball, Intercourse and Paradise in the hope of catching a glimpse of the 20th century descendants of the Anabaptist movement. But Lancaster harbors more than the Amish and their more liberal counterparts the Mennonites. The county is in fact inundated with hundreds of churches representing practically every segment of Protestant Christian denominationalism. One need not go to the mid-West to find religious orthodoxy, one can find the Bible-belt right in the middle of Pennsylvania.

If the intent of many tourists is to seek out the Amish riding in their horse and buggy and to visit an Amish homestead, then it comes as an unexpected bonus to find a Jewish community located right in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch (Deutsch) country. Not only are Jewish tourists surprised to find a synagogue but are positively shocked to learn that the Jewish community supports three synagogues (Orthodox, Conservative and Reform) and a spacious Jewish Community Center.

There are approximately 1800 Jews living in Lancaster County among a total population of more than 341,000. The Jews of Lancaster, therefore, are less than 1% of the population. Unlike their counterparts in the suburbs of New Jersey or Long Island, the Jews of Lancaster are not



Temple Shaarai Shomayim at the northwestern corner of Duke and James streets is the house of worship owned by the Reformed Jewish congregation. It was built in 1895-6. The early synagogue was located at Orange and Christian streets 1867 to 1895. Congregation Shaarai Shomayim evolved from a German Jewish congregation chartered in 1856 to represent liberal or Reform Judaism. This house of worship is the fourth oldest still in constant use by American Jews.

easily recognizable by neighborhood, vocation or even by name (surnames almost certain to be Jewish in New York turn out to be German in Lancaster County). Jews do not live in any identifiable "neighborhood" as such nor for that matter is there an area which could be pointed to as the Jewish "ghetto." In Lancaster, Jews do not seem to have a disproportionate hold on any of the professions in the county (Jewish doctors and attorneys exist but are relatively small in number). The two major colleges in the area, Franklin and Marshall and Millersville University, have a small proportion of Jewish faculty—although the Jewish student population at Franklin and Marshall is estimated to be about a third of the student body with an active Hillel organization. By contrast, there are approximately 60 Jewish students at Millersville out of a total student body of approximately 6,000.

With regard to business, Jews are not distinguishable although there are several concerns which were founded and continue to be operated by Jewish families. There are also slum-lords in the city of Lancaster who are Jewish but it is hard to determine if a connection is made between their ethnic affiliation and their well-earned unsavory reputations. Thus

when one thinks of business and industry in Lancaster County such names as Sperry New Holland, Armstrong, A.M.P. and R.C.A. readily come to mind—organizations not known for being top-heavy with Jewish executives.

The visibility of the Jews of Lancaster, therefore, is not readily apparant. An outsider would have to probe deeply to find the economic and social make-up of the Jewish population. What he would find, however, would be two communities. The first being the “old-timers,” descendants of the German-Jewish families that migrated to Lancaster in the mid-nineteenth century. The great grandchildren of these immigrants operate many of the businesses that Jews do own in Lancaster County. The other community can best be described as middle-management transients, sharing the mobility of their non-Jewish counterparts in corporate America. Many of these Jews come to Lancaster, settle for a few years, and then are transferred by their organizations. Although one does not perceive a closeness between the two communities, there is nevertheless much in common between them. Both Jewish communities share a middle class regard for values and commitment to Jewish institutional life in Lancaster County. They share many of the concerns that Jews in other parts of the country have; Israel (Lancaster Jews have a good record in raising funds for the United Jewish Welfare fund), missionary activity in the community and a sensitivity to what the “goyim” think about them. Jews, therefore, in Lancaster County manage to keep a low profile in the community and in turn experience little overt anti-Semitism although cases of it have ocured. Perhaps, the most poignant example of latent anti-Jewish feeling can be found in the reluctance of one of the more prominent “clubs” in Lancaster to elect a Jew as a member. This festering sore remains a continuous reminder that a line still exists after the working day is completed.

On the whole Jews do not feel alienated in Lancaster County. One can argue that the nature of Jewish-Christian relations hinges more on a lack of sensitivity on the part of the overall community to the interests of the Jewish community. This manifests itself in the “givenness” of the Christian belief system which periodically surfaces in the school systems in the form of Christian-oriented assemblies, concerts and holiday programs. There appears to be an unwillingness on the part of many teachers, administrators and members of school boards to make a distinction between secular culture and Christian culture.

There are organizations which try to bridge the gap. One of them, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, attempts to bring about some dialogue with regard to the sensitivities of the small Jewish community. The Lancaster City-County Human Relations Committee took the lead in attempting to counter the dissemination of the Christian Yellow Pages in

the county a few years ago. But with all of the above, to use a current colloquial phrase, the Jews of Lancaster do not feel threatened but they also do not know what the "bottom-line" is with regard to the apparant polite exteriors of their non-Jewish neighbors (a problem, perhaps, not unique to Lancaster Jewry). Jews in the community would like to know what their neighbors feel about the security of Israel, conversionary activity in the county (a Messianic Jewish Fellowship has recently begun to operate in Lancaster), and Jews in general.

Towards taking a first step in finding the answers to some of these concerns, the Lancaster City-County Human Relations Committee successfully sought funds from the Comprehensive Educational Training Act (C.E.T.A.) to conduct a study of Lancaster County ministers with regard to their attitudes towards Jews and other minorities. The model for the survey was the two studies done in the 1960's and early 1970's by Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (Harper 1966), a study of the beliefs of church-goers with regard to Jews in the San Francisco Bay area and *Wayward Shepherds* (Harper 1972), a study of the connection between the beliefs of ministers and the persistence of Anti-Semitism. Given the intense "Bible-belt" atmosphere of Lancaster

Temple Beth El is the house of worship owned by the Conservative Jewish congregation at 25 North Lime Street, formerly the Baker mansion. The handsome Georgian building was purchased in 1945 when the congregation was founded. Conservative Judaism represents the middle position between Orthodox and Reform Judaism, and while it practices traditional rituals and theology, it does so in the context of the American experience.



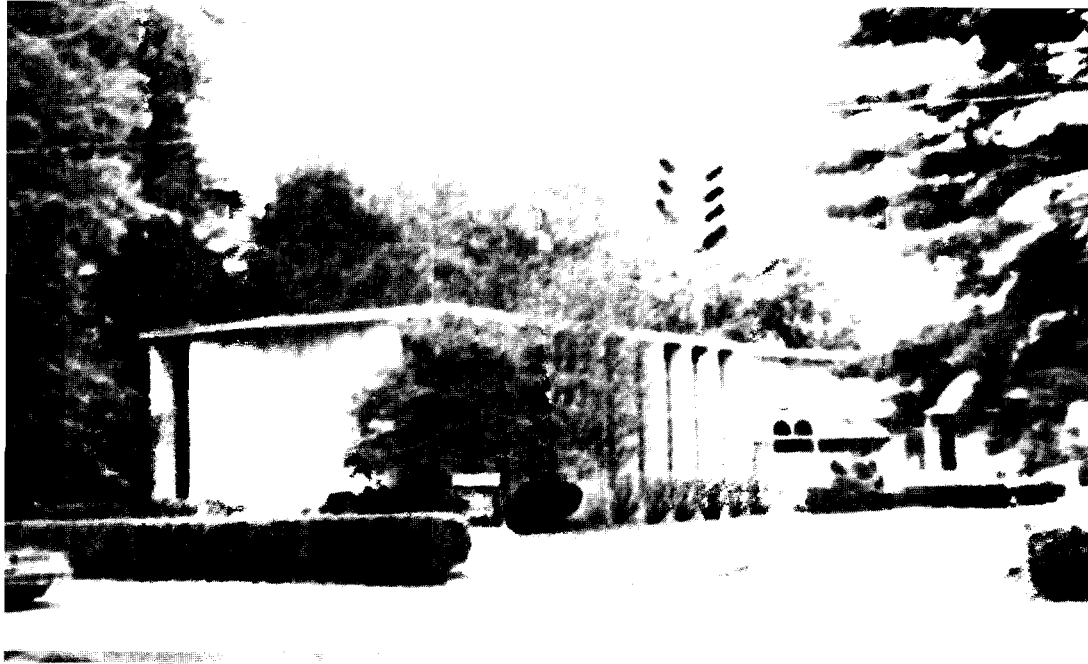
County, it appeared that such a study would be valuable in attempting to fix Lancaster County's place within the overall conclusions which Glock and Stark reached in their works.

The study, entitled "Lancaster County Ministers and their Attitudes towards Jews, blacks and Hispanics," was undertaken in late 1978 and was completed in May 1980. Because of time limitations and funding, the study was limited to interviewing ministers rather than a random sampling of church-goers (although this may be attempted in the future). It was also felt that in a community the size of Lancaster, ministers probably have a greater influence on the moral and ethical beliefs of their congregations than do ministers in larger populations areas.

Following the outline of Glock and Stark, the study divided the interviewees along denominational lines based on their reply to questions regarding their doctrinal beliefs—the Orthodoxy scale. The ministers were divided into one of three categories of Churches; Main Line Ministers or the more "liberal" ministers with regard to doctrinal beliefs as well as on social issues. For the purposes of the study, the clergy of the Lutheran, United Presbyterian, United Methodist, Episcopal, United Church of Christ denominations and Society of Friends (Quakers) were included in this category.

Conservative clergy (including Plain and Non-Resisting Denominations) comprised the second category of ministers. Included in this grouping were ministers who represented religious denominations which grew out of the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century and Pietist movement of the eighteenth century. The members of the sample included clergy of Mennonite and Brethren Churches (the Amish do not have ordained ministers and have lay leaders who were approached but refused to participate in the survey). Although facile generalizations should not be made about these groups, nevertheless they do share (to a greater or lesser degree) a rejection of certain aspects of the dominant lifestyles of modern, urban and technological society. This trait spans a spectrum of all possible degrees, ranging from the marked austerity of Old Order Amish to the modesty and humility of the contemporary Brethren. The conservative clergy in our sample shared a theological and moral doctrine which rejects the validity of infant baptism, accepts the necessity of repentance and conversion for salvation, disavows the practice of war and other forms of violence and avoids an indulgence in luxury. While Mennonite and Brethren Churches also maintain schools, colleges, hospitals and the like, the local congregations tend to be considerably more autonomous than those of the main-line Protestant denominations.

The Bible and Fundamentalist clergy represent the third category of interviewees. Although in some aspects this category of clergy appear to



Congregation Degel Israel (Orthodox) built this fine synagogue in 1964 at 1120 Columbia Avenue. Its stained glass windows depicting the Jewish holy days are among the finest examples of art in the nation. The congregation was formed in 1896 as an outgrowth of and eventually successor to three Orthodox congregations, Chizuk Emunah, Hagudah Sholom and Kesher Torah.

resemble their conservative counterparts, there are however significant differences. In many parts of the county the word "Fundamentalist" can become a trigger word for anti-intellectualism as well as illiberalism. Fundamentalist clergy in Lancaster County who were interviewed, on the whole, tend to share a belief in the concept of the Bible as the divinely inspired and wholly inerrant word of God, and a strong belief in the reach of Biblical prophecy for our own times ("dispensationalism"). Furthermore, the ministers in the sample represented completely autonomous local congregations and as a matter of religious principle decline any affiliation with major denominational groups.

In addition to dividing the ministers along denominational lines, the survey also took into account the age, educational background and location (urban vs. rural) of the clergy. A total of 149 ministers out of 530 were sampled (because of the small number of Roman Catholic priests in Lancaster, a decision was made to interview them but not deduce conclusions from their responses). With regard to the section of the survey dealing with Jews, the following questions were asked:

- 1 - Many Jews are often too quick to claim that other people are persecuting or harassing them.
- 2 - Many Jews are frequently torn between their support for Israel and their loyalty to the United States.

3 - Many Jews prefer to stick to themselves and tend to socialize with each other rather than with non-Jews.

4 - Jewish businessmen control an unusually large portion of the financial resources of the United States.

5 - Many Jews tend to be more materialistic in their personal goals and values than non-Jews.

The survey results were both surprising and extremely disturbing. Taking into account age, education and location of the ministers, the survey showed that on the average 44% of the ministers interviewed scored high on the negative stereotyping scale. Even among the better educated, younger and urban clergy, (predominately ministers of the "main-line" churches) the negative response was 28.8%. Negative stereotyping was highest among the older (over 45), fundamentalist, less educated and rural clergy—the minister who has little or no contact with Jews. One could infer that at least among the Lancaster clergy, historic types of stereotyping are still alive and well in the county. The reader must recall that Jews are not readily visible in Lancaster County and yet the persistence of stereotyping continues.

Glock and Stark in *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* and their *Wayward Shepherds* concluded that anti-Semitism remained latent in Orthodox Christian belief. The results of Project Relic appears to validate Glock and Stark's conclusions for Lancaster County. However the report raises questions which should be answered before the tag of anti-Semitism be labelled against a large portion of the Lancaster clergy. For example, is it possible that because the Jewish population in Lancaster is small, many of the clergy base their image of the Jew on abstractions rather than on personal contact? Is this anti-Semitism or simply "received wisdom" with regard to the Jew as a result of the insulation of both groups from one another (but then how do we account for the attitudes of close to 30% of the better educated and urban clergy)? What can Jews do to change the image? Is it desirable to do so? Is it possible that the accelerated intensity of missionary activity in Lancaster County is based on the assumption that since Jews are "materialistic" therefore it is the duty of Christians to show Jews the "light." Is this anti-Semitism or misguided altruism?

There is much work to be done in the area of ecumenical relations between Jews and Christians in Lancaster County. Recent history has taught the Jew that stereotyping is the necessary precondition for anti-Semitism. If a sizable proportion of the Lancaster clergy share in negative stereotyping of Jews, what can we expect from the laity?

Perhaps it was not a slip of the tongue when the Reverend Bailey E.

Smith, a Southern Baptist leader, said that "God Almighty does not hear the prayers of a Jew." Project Relic seems to indicate that those prejudiced remarks made by Reverend Mr. Smith may well have found a sympathetic ear among a segment of the Lancaster County clergy. If this be true, then the Lancaster Jewish Community, joined by others of good will, must find ways of countering these biased beliefs.



Established in 1943 the Lancaster Jewish Community Center serves the entire Jewish community's social, cultural and athletic needs. This large building along the Oregon Pike was built in 1974 and was enlarged recently. It is named in honor of Mary Sachs whose generosity and civic leadership contributed greatly to Lancaster.

About the Contributor

Dr. Fischel is a professor of history in Millersville University of Pennsylvania, and is active in various organizations of the Jewish community.