

Problem of money gets in the way of lofty rabbinic issues

THE RABBI'S TURN

RABBI ARTHUR GREEN

"It's a different kind of column, rabbi," the Exponent editor said to me. "We don't want you rabbis to write about the Torah portion again; we've seen that already. Write about something different. What about what's *really* on your mind?"

"Alright," I said some four years ago. And I've been doing just that.

So here it is. Now let me tell you what's really on my mind. It's *money*, the money it costs these days to be a Jew, to run a Jewish institution, to maintain Jewish life.

We are living through times of economic scarcity. True, almost no one in the Jewish community is going hungry. The same may *not* be said, however, for the institutions we need to support Jewish life: schools, synagogues, libraries and all the rest. They are hurting, and hurting badly.

Jewish life begins, as we all know, with education. It is now widely accepted that day-school education will give us our best chance to provide the cadre of knowledgeable, and hopefully committed, Jewish leaders that we'll need for the future of Jewish life in this country. Fortunately, day-school enrollments have grown spectacularly in recent years, especially outside the Orthodox community. This is a most positive and welcome development, one the Jewish community should be supporting with all its might.

But how can Jews — ordinary middle-class Jews — afford a day-school education? Tuition fees are going through the roof, pushing up to more than \$8,000 or \$9,000 a year per child. What do you do if you have three children? How can one family possibly afford it? True, there is some scholarship help available, but not nearly enough.

If the Jewish community truly cared about its future, it would work to provide full scholarships to Jewish day school for all those who want to attend. Liberal Jewish leadership would climb down from its outdated policy of opposition to tuition tax credits and other possible means of government support for the secular parts of day-school education.

We are talking about Jewish survival, and if survival is too expensive for Jews to afford, it simply won't happen. We, as a community, simply cannot afford the alternative. This reality

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may just be more vital to us as a community than our tradition of support for the public schools. It is time we rethink this sacred cow.

Jewish education in all forms is grossly under-supported by a community that we all know contains pockets of great wealth. Though there has been remarkably positive movement on the part of Jewish federations, in this city and elsewhere, in recent years, wealthy individuals and family foundations are not yet bearing their full share of the burden. A great deal more can be done, especially in such creative new areas as family education, multigenerational education and adult Jewish literacy programs, with the right funding.

The same is true for the synagogue and its afternoon school. We, as a community, have not invested seriously enough in Jewish education to make Hebrew-school teaching a career to which bright and committed young Jews might aspire. Teaching in Hebrew and Sunday schools is seen, even more today than in the past, as something to be done for supplementary income while in college or in the course of a public-school teaching career.

When speaking of Jewish underfunding, how could one possibly neglect mentioning the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations and Jewish life on the college campus? Everybody agrees that something has to be done for Jews in college. I've heard that screamed from the rooftops for nearly 30 years now. But look at the rabbi/congregant ratio on the college campus — one rabbi for 7,000 Jewish kids at one school, a rabbi and a program assistant for 10,000 at another.

How can campus Hillels possibly do an adequate job with that kind of staffing? Major Hillels should have three or four rabbis on staff, trained specifically for work on the college campus and reflecting different religious orientations and skills.

And now I finally reach home territory. Jewish institutions of higher learning are going through a terrible time. This is true of the seminaries in all denominations, as well as community-based colleges and centers of learning.

You can read in the press any day this month about major universities that are cutting back programs and eliminating departments. That includes institutions with endowments in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Most Jewish institutions have never built serious endowment funds. We live from hand to mouth and are entirely too dependent on the exigencies of the day-to-day financial condition of our supporters. More of my own time as a college president is devoted to fund raising this year than ever before.

"But look how generous Jews are!" you'll say. "Compare Jewish giving to the rest of the population and you'll see how much we care!"

True, Jewish giving is higher than that of most other segments of American society. We have a record of which we should be very proud, and that includes our generosity to Israel and to Soviet Jewry. Both of these must continue, and I am fully supportive of them.

But if we are to build a Judaism for future generations in this country, the level of giving will have to increase fivefold or tenfold during the next few years.

Most Jews with real money do not know what it means to give until it hurts, to give to the point where their own lifestyles will be affected by the amount of money they spend on

Jewish living. If they would like to learn this lesson, I have a suggestion for them.

Just let them come to our neighborhoods any day and talk to parents with two or three kids in day school. Let them talk to rabbinical students who are working so many hours a week to support themselves that they cannot keep up with their rigorous course of study. Let them talk to kids on campus who find that the rabbi never has time to reach out to them. Then they may begin to learn what level of giving we really need to build a Jewish future. ■