

Affirmative Action and Masada

There is an interesting footnote to the Bakke decision by the California Supreme Court, described more fully elsewhere in today's Bulletin.

The attorney who won this decision, Reynold Colvin, has consistently over the years made brilliant and distinguished contributions to the field of Jewish public affairs, apart from his leadership in other arenas of local Jewish life. He was the first chairman of the Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California, been Chairman of the Jewish Community Relations Council, and has served as an officer or board member of the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Congress. All of these Jewish public affairs organizations have strenuously attempted to draw the line between affirmative action and quota systems.

It would have been easier to say: "Affirmative action, if perverted, can lead to quotas, and therefore we are against affirmative action." That would have been conscienceless and probably disastrous. The Jewish agencies, almost alone, have toiled to draw that difficult distinction between supporting affirmative action and opposing quotas. The Bakke decision draws that important distinction, with respect to professional school admissions.

The footnote is this: in the same week that the Bakke decision was announced, the American Jewish Committee - of which Colvin is currently local chairman - announced that it had negotiated an "affirmative action" agreement with a national insurance company, under which that insurance company would make an active effort to hire more Jews in executive positions. In that agreement, numerical goals are set, in order to measure progress; but quotas are specifically ruled out.

A number of calls have been received about the "negative action" of a television special, "MASADA", which has recently appeared on a couple of Bay Area TV stations. The first 50 minutes is a stirring account of that historic episode in Jewish history, using Israeli actors. In the last 10 minutes, a Christian evangelist comes on to suggest to Jews that they turn to Christ. Jewish viewers are enthralled by the first 50 minutes, and left in a state of shock by the last 10 minutes.

The program is produced by Morris Cerullo World Evangelism Inc. of San Diego. Cerullo, the gentleman who comes on at the end of the program, has told his backers that he considers this program an "exciting development in our Jewish outreach." Cerullo writes:

"This is where the TV special has its impact for the Jew. For, you see, I give a message at the end based on Psalm 81: "Oh that my people had hearkened to me and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries." Then I tell the on-looking audience that Jesus offers a permanent solution."

Apparently Cerullo is unaware of the irony. Here he presents the story of Masada, symbolic of the refusal of the Jews to abandon their beliefs. Then he suggests that Jews can avoid Masada - by abandoning their beliefs! It is the kind of reverse Catch-22 which has always been proposed to Jews: you can avoid being hurt as a people, if you will only commit suicide as a people. Some suggestions along that line are still being made to Israel.

It is the standard line of the Christian evangelists, of course. Cerullo, Moon, all of them say to the Jews: "Your problems are of your own making. You are being punished for refusing to become non-Jews." We know that, fellows. That is what the Visigoth Kings said to us; that is what Torquemada said to us; that

is what the Moslems said to us; that is what the Soviet Union said to us. And they all thought that they were commissioned to do the work of their particular gods -- the work of punishing the Jews.

It was therefore appropriate for people to express their distaste for the special trickery in "MASADA". Cerullo paid for that TV showing. But, as the National Conference of Christians and Jews wrote to the local TV stations which carried the program: "Under the guise of love and concern for Jews, it is an exercise in the phenomena of blaming the victims... we do not wish to place limitations on the freedom of the press, or the constitutionally guaranteed free exercise of religion. Rather, this is a plea to Christians to live by the principle of pluralism on which this nation is founded, and permit Jews to be Jews without harassment or pressure."

At the least, the program should have been labelled for what it was.