

MORAL POLLUTION

There was deposited on the steps of some San Francisco homes last week a brochure advertising a pornographic shop. The brochure featured pictures of young boys in explicit sexual postures and acts.

Is that, too, protected as freedom of expression? Have we lost all sense of distinction between liberty and libertinism? Is the matter of any special concern to the Jewish community?

When Dianne Feinstein, as a Supervisor, tried to place some restrictions on movie houses showing pornographic and bestiality films, she was laughed down as a "bluenose." Some civil libertarians expressed shock at her efforts. There were other civil libertarians, concerned about constitutional freedom of speech, who were also concerned about the pollution of moral standards in our community. But for the most part, *they* were afraid to come out of the closet.

Society has a responsibility to try to maintain the continuity of *its* moral standards. It has a concern with the cultural climate, as it affects those moral standards. There's no use pretending that the cultural climate doesn't influence young people. It is one thing to say that government cannot interfere with what anyone does in privacy; but it is another thing to say that government cannot regulate the public flaunting and celebration of immoral behavior.

Sure, there's a problem of defining public immorality. There's also a problem of defining unacceptable air pollution and noise pollution, but we do it. Cigar smokers aren't crazy about not smoking in airplanes -- when they need it the most -- but they usually understand the reason for this imposed restraint. The cultural climate can also be polluted, with even more offensive and destructive consequences.

Morality -- and sexual morality -- defines the way society expects people to treat each other in their personal behavior -- in terms of respect for each other, and in terms of the continuity of the human society. Moral customs change within the boundaries of moral principles. But what we seem to be faced with today is not so much a request for adjustment, as an attack on the very idea of morality or moral restraint.

It is troubling that Jews seem to be in the forefront of the assault on sexual morality. In a recent survey, 78 per cent of American Jews approved of premarital sex, as against 53 per cent of American Christians. About 56 per cent of Jews opposed pornography laws, as against 45 per cent of Christians. About 48 per cent of Jews favored easier divorces as against 28 per cent of Christians. The Jews were more permissive on such matters than the combined youth of the nation, the college-educated population, the highly urban population, or any other definable group in the country. It has been a long time since Maurice Samuels commented, about the world of Sholom Aleichem, that "Jews were too busy having children to bother with sex."

The Jews are also the leading opponents of current efforts to return prayer to the public school. Congress may soon be considering a "Helms Amendment" which would prevent the Supreme Court from interfering with any state law allowing voluntary prayer in the schools, thus partly cancelling the First Amendment. The Helms law would not even require the prayers to be non-sectarian; and we know what "voluntary" means in the compulsory, peer-pressured atmosphere of the school.

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It would be a very unfortunate law -- and you may wish to write your Congressman about it -- but we should note that a number of people supporting the law are doing so because they want to balance the moral climate which they feel is being polluted. If those who both revere the Constitution *and* are concerned about moral pollution, don't come out of the closet with their concern about moral pollution, they will be leaving the field open for those who are not bound by constitutional concerns.

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