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The Excommunication of Mordecai Kaplan

Zachary Silver

On 12 June 1945, a group of Orthodox rabbis known as Agudat HaRabbanim¹ assembled in the Hotel McAlpin in New York and burned the *siddur* of Rabbi Mordecai Menahem Kaplan of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). This ceremonial book burning concluded the formal excommunication of the founder of Reconstructionism. Just one month after the Allies declared victory over Nazi Europe, a group of rabbis used religious principles and a symbolic act to attempt to stifle a dissenting voice within their midst, even going to the extreme act of burning a prayer book that contained the name of God to underscore their point.

Despite extensive scholarship about Kaplan, historians have yet to address this seminal event in the life of one of twentieth-century America's foremost Jewish leaders and thinkers.² Though hardly the first time that Kaplan's work had angered traditional Jews, his *Sabbath Prayer Book* proved to be the work that incited the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada (or "Agudat HaRabbanim" in Hebrew) to issue a formal excommunication—the ancient rite of *herem*—from the Jewish community against Kaplan.³

Responses to both the *herem* and the burning of the *siddur* varied widely in the Jewish community. Reactions to the event diverged even among Kaplan's own colleagues at JTS, where he served as a senior faculty member.⁴ But the news of the *herem* stretched well beyond the Jewish community.⁵ While Agudat HaRabbanim intended the *herem* as an internal edict within the religious Jewish community, its action affected the entire English-speaking Jewish public. Despite the fact that the excommunication was both a rare and drastic Jewish religious rite, its subsequent impotence formed a watershed moment for a wider Jewish community, coming out of wartime and wrestling anew with the meaning of democracy and freedom in America. In many ways, the *herem* indicated the failure of a particular worldview during this transitional moment in Jewish history; the sectarian nature of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis did not mesh with the multivalent culture of postwar America. The very notion of a *herem* in 1945 New York was inimical to the sociological realities of Jewish culture in New York City, particularly when the rabbis enacted it upon somebody outside Agudat HaRabbanim's "jurisdiction."⁶

Though conceptions of a heterogeneous Jewish community were present before the *herem*, that event served as a marker in time, indicating an emerging consensus to allow for free expression of religious ideologies and practices. Non-Jews largely sympathized with Kaplan, specifically because they were deeply disturbed by the silencing of any voice in the midst of a modern democracy. As greater trends of religious universalism took hold in the 1950s, the ideologies of the extreme religious right became increasingly marginalized in America.

Four years before the *herem*, Kaplan had written his first liturgical document, *The New Haggadah*.⁷ That publication led the entire JTS faculty to issue a unanimous letter to Kaplan, condemning him for liturgical blasphemy.⁸ In 1945, Kaplan's *siddur*, a book that took the same "heretical" liberties as the *haggadah*, sent tidal waves through the Seminary.⁹ JTS President Louis Finkelstein had attempted to foster dialogue in the wider community of world Judaism and religion.¹⁰ Agudat HaRabbanim, by contrast, rejected any attempt to reconcile religious and secular life, and it offered only a sectarian sociology, a movement of self-segregation in New York City.

Even though Kaplan had already been a pariah on the faculty for much of his career at the Seminary, and the letter of condemnation about the *haggadah* had served as a warning bell concerning his liturgical license while employed at the institution, Agudat HaRabbanim all but forced Finkelstein to defend Kaplan against outside attack.¹¹ Finkelstein's response to the *herem* tangibly marked the Seminary as an institution that would mandate the representation of a plurality of beliefs, a fundamental principle in the Conservative movement's emerging place of leadership in American Jewish life during the 1950s.

Ancient Ritual in the Big Apple

Although the decision to issue a *herem* grew from Agudat HaRabbanim's very traditional religious principles, the way in which it executed the *herem* was antithetical to the very fabric of the organization. While fighting to seclude itself from secular society during the first half of the twentieth century, Agudat HaRabbanim nevertheless used modern tools to shape the public scope of the event in 1945. Notably, rather than hold the ceremony at a synagogue, it was held in one of New York's largest hotels, located at 34th Street and Broadway, in the center of downtown.¹²

The Hotel McAlpin served a double purpose for Agudat HaRabbanim. On the one hand, the sheer size of the hotel and its prominent position compelled attention—when the hotel was built in 1912, it was the largest hotel in the world.¹³ But the location also held particular resonance for the Yiddish-speaking press and public, Agudat HaRabbanim's principal constituents: From 1932 to 1938 the hotel hosted the Yiddish radio station, WEVD, before the station later moved up to 46th Street.¹⁴

Using a dash of its own irony, the Reconstructionist Foundation also hosted its annual meeting in October 1945 at the Hotel McAlpin. While the topics for the conference—"Unity and Diversity in Jewish Life" and "Necessary Changes in Jewish Religious Beliefs"—could have served the needs of any Jewish organization that sought to integrate Judaism and modernity, these choices for topics particularly resonated in the very location where a group of rabbis had burned a *siddur* only four months before.¹⁵

Agudat HaRabbanim used the press as their primary vehicle to publicize the *herem*. In pre-emancipated society, the rabbis advertised an excommunication by simply announcing it at a community function. But in twentieth-century America, where New York Jews were scattered both by geography and ideology, the only common medium was the press. Perhaps this was the ultimate irony in the situation—that the Union of Orthodox Rabbis expected the social norms of the past to yield the same results in New York City. For an excommunication to have any weight at all, the person being excommunicated needs to abide by the decree and to feel keenly the disgrace of being ousted from a small and closed community. Without this fundamental fact, the excommunication is empty rhetoric—or worse, seen as an unwarranted attack on individual freedom.¹⁶ Though the excommunication featured a particularly extreme example of how the Union of Orthodox Rabbis used the media for its own political purposes, the press had no problem responding to the organization's goals, as Kaplan lamented in his journal:

If I were asked what I regard as the most disheartening aspect in Jewish life as reflected in the tragi-comedy of the herem, I would say that... we have rabbinical gangsters who resort to nazi methods in order to regain their authority and on the other hand our Jewish journalists are cynical about the whole business and treat the very attempt to articulate religious values in terms of a modern outlook in life as silly and superfluous.¹⁷

Ultimately, condemnation of Kaplan's *siddur* was secondary in the *herem* ceremony to a bigger foe of the era: Conservative Judaism. Agudat HaRabbanim used this opportunity to try to undermine the movement's political influence in America. Representing Kaplan as the archetype of Seminary heresy, the formal excommunication document stated:

We have gathered today to condemn with a tremendous protest against one of the Conservative rabbis,¹⁸ who scatters a new siddur in Israel. [The Conservatives] are even more inferior than the Reformers, because every Jewish Haredi knows from a Reformer—that he needs to stray from them. But the Conservatives clothe themselves in a new Judaism, and after them stream Haredi Jews, because they think that it is the same as ours.¹⁹

Of course the real irony concerning this declaration was that this *siddur* was in no way institutionally a Conservative prayer book.²⁰ Though it can be debated whether Kaplan's ideas fit the mold of Conservative Judaism, his ideologies—and certainly his liturgical documents—fell outside the bounds of what JTS was willing to endorse.²¹ In fact, the Conservative movement would publish its *own* prayer book just one year later.²²

Before an audience of more than two hundred rabbis, Agudat HaRabbanim's Rabbi Israel Rosenberg reminded the crowd about *The New Haggadah*, in which

Kaplan excised all references to God's condemning enemies of the Jewish people.²³ Of course, the most obvious argument against this excision was the Holocaust, still painful today and, at that moment, a newly revealed trauma; eliminating the Nazis was the *only* way to ensure the very survival of Judaism.²⁴ Rosenberg spoke of the textual excision and ran with his own homiletical license, using this example from the liturgy as a proof of the extent of Kaplan's heresy. After all, as Rosenberg stated, how could one already forget "the death in Majdanek, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Buchenwald, Dachau and more?"²⁵

With the speech complete, Rabbi Israel Doshowitz next read the formal decision aloud, and each member present repeated, word for word, the proceedings.²⁶ Following the recitation of the first Psalm,²⁷ Rabbi Meir Krieger established that the agreement was according to Jewish religious law, at which point one rabbi burned a copy of Kaplan's *siddur*.²⁸

The Union of Orthodox Rabbis later disavowed responsibility for the book burning, claiming that the event was not a scheduled part of the ceremony but rather the act of one rabbi from the audience who acted on his own, after the service was completed.²⁹ This version seems unlikely, however, since the article about the excommunication in *HaPardes*, the unofficial magazine of Agudat HaRabbanim, gives specific justification for the book burning as part of the ceremony, and does so in halakhic terms.³⁰ The more likely scenario is that, after witnessing the heated public reaction, Agudat HaRabbanim chose to disavow responsibility for burning the *siddur* as a face-saving public relations move. Thus, by saying that the burning was not part of the planned activities, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis could attempt to refocus public attention on the greater issues of the heresy of Kaplan and the Conservative movement, rather than on a particularly unsettling segment of the ceremony, which itself evoked memories of Nazi ritual book burning. Of course, the uproar implies that Agudat HaRabbanim did not realize that most Americans would be troubled by a book burning in 1945—a lapse of judgment that would manifest the extent to which the Union of Orthodox Rabbis had lost touch with contemporary currents in American culture.³¹

The written text of the *herem* echoed much of what Rosenberg issued in his speech, echoing the vociferous castigation of Kaplan: "Dr. Kaplan has published a new monster that was prepared in the name of a *prayer book* [emphasis in the original]; its contents were shown to the eye of every heretic and heresy before the God of Israel and the fields of the faith of Israel's Torah."³² The document explained that because of this publication, Agudat HaRabbanim had decided to remove Kaplan from the nation of Israel until "he [returned] with full repentance according to the law and the faith."³³ While Kaplan would have a chance, albeit a small one, to return to the nation of Israel according to the Union of Orthodox Rabbi's standards, the *siddur* was banned for all time; one

should not even deign to look at it nor touch it, and it would not be allowed anywhere in Jewish communal settings.³⁴

Following the declaration, the text provides the scriptural precedents for issuing the *herem*, citing rabbinic prohibitions to tamper with prayer. Using proofs from tractates *Berakhot* and *Megillah* of the *Babylonian Talmud* as well as from Maimonides's *Laws of Prayer*, the *herem* document expresses profound distress that a man two thousand years after the Court of Elders could simply "raise his hand" and "strike down a tradition" that had been passed down from generation to generation.³⁵ In an ultimate statement of frustration, one that seems antithetical to such a legal document, the Hebrew text follows with what can only be interpreted as two internal screams, "Ahh! Ahh!"³⁶ If the *herem* itself did not already indicate an act of ultimate despair, then its very language would make clear that this document and ritual formed a desperate attempt by Agudat HaRabbanim to retain its political power in Judaism.

Agudat HaRabbanim: Attacking Kaplan and JTS Since Day One

Agudat HaRabbanim was formed in 1902, one day following the death of Rabbi Jacob Joseph, the chief rabbi of New York. Its formation was in response to American secularism, which it saw as sabotaging the integrity of Judaism. The rabbis defined their mission as a "divine obligation to unite and form a union of Orthodox rabbis."³⁷

Agudat HaRabbanim began voicing its distaste for Kaplan virtually from the moment he set foot outside the gates of JTS after his rabbinical ordination in 1903.³⁸ By 1904, the organization issued a circular throughout the Jewish press, specifically targeting Kaplan as well as other graduates of the Seminary. Some of the American Jewish press felt threatened immediately by the antagonistic Agudat HaRabbanim; the *Yidische Gazetten*, a paper usually associated with moderate Orthodoxy, wrote: "We shudder to think of the depths to which these men would drag Judaism if they had the power—to what extremes their fanaticism would reach."³⁹ The *American Hebrew*, which mistook the circular for a *herem*, was particularly perturbed by the idea of an excommunication decree against Kaplan. Characterizing the decision as "*hillul Ha Shem*—a profanation of our Holy Faith," the publication condemned the perceived *herem* as "a disgrace [which] tends to lower our fellow citizens of our faiths."⁴⁰

Agudat HaRabbanim issued its most extreme pre-excommunication condemnation of Kaplan in a response to an article he wrote in the *Menorah Journal* in 1920, titled, "A Program for the Reconstruction of Judaism":

The Agudat ha-Rabbanim demands from Prof. Kaplan and from the other workers in the society 'Tehiyat Israel' that they should at once stop their activities. If no reply is received from them in the course of one week, the Agudat ha-Rabbanim shall be prepared to begin open warfare against this movement and use all possible means in this warfare.⁴¹

Of course, while extreme, this invocation of “war” was merely rhetorical; twenty-four years later, in the wake of a worldwide shooting war, the declaration evolved into action, manifested by the burning of Kaplan’s *siddur*.⁴²

Because Agudat HaRabbanim declared itself as the *only* Orthodox rabbinat in America, it felt an obligation, perhaps even a divine imperative, to protect the American Jewish community from being steered from the proper “way.”⁴³ Nowhere did the organization exemplify its theocratic reign over American Jewish life more vividly than in its attempt to control the *kashrut* industry. Control over what people eat, after all, has an everyday effect and guarantees an institution’s influence in routine activities. Friction over the supervision of kosher food has been a concern throughout Jewish history, in part because of the deep legal complexities involved in the process. As a result, the position of guardian of the kosher food industry has held great political and moral clout within the Orthodox community. From its inception in 1902 until 1923, Agudat HaRabbanim had been the sole institutional authority on *kashrut*. However, in 1923 the Orthodox Union (OU) officially entered the *kashrut* derby when it sanctioned Heinz Vegetarian Beans, giving Agudat HaRabbanim its first competition in the American *kashrut* industry. With that new competition, more than ever, Agudat HaRabbanim had to prove its status as *the* system of Torah-true Judaism and, hence, the only entity to which Jews should turn for religious authority. But the defense of its authority sparked both liberal and orthodox members to resist the organization’s attempted control of the market.⁴⁴ In particular, other Orthodox organizations that dealt with halakhic minutiae read Agudat HaRabbanim’s arguments over *kashrut* in America as political skirmishes that did not deal with the ultimate issues ingrained in the religious law. An editorial in the 1941 edition of *The Commentator*, Yeshiva College’s newspaper, read:

That the driving force... is the leadership of the *Agudat HaRabbanim* is no surprise. The record of anarchy in *Kashrut*, and the dire danger of a barren future to Torah-true Judaism are eloquent testimony to the hegemony of the *Agudat HaRabbanim* in American Orthodox life.⁴⁵

Following the excommunication, Kaplan noted in his journal just how desperate he believed the organization to be and commented on what he felt was its tyrannical hold on the *kashrut* industry:

From the standpoint of a struggle for power, we have to remember that those rabbis represent a vanishing order. Their sense of insecurity is great. To achieve some degree of security they have to depend on the Kashrut business. To make sure that people will demand Kashrut, they combat all tendencies that might weaken their authority.... Here is where the nazi pattern of struggle for power beings to emerge. The Nazis—the spokesmen of a people trying to overcome its sense of insecurity by a violent struggle for power—singled out

the democracies as the object of attack. In order to bring about inner division among these democracies the nazis [blamed] the Jews, who were the most conspicuous beneficiaries of democracy... In like manner the most conspicuous beneficiaries of the liberal policy of the Conservative movement is Kaplan whose atheistic philosophy is the dominant philosophy of the movement. It is therefore urgent that we must stop him. Now that he has come out with a prayer book in which he openly aims his heresies is the most opportune time to launch an attack against the entire Conservative movement.⁴⁶

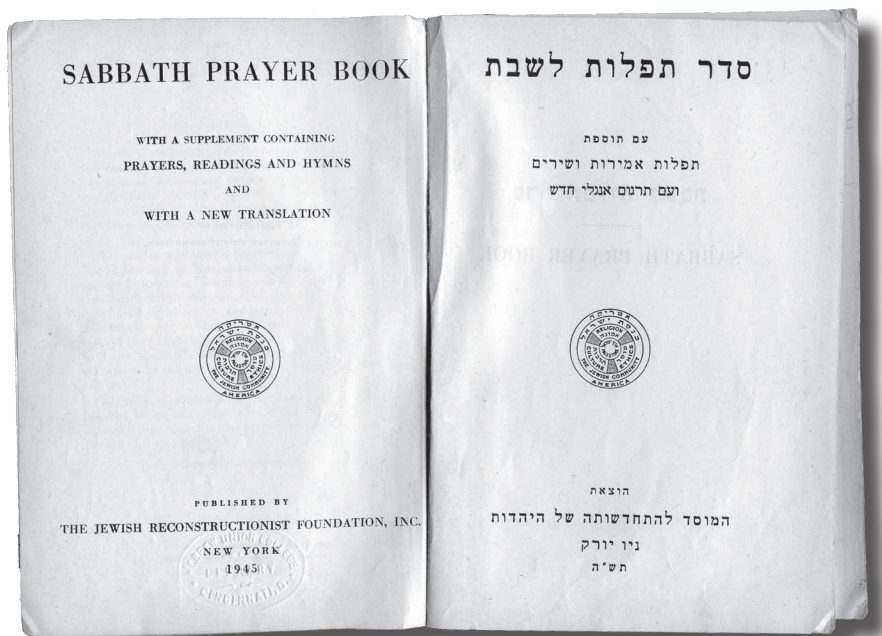
The 1930s marked a time when the Conservative movement also threatened Agudat HaRabbanim's status as the sole expert in Jewish legal exegesis. In his 1932 address, Union of Orthodox Rabbis President Rabbi Eliezer Silver spoke to the members of Agudat HaRabbanim about the dangers that Conservatives would pose in American Jewish life, not only in disseminating critical approaches to Torah study but even in areas of halakhah:

We now must contend with the Conservatives who consider themselves Orthodox. They have begun to seize for themselves the duties of the authentic rabbinate.... We must oppose them and display to the masses exactly who are the genuine and learned rabbis.⁴⁷

Agudat HaRabbanim felt that it had "let" JTS rabbis encroach on the national halakhic conscience by not fighting vociferously enough against their opinions. By 1930, with JTS graduate Louis Epstein's proposal of a legal allowance for a woman who was refused a *get* (Jewish divorce) to remarry, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis could no longer see Conservative rabbis as irrelevant to matters of a national halakhic consciousness.⁴⁸ Right-wing Orthodoxy went as far as to blame itself for allowing Conservative voices to influence the American consciousness, even in the realm of halakhah. As it says in Agudat HaRabbanim's unofficial journal, *HaPardes*:

We must confess and say "we are guilty"! There are found among us rabbis who respect them, who come together with them to be *mesader kiddushin* [marriage officiate], or at other gatherings. There are those of us who enter their synagogues... there are those of us who educate our children in their seminary, and this is what brought about their *chutzpah* to establish themselves as rabbis, to rule in halakhot of *gittin* [divorce] and *kiddushin* [betrothal].⁴⁹

In a defensive response to Epstein's 1930 article and its companion *teshuvah* (responsum), written in 1935, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis issued an anonymous *herem* in 1935 against anyone who would dare to use the responsum.⁵⁰ For Agudat HaRabbanim, this *teshuvah* meant that the OU, with its entrance into *kashrut* certification, was not the only organization taking halakhic power away from its previously impenetrable organization; now the tower of heretics at JTS was doing so as well.



Mordecai Kaplan's 1945 Sabbath Prayer book
(Courtesy Klau Library)

The *Siddur* Burned in the Name of Religion

Kaplan articulated his vision for a prayer book as early as 1923, in the published dedication of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, the synagogue he founded to sponsor a reconstructionist ideology.⁵¹ In describing his “Thirteen Wants” for Judaism at the dedication ceremony, Kaplan’s seventh “Want” discussed enabling Jews “to worship God in sincerity and in truth”—and Kaplan did not believe that the established liturgy filled the community’s needs.⁵²

For Kaplan and his coeditors, Ira Eisenstein and Eugene Kohn, this document represented a way to return people to prayer. As they describe in the introduction: “The motions survive; the emotions have fled. The lips move, but the heart is unmoved.”⁵³ Yet the editors understood that this particular *siddur* would be deemed a radical text. Thus they prefaced it with caution, adding a footnote as early as the title of the introduction, specifically indicating that no other institutions—namely JTS—contributed to producing the *siddur*. Kaplan predicted the potential fallout, because he had already experienced turmoil with the publication of his *haggadah*.

Although Kaplan’s philosophical texts were also considered heretical, applying his ideologies to a prayer book transferred heretical philosophy to heretical human behavior. Indeed, JTS would not want to be associated with the ideological message of the *siddur*, or for that matter, even to own a copy of it. Upon

publication, Kaplan asked Finkelstein if he should even bother giving copies as a courtesy to his colleagues, as was customary. He noted in his journal:

When the new Prayer Book appeared, I told F. that I did not [know] whether to send copies of it to my colleagues on the faculty or not. On the one hand, I didn't want to slight them by not sending them copies of the prayer book. On the other hand, I didn't want to irritate them by sending them copies, knowing how bitterly opposed most of them were to the changes in the new prayer-book. I asked F. to sound my colleagues to find out how they felt. When I saw him last week he told me I needn't bother sending them.⁵⁴

For the *siddur* to evoke religious meaning for twentieth-century Jews, Kaplan felt that the liturgy had to be intellectually honest about the goals of modernity, even if that meant changing the ideals of ancient doctrine.⁵⁵ As he and his coeditors point out in the introduction:

People expect a Jewish prayer book to express what a Jew should believe about God, Israel and the Torah, and about the meaning of human life and the destiny of mankind. We must not disappoint them in that expectation. But, unless we eliminate from the traditional text statements of belief that are untenable and of desires which we do not or should not cherish, we mislead the simple and alienate the sophisticated.⁵⁶

Thus, Kaplan and his coeditors notably eliminated references to several doctrines: Jews as the chosen people, the personal Messiah, a supernatural God who has a role in daily life, divine retribution, and the restoration of the Temple sacrificial cult.⁵⁷ In some cases, the editors replaced the traditional texts with ones that responded to the moral tone the editors wished to set; in others, they simply excised the troublesome passage completely.⁵⁸

The JTS faculty considered these alterations particularly contentious because non-Jewish circles often misunderstood the concept of the selection of Israel and interpreted it as a certain Jewish arrogance. For a rabbi who understood the theoretical original intent of the texts to make such changes seemed to legitimize the views of the non-Jewish opponent, as the letter from the Seminary faculty about the *haggadah* suggests: "Such a change would indicate that the doctrine of the election of Israel implies a sense of superiority on the part of Israel. This accusation so frequently made by the enemies of Israel is, of course, groundless."⁵⁹

Prayers flowed through Kaplan's journal, some of which were modified and incorporated into the prayer book.⁶⁰ As with the rest of Kaplan's interpretation of Judaism, however, his personal prayers often were distinctly tailored. Eisenstein described how in the summer of 1942 at the New Jersey shore he saw Kaplan praying from texts other than a *siddur*. It was not unusual for Eisenstein to see Kaplan wrapped in *tefilin* (phylacteries) and a *tallit* (prayer shawl) yet also

to see Kaplan “davening from Dewey.”⁶¹ Prayer stood at the center of his life, so it was not surprising that it was key to his efforts to reconstruct Judaism in the modern era.

A gifted and committed teacher who felt that education was one of the essential components to the Jewish people’s survival, Kaplan also placed pedagogy at the center of his *siddur*. More than a vehicle to communicate with God, this text would serve as a mode of instruction, both in the nature of the text itself and in how Kaplan limited the traditional readings to make room for supplementary study. For example, he eliminated repetitions of the standing prayer and most of the additional service for the Sabbath, choosing instead to include supplementary study materials that could be accessed easily within the *siddur*. Not only did shortening the service make room for studying texts, but the prayer book itself functioned as a study guide, with 329 of the 565 pages appearing as supplemental readings.⁶² Kaplan also emphasized the American experience of prayer, including prayers and entire services for holidays such as Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Thanksgiving. He crafted a vision for living as “cultural hyphenates”—to be an American Jew was to live both as a citizen of the American civilization and the Jewish civilization.⁶³

Kaplan ultimately felt that Jews did not feel at peace in a traditional prayer setting and were alienated by the service. Therefore, by creating a *siddur* that catered to what he felt people needed—rather than prayers prescribed by a system of Jewish law, which he often felt to be antiquated—he created what he believed to be a means to bring people to the synagogue.

Why Kaplan? Why Excommunication?

While Agudat HaRabbanim clearly saw Kaplan as a threat to the fabric of traditional Judaism, the changes that he made to the service were relatively tame compared to those of the American Reformers. This begs the question: Why didn’t right-wing Orthodoxy excommunicate the creators of the Reform liturgy? The reality is that, politically, there was no real opportunity for Agudat HaRabbanim to make a similar statement regarding the Reform Jews of the nineteenth century. By the time Agudat HaRabbanim had decided to use its political clout for an excommunication, it felt that the Reformers had so far removed themselves from the Jewish norm of discourse that they no longer were a part of the Jewish mainstream. As the formal statement of the *herem* stated: “It is more comfortable for a Jew to enter into a Christian Church than to enter a Reform Temple.”⁶⁴

The question—why Kaplan instead of the Reformers?—seems to have been a common question at the time.⁶⁵ Indeed, Agudat HaRabbanim spoke to this topic in the *herem* document, and Rabbi Israel Rosenberg also mentioned it in his interview with the *New York Times*.⁶⁶ The answer showed a consistent paranoia: Agudat HaRabbanim legitimately feared that Orthodox Jews would

pick up Kaplan's *siddur* because of its traditional physical appearance. They would then unwittingly begin using it, falling victim to its heresies!

Rabbi Joshua Trachtenberg's comments in the 1945 *American Jewish Year Book* underscore the confusion that even educated Jews felt about the decision to excommunicate Kaplan and not the Reformers:

The militant implication of this act is all the more strongly underscored by the fact that the Union had not seen fit to adopt such a stand against any other of the many 'unorthodox' prayer books previously issued during its forty-three year history.⁶⁷

Ultimately Kaplan's ideologies were new but no more "heretical" than those of many other Jews. But since Kaplan's heresy looked similar to Orthodox texts and he offered a public, particularly boisterous, threat to the "traditional view," Agudat HaRabbanim felt the need to respond forcefully. This excommunication marked the opportunity to reassert a claim on the American Jewish landscape by bringing down a zealous figure like Kaplan; and, even more important, it presented Agudat HaRabbanim a chance to contest the entire Conservative movement.

Effects of the *Herem*

Did the excommunication accomplish any tangible political gain for Agudat HaRabbanim? After all, for an excommunication to have an effect, the condemned—as well as the Jewish community—had to acknowledge and abide by the decree. In a pre-emancipated society, the *herem* affected every part of an individual's life, since the central Jewish authorities controlled every aspect of community life—social, economic, and spiritual. The *herem* epitomized the ideals of the Old World, and Agudat HaRabbanim used it as an attempt to regain control of New York's Jews and to illustrate that its system still worked quite well in America. But in America, there was no court of Jewish law to which all Jews turned, and there was no way even to enforce the decree. Thus, a *New York Times* headline outlined the basic problem—and the ultimate irony—of a modern excommunication in a single phrase: "Group of Orthodox rabbis 'excommunicate' author of prayer book though he is not a member."⁶⁸

For different reasons, both Kaplan and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis saw Judaism as slowly collapsing, and each sought solutions to the problem. However, the two views exemplified completely opposite approaches: one working to unify different streams of belief and practice, the other stoutly standing against such plurality. Thus, their battle became not how best to benefit the Jewish people by arguing against another ideology, but rather how to fight the individual who personified that ideology.

Everyone Has an Opinion: America Responds to the *Herem*

The pain of the *herem* struck Kaplan immediately, particularly in light of the burning of the *siddur* just one month after the victory over Nazi Europe. He voiced this throughout the months of June and July in his journals and publicly to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency:

It is just too bad that men who call themselves rabbis should in this day and age resort to the barbarous procedure of outlawing a man without giving him a hearing, and to the Nazi practice of burning books that displease them. God save us from such leadership and from the disgrace it is likely to bring upon Jews.⁶⁹

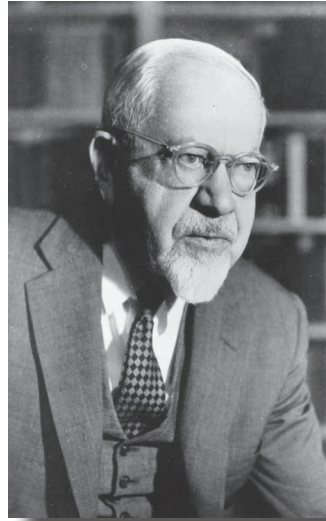
But the event also directly affected his family. Shortly after the *herem*, Kaplan's youngest daughter Selma went to the local kosher bakery to buy hallah and cakes for the Sabbath. But because of Agudat HaRabbanim's declaration, the clerk would not even serve her. "They said, sorry," she explained. "They just didn't want anything to do with that heretic Mordecai Kaplan."⁷⁰

News of the excommunication literally made its way around the world as well; Professor Max Arzt of the JTS described how a U.S. Marine came across the *New York Times* article while on a ship in the Pacific Ocean, and though he came from a yeshiva background, he was deeply dismayed by the *herem* and ultimately feared for the future of the Jewish people.⁷¹

Conservative Jewish leaders expressed concerns similar to Kaplan's, fearing that outsiders to Judaism might believe that the excommunication and book burning represented the unanimous decision of American Jews. Thus, the final paragraph of the Rabbinical Assembly's (RA) resolution about the *herem* stated:

We assure the public at large that the action of the Agudat Harabbanim is in violation of the feelings of the overwhelming majority of American Jewry, whose loyalty to Judaism expresses itself not only through ritual observance and ethical conduct but also through a genuine respect for the freedom of man's conscience.⁷²

Both for Kaplan and the Conservative movement, intellectual freedom stood as the central doctrine that *had* to remain open in America. Ultimately, the Conservative movement had nearly as much to lose from this *herem* as Kaplan himself; if Agudat HaRabbanim could excommunicate Kaplan, then



Mordecai Kaplan
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

the institution that housed him also would also be severely threatened. Above all, the Conservative movement, particularly its seminary, needed the ability to question all aspects of Judaism in a free, democratic environment, even if it vehemently disagreed with the contents of the *siddur* itself.

In July, Kaplan wrote a three-column defense of himself in the Hebrew newspaper *HaDoar*, responding not only to the *herem* but also to the entire worldview of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis.⁷³ Kaplan was particularly frustrated that Agudat HaRabbanim could issue the *herem* for political reasons but couch it in religious terms. Just as this was an opportunity for Agudat HaRabbanim to attack Kaplan, Kaplan could fire back with that same gusto. While his personal anger and pain cannot be ignored, he legitimately feared how the outside world would view this event, at a time when Jews needed to rally international support for a Jewish state. What will “sweep the hearts of the nations to us that they will give us a nation and the permission to govern ourselves?” he questioned.⁷⁴

But ironically, by excommunicating Kaplan, Agudat HaRabbanim almost completely removed the issue of theology from the discussion.⁷⁵ No longer could Conservative and Reform rabbis argue the merits of the document’s content, because they had to defend Kaplan against the Union of Orthodox Rabbis’ fundamentalism. Disagreeing with the prayer book actually was the norm in America at the time, but because Agudat HaRabbanim had resorted to such extreme measures, public condemnation of the *siddur* suddenly became a political faux pas. Kaplan, in seeking to educate about the excommunication, placed a notice in the *New York Times* to advertise his session at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, titled “Excommunication vs. Freedom of Worship.”⁷⁶

The Reform rabbinical assembly, too, deeply disagreed with the merits of the *siddur*, but the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) thoroughly condemned the actions of Agudat HaRabbanim and did not address the contents of the *siddur* itself. “This shocking action violates the very spirit of freedom of thought and the tolerance which we cherish in our country,” reads a draft of the statement from the CCAR, continuing,

It is an expression of bigotry. Without taking sides in the theological issues involved, we nevertheless must condemn unreservedly the revival of medieval acts of excommunication and book burning. When some rabbis, who are out of touch with the modern spirit, indulge themselves in such outgrown practices, they make themselves ridiculous and impair the good name of the entire rabbinate.⁷⁷

Instead of overturning the new balance of power in American Judaism, the *herem* forced virtually every Jewish organization to react against Agudat HaRabbanim, ultimately demoting its authority over American Jewry.

JTS Faculty Members Break Silence

While most of the American Jewish community remained silent about the content of the *siddur*, preferring instead to tackle what seemed to be the tyrannical tactics of Agudat HaRabbanim, three rabbis from JTS did attack the prayer book's theology—and the theology of Kaplan himself. Rabbis Louis Ginzberg, Saul Lieberman, and Alexander Marx lambasted not just the *siddur* but indeed Kaplan's entire career as a rabbi. Though Kaplan felt the wrath of many Jewish leaders because of the prayer book, the condemnation of his colleagues proved to be particularly hurtful, in part because of the intimate contact he had with them.

The publication of the *siddur* and the ensuing *herem* marked the culmination of what the three rabbis felt were Kaplan's heresies, and the events gave them an ideal occasion to condemn Kaplan publicly. While not in the same language as a religious edict, their letter to *HaDoar* served as a public outcry against Kaplan's rabbinical career.⁷⁸ They not only wished for Kaplan to leave the Seminary, but they also attempted to denigrate him to all other institutions by portraying him as a fraud.⁷⁹ This response represented a small victory for the Union of Orthodox Rabbis: While it was not successful in destroying JTS, it managed to get the Seminary's most renowned faculty members to respond to its decrees. Agudat HaRabbanim may have been weak in the mid-1940s, but it was not dead.

Ginzberg, Lieberman, and Marx saw it as their responsibility to delegitimize Kaplan, so that people would not heed him in the future.⁸⁰ Yet the three rabbis took on a much more defined task than the Union of Orthodox Rabbis did. Rather than attack an entire movement, they chose to attack an individual—and one whom they knew personally. Their letter provided particularly compelling arguments, because they knew the intricacies of Jewish law much better than Kaplan—a fact that they were not afraid to state blatantly in the letter:

Dr. Kaplan, teacher of homiletics in our Rabbinical seminary, is a great expert in his department. But his is not representative in the Talmudic or in the Rabbinic literature and their wide range. He does not know nor can he recognize the truth, and he does not willfully intend to rebel against it.⁸¹

The rabbis picked apart Kaplan's arguments—found primarily in the letter he had written to *HaDoar*—that Kaplan had used to defend himself against Agudat HaRabbanim's attacks.⁸² In that letter, Kaplan used textual proofs to attempt to demonstrate that the halakhic system itself allowed for a group to ostracize an individual. To emphasize the absurdity, he even asserted that Agudat HaRabbanim had the responsibility to burn his *siddur* according to the Talmudic law that “a Torah scroll that was written by a *min* ⁸³ would be burned.”⁸⁴

Though the rabbis did not agree with issuing the *herem* and certainly opposed burning the *siddur*, they felt nonetheless that the Union of Orthodox

Rabbis acted out of correct principles in initiating the ban—they simply executed it incorrectly. Ginzberg, Lieberman, and Marx even went so far as to defend the actions of Agudat HaRabbanim, accepting that the organization did not purposefully burn the *siddur*—though the event clearly happened as part of the formal ceremony. In their own letter, the three rabbis attempted to pick apart Kaplan’s halakhic argument and interpretation of the texts, correctly stating that the law of burning the Torah scroll even of a heretic only applied to the technical category of a *min*; therefore, Kaplan had misinterpreted the definition of a *min* to imply any heretic.⁸⁵ However, it appears that the rabbis never read the official *herem* decree and thus gave the Union of Orthodox Rabbis credit that it did not deserve. Because Agudat HaRabbanim dubbed Kaplan with the technical term “*min*,” it legally could, or even had the *obligation* to, burn the *siddur*—a fact the Seminary rabbis would have realized if they had read Agudat HaRabbanim’s publications.

The *Herem* in Its Context

Kaplan’s “heresy” held particular weight for JTS because he wrote and taught these views to students at the institution. While the Seminary publicly refuted the claims that Kaplan made about Judaism and asserted that he represented a different worldview from its official stance, ultimately he was able to craft a vision for his entire movement without permission to do so.⁸⁶ JTS professor Rabbi Neil Gilman reflected on how a donor once called JTS President Finkelstein during the 1950s and offered a substantial donation in exchange for firing Kaplan:

So I said, “Why didn’t you?”

So he said, “How could I?—he was my teacher.”

So I said, “Oh, come on.”

So he said, “No seriously. I spent my entire career trying to ensure the Seminary’s academic respectability in the American academic world. All I had to do was declare one teacher that I disagreed with and fire him, and I would have ruined the Seminary’s reputation forever.”⁸⁷

To Finkelstein, firing Kaplan would have represented much more than releasing a member of the faculty. It would have indicated the attempt to squelch a dissenting voice.

Gilman continued:

I suppose it’s a fascinating story because it gives a peek into Finkelstein’s values. He was prepared to tolerate what he I’m sure felt was a very subversive voice on the faculty in order to make sure that, academically, the Seminary’s reputation... at this point would remain intact.

In reflecting on the tumultuous 1940s, Finkelstein dubbed the decade “more miraculous” even than the Exodus from Egypt, with “the manifestation of the Deity readily... discerned in almost any aspect of the downfall of Hitler.”⁸⁸ Surely Finkelstein had good reason to frame his first ten years as leader of the Seminary with such an extreme characterization; he had used his position to thrust JTS onto the world scene. Seeking to neutralize totalitarian forces across an ocean and to unify a vital center both in America and abroad, Finkelstein strove his entire career to bring people together. He sought not only to unify American Jewry but also to transform JTS into *the* leading voice for American Judaism. Indeed, it was his hope for the Seminary to become a unifying force for all American religion. Finkelstein said to the RA in 1942,

I have little doubt that it can only be through the strengthening of religious work in all denominations, and the creation of better understanding and increased cooperation among them, that we can find our way out of the slough of despond of the twentieth century.⁸⁹

By strengthening the center, ultimately the Seminary helped to limit groups such as Agudat HaRabbanim from wielding power with extreme measures such as excommunications. According to Rabbi Morris Adler in an address at the Conference on the Role of Judaism in the Modern World:

The Jewish Theological Seminary represents the American Jewish Community's coming of age. It is that movement which seeks to transform the population of Jews in America into a Jewish center, in line with all the great centers during the ages which have enriched and fructified Judaism. It seeks to convert a settlement of Jews into a Jewish society, into a Jewish community, and the common denominator upon which this Jewish population shall be united into a society will not be the pressure from without or the general humanitarian principles of mercy or of fear, but a self-identification with the culture of Israel.⁹⁰

The 1944 JTS conference, “Approaches to National Unity,” epitomized in both theme and content the wider message that Finkelstein sought to implement during his tenure. Only through breaking denominational boundaries that had previously separated them, joining in a democracy of thought, could people realize the ideal of pluralism. Moreover, the introduction to the conference volume suggests that the problem was not simply an academic issue.⁹¹ Conferences during this time elevated the democratic ideal and sought to activate it in practice. Fittingly, just months after the Allies declared victory, the 1945 conference addressed “Approaches to Group Understanding.” World War II had represented the ultimate breakdown in diplomatic relations, a phenomenon that many blamed on a lack of communication in the world community. This problem transcended religions and cultures.

“We cannot bomb ourselves into physical security or moral unity,” stated the introduction to the conference. “The release of atomic energy has not abolished our continuing moral problems; it has made them more urgent. Mankind is seeking the way to cooperation. Its intellectual leaders can help by overcoming temptations to set themselves against each other, by learning to labor and think together.”⁹²

This passage encapsulates exactly why the strategy of Agudat HaRabbanim failed in this new era—it “attempted to bomb [itself] into physical security.” In an age that treasured an ecumenical spirit, Agudat HaRabbanim resorted to burning a *siddur* as its ultimate cry against Kaplan’s heresy. While JTS never officially supported Kaplan, it certainly protected him. More important, it could only support him against outside attack, based on the democratic ideal that philosophies were meant to be debated on the intellectual battlefield, not attacked in an actual state of “war.” As soon as the Union of Orthodox Rabbis burned a book in 1945, it removed itself from democratic discourse, effectively isolating itself from the majority of the American Jewish community.

The Sociological Triumph of Conservative Judaism in the 1950s

While JTS sought to influence American Judaism and even global religion, the Conservative laity and synagogue rabbis operated largely on their own in response to the sociological phenomenon of suburbanization—perhaps the best explanation for the movement’s overwhelming success during the 1950s. While Finkelstein sponsored his ideology on the Upper West Side of New York, Conservative rabbis translated it to their constituent congregations. Explains sociologist Marshall Sklare:

Suburbanization brought with it the problem of the maintenance of Jewish identity, and it was to the synagogue that the new Jewish suburbanite tended to look for identity-maintenance. And Conservatism exemplified the type of synagogue that was most appealing to the Conservative Jew.⁹³

More than ever, as urban sprawl broadened the geographical landscape of American Jews, it also marked the doom of Agudat HaRabbanim and its insular, centripetal model of Jewish religious life. From a practical point of view, controlling New York City’s Jews in the 1950s no longer held the same political clout as in the first half of the twentieth century, since many had already moved out of the city. With an ideology that did not adapt to the expanding, increasingly multifaceted Jewish society that incorporated the variety of beliefs in America, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis slowly dwindled. As Louis Bernstein described, “The largest and most important rabbinic group of the first half of this century, the Agudat Harabbonim, will live on only in the yellow pages of old Yiddish newspapers.”⁹⁴

Where Jews had previously lived in relatively homogenous, compact communities in cities, they now faced the reality of a truly diverse community. One sociologist of the time reported, “The environment is strange. The Jewish residents are no longer the majority or plurality which they were, or felt themselves to be, in the urban neighborhoods or blocks from which they came.”⁹⁵ Though Finkelstein was thinking in broad terms about the place of the Jew in America when he tried to expand the influence of the Seminary in the 1940s, his efforts would serve the altered needs of Jews just one decade later. Without planning for a specific sociological phenomenon in American history, Finkelstein managed to institute programs that catered to the novelties of the 1950s and fit a new model of Jewish life and culture. In large part due to his efforts, the center had seized control of discourse in the Jewish community at large. There was a new spirit of engagement with Jewish life, and a fringe organization no longer could seize control over the community, as Agudat HaRabbanim had attempted to do for much of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, its lack of engagement with the rest of the Jewish community led to its decline during the 1950s.

Conclusion

It is not surprising that, just one month after America declared victory over Nazi Germany, Agudat HaRabbanim’s declaration of the *herem* sent a jolt through American Jews’ collective conscience. Particularly when combined with the burning of a holy book, an excommunication marks a refusal to engage in democratic discourse; a *herem* launches a group attack upon an individual, attempting to render him incapacitated in every segment of his life. Such an act might have caused a similar reaction in any era. But in 1945, with the backdrop of World War II and a rising spirit of cultural pluralism in peacetime American religious life, the *herem* and, particularly, the burning of a prayer book—recalling Nazi tactics—marked a decisive clash in values between Agudat HaRabbanim and American norms of tolerance. After decades of attempting to assert its sovereignty over Jewish religious life in America, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis issued the most drastic proclamation possible according to its worldview, invoking conflict rather than religious debate and democratic participation. The *herem* proved more than ever that the absolutist views of Agudat HaRabbanim and other such extremist authorities were no longer compatible with American life. Indeed, the next fifteen years would represent a surge toward religious universalism and diversity, notions antithetical to Agudat HaRabbanim’s self-segregation. The discord provoked by their symbolic burning and the resistance to their authoritarian decree displayed clearly how their command over Jewish thought and behavior had dwindled within the American Jewish community.

Looking retrospectively at the event, Yeshiva University's Rabbi Norman Lamm described the burning as disastrous for the cause of Orthodoxy in America:

If we want to win people over to Orthodoxy, we need to present ourselves as measured, mature, and moderate people with deep faith and the right practice, but we do not insult others and we do not damage or condemn them. Coming out with *issurim* [decrees that forbid particular actions] against everyone else is like another Fatwa. When I was younger there was a heretic by the name of Mordecai Kaplan, and the Agudas HaRabbonim had this whole big book burning party. I thought it was ridiculous to have a book burning in the twentieth century. It didn't make anybody decide to become more religiously observant. Nobody who was reading his books said[,] "If important Orthodox rabbis burned them, we're not going to read them." If anything, it aroused interest in people who otherwise would not have wanted to read these books. But in addition, what it accomplished was that it got people to look at the Orthodox as fanatics. That's no way to make friends and win people over to Orthodoxy.⁹⁶

Though Kaplan was personally hurt by the attacks of Agudat HaRabbanim and the three rabbis from the JTS, ultimately his philosophies of crafting a pluralistic religion and fashioning the synagogue as the centerpiece of communal growth proved to be the guiding foundation for American Jewish life during the 1950s. Meanwhile, the views of Agudat HaRabbanim—and in fact the organization itself—faded during the decade following the *herem*.

At the center of this altered religious consciousness stood JTS and Louis Finkelstein. No longer would the institution be isolationist. Under Finkelstein, the Seminary thrust itself onto the world scene and attempted to shape a global consciousness of democratic values, ones defined in stark contrast to the values of the Nazis. Though the faculty could not accept Kaplan's theology, particularly in the form of a liturgical text, finally the Seminary had to protect Kaplan, because Finkelstein felt it was essential for Kaplan to be able to voice his opinion in a democratic environment. Unlike Agudat HaRabbanim, JTS did not ceremoniously expel members. Kaplan would be able to speak his mind from within the Jewish community, despite the immense pressure that many—including his own distinguished senior colleagues—placed on Finkelstein to dismiss Kaplan from the faculty. In contrast to Agudat HaRabbanim, the cultural climate in America during the postwar years fostered ways to interact with varying notions of religion, fortifying the center and virtually ridding the American landscape of fundamentalism in the 1950s, during which time the Conservative movement would dominate.⁹⁷

Agudat HaRabbanim's *herem* attempted to ostracize Kaplan completely from the American Jewish community and to leave the Conservative movement crippled. Ironically, however, it strengthened JTS and its ideologies to

unimagined levels of influence in both Jewish culture and the wider American culture of the 1950s. In effect, Agudat HaRabbanim had excommunicated itself from American life by issuing its *herem* decree against Kaplan.

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Notes

¹The Hebrew Agudat HaRabbanim literally means “the association of rabbis” and includes the article “the” as part of the name of the group. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, I do not use another article when referring to the combined term Agudat HaRabbanim, as it would be redundant. However, all quoted passages remain as they were in the original. Translations from Hebrew to English are mine unless otherwise specified.

²Mel Scult's biography of Kaplan mentions that the event occurred, but he does not believe that Agudat HaRabbanim burned the book as part of the formal ceremony. Rather, he says that the burning occurred incidentally at the back of the room. However, Agudat HaRabbanim's documents illustrate that it was a previously scripted formula. Jeffrey Gurock and Jacob J. Schacter's book, *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community*, addresses the excommunication and disputes Scult's claim that there was no intentional book burning. See Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1993) and Gurock and Schacter, *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai M. Kaplan, Orthodoxy and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

³In 1934, Kaplan published his manifesto, *Judaism as a Civilization*, which JTS Chancellor Arnold Eisen has dubbed “the single most influential book of its generation.” As I will discuss, Agudat HaRabbanim deliberately chose the *siddur* rather than a book of philosophy to pinpoint Kaplan's heresy. See Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934).

⁴Kaplan faced mixed reactions from the faculty. Most notably, Louis Ginzberg, Saul Lieberman, and Alexander Marx wrote a strong letter condemning the *siddur*, though they did not agree with the *herem* as a means of condemning Kaplan (see below).

⁵This occurred largely because of an article in the *New York Times*, which covered the event. See “Orthodox Rabbis ‘Excommunicate’ Author of Prayer Book Though He Is Not a Member,” *New York Times* (15 June 1945): A11.

⁶Kaplan felt that the practice of excommunication manifested the inherent problems of the entire halakhic system, because rabbis were able to wield it as a weapon against those who threatened their authority. See Kaplan, “Comments on Dr. Gordis' Paper,” *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* (1942): 97. Kaplan also noted in *Judaism as a Civilization* the inherent anachronism of an excommunication in the modern age:

The social structure of Jewish life was hitherto of the ecclesiastical type, for though the rabbi exercised his authority with the consent of those to whom he ministered, the Torah, the supernatural revelation of God's will, was the sanction of the laws he enunciated. It was by virtue of that sanction that the rabbi could apply the weapon of excommunication. With the rise of modern ideology and the denial of the validity of the supernatural sanction, the exercise of excommunication was eliminated from Jewish life (208).

Kaplan states that the excommunication was irrelevant in modern Jewish life because moderns no longer believed in the sovereignty of a supernatural God—an assumption that was far from universal. I argue that Kaplan's thesis about excommunications does not rest on personal theology

but is reflective of the social structure of the modern Jewish community, which Kaplan also emphasizes throughout much of the rest of the manifesto.

⁷Mordecai Kaplan, Eugene Kohn, and Ira Eisenstein, eds., *The New Haggadah* (New York: Behrman House, 1941).

⁸For a comprehensive article on the *haggadah* controversy, see Jack Wertheimer, “Kaplan vs. ‘The Great Do-Nothings’: The Inconclusive Battle over The New Haggadah,” *Conservative Judaism* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 20–37. It should be noted that this was a “unanimous” faculty reproach of Kaplan because Robert Gordis felt coerced to sign this letter. As noted below, Gordis disagreed with Kaplan’s approach to Jewish ritual and halakhah but did not agree with the tone of this letter and the mode of rebuke. He would later apologize to Kaplan for being a part of what was a hurtful personal attack. See Ira Eisenstein, *Reconstructing Judaism: An Autobiography* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1986), 165.

⁹On a basic level, a *siddur* differs from a *haggadah* because Sabbath *siddurim* are used weekly, whereas *haggadot* are used a maximum of twice yearly. Additionally, a *siddur* is a way for people to connect to the divine, whereas the *haggadah* facilitates Jews recalling a collective history. Both of these facts indicate that Kaplan’s choice to publish the *haggadah* before the *siddur* served as a test to see how the Jewish world would respond to his liturgical works. As it turned out, the response to the *haggadah* was a unanimous letter of castigation, whereas the response to the *siddur* went to another level.

¹⁰Finkelstein was named chancellor of JTS in 1949; subsequent leaders of the institution continue to bear this title.

¹¹This was part of a continued trend of pressure to dismiss Kaplan from JTS, which originated in the Cyrus Adler era of leadership. Kaplan felt such unease at the Seminary that he resigned in 1927 to go to Stephen Wise’s Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR), only to change his mind and return to JTS within the week. The pressure to dismiss Kaplan was particularly acute in the case of the *siddur*, because the faculty had already explicitly reprimanded Kaplan for his *haggadah*. An example of chastisement can be seen in a satirical letter from Jason Cohen:

I was very happy to read in that great book by the head of the Seminary, Prof. Kaplan, that at last you were sensible enough to abolish the outwork Dietary Laws.... May I suggest that to publish this great epoch making step on yor [*sic*] part you arrange an outing to take place next Saturday afternoon. I shall be only too glad to furnish the buses and pay for the dinner at some prominent seashore resort. There you could enjoy the finest CLAM BAKE or PIG ROAST [emphasis his] ever served by a Gentile to Jewish Rabbis. You will all of you have a very fine time and at the same time let the world know that the old superstition about the Sabbath and food have no place in modern Jewish life.

See Letter from Jason Cohen to anonymous “Rabbi”, 30 June 1934, Faculty Files, RG 3, Box 2, Folder 1, The Ratner Center Archives of The Library of JTS, New York. For more information on Kaplan’s displeasure at the seminary, see Scult, 203–240.

¹²For information about the hotel when it was built, see “Flock to Inspect the Biggest Hotel,” *New York Times* (30 December 1912): 18.

¹³Yiddish Radio Project, http://www.yiddishradioproject.org/exhibits/history/history.php?content=photos&pg=1&photo_pg=2. (accessed 19 April 2010).

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, Inc., Invitation to 1945 convention, Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation Records, I–71, Box 8, Folder 5, the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), New York.

¹⁶The exclusion of Baruch Spinoza from the seventeenth-century Amsterdam Sephardic community has often been taken as a symbolic opening salvo of the emerging Enlightenment emancipation from closed religious sectarianism. See Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 116–54.

¹⁷Kaplan Diary, 16 June 1945 (Volume 13, 1944–1946), found in the Ira and Judith Kaplan Eisenstein Archives at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Philadelphia.

¹⁸It is significant that Agudat HaRabbanim uses the term “rabbis”—transliterated as such in the Hebrew—for JTS graduates, instead of the Hebrew word for rabbis, “*rabbanim*.”

¹⁹“Asefat HaHerem,” *HaPardes* 19, no. 4 (July 1945): 2.

²⁰For an extensive comparison between Kaplan’s text and the 1946 Conservative *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, see Eric Caplan, *From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2002), 112–120. Caplan suggests that the Conservative RA editors shared many of the same theological concerns that Kaplan did, but they responded to them by changing the English translations rather than the Hebrew prayers themselves. Kaplan and his students certainly knew the contents of the Conservative *siddur*, because both Milton Steinberg and Ira Eisenstein were on the original committee for the *siddur*, and the main editor of the text, Morris Silverman, conferred with Kaplan during the editing process. See Caplan, 112.

²¹“On Burning of a Prayer Book,” *The Jewish Exponent* (22 June 1945): 4.

²²In defending Kaplan, the RA mentioned explicitly that while the actions of Agudat HaRabbanim were abhorrent, the Conservative movement did not endorse the *siddur*. See “On Burning of a Prayer Book.” The RA published *The Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* in 1946.

²³Rosenberg specifically pointed to Kaplan’s excision of *shefokh hamatkha*, a paragraph in the *haggadah* that asks God to “Pour out [God’s] wrath on the enemy nations that do not know [God].”

²⁴Kaplan also confronted this theologically and philosophically troubling issue while writing the *haggadah*, particularly in relation to responding to the challenges of the Holocaust. See Jack Cohen, *Major Philosophers of Jewish Prayer in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 163–164. Eisenstein reflected on this in his autobiography:

If the *haggadah* was to be edifying, and if our purpose was to engage the attention of young people, we should omit all texts which smacked of cruelty and vengeance. I can truly testify that he never reckoned with possible gentile reactions. Knuckling under was a stance he resolutely eschewed.

See Eisenstein, *Reconstructing Judaism*, 164.

²⁵“Asefat HaHerem,” 2.

²⁶*Ibid.* Also see Simon Noveck, *Milton Steinberg: Portrait of a Rabbi* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1978), 183.

²⁷The first psalm speaks about not following “in the counsel of the wicked,” a fitting liturgical piece for an excommunication.

²⁸It is unclear who actually burned the *siddur*, as the report in *HaPardes* uses the passive voice. See “Asefat HaHerem,” 2.

²⁹Noveck, 183.

³⁰“Asefat HaHerem,” 2.

³¹The July 1945 issue of *HaPardes* illustrates this very irony. On the same page as part of the *herem* document, there is another article titled “Et Hasereifa Asher Saraf HaShem: Ba’me Enahem?” (“The burning that God burned: How shall we gain mercy?”), which laments the passing of Rabbi Aharon Pechenikís’s father, murdered by the Nazis. The parallelism of burning—one committed *against* the Jewish people and one *by* the Jewish people—is eerie.

³²“Nosah Hahlatat HaHerem,” *HaPardes* 19, no. 4 (July 1945): 3.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵The document cites *Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 33, Megillah 17*. See “Nosah Hahlatat HaHerem,” 3.

³⁶Following the statement, “This man raises his hand to scatter against the Members of the Great Assembly,” the text inexplicably spells out the following word twice in Hebrew: “!הרהא”

³⁷Jeffrey Gurock, *American Jewish Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1996), 7.

³⁸Kaplan was the first rabbi to introduce English sermons to the affluent Upper East Side synagogue, Kehilath Jeshurun. While Agudat HaRabbanim did not prevent his hiring, Kaplan believed that the organization ensured that his title would be “minister” instead of “rabbi,” because he did not receive Orthodox ordination. For more information about Kaplan at Kehilath Jeshurun, see Scult, 69. For more on the conflict at the Upper West Side’s Jewish Center, where Kaplan subsequently served, see Schacter and Gurock, chapter 5.

³⁹Scult, 69.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Retrospectively, it seems that Kaplan’s article lays the groundwork for his philosophy in *Judaism as a Civilization*. This statement from Agudat HaRabbanim appeared in multiple newspapers on 21 January 1921, including *Hebrew Standard, HaToren, The Jewish Gazette, and Halbri*. Reproduction of articles found in letter from Kaplan to Cyrus Adler, 27 January 1921, RG 3, Box 2, Folder 1, The Ratner Center Archives of The Library of JTS, New York.

⁴²The editorial also classified Kaplan’s ideas as “nothing less than heresy” and his acts as “treason to the cause he affects to serve.” See Gurock and Schacter, 110.

⁴³Louis Bernstein, *The Emergence of the English Speaking Orthodox Rabbinate* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1977), 262.

⁴⁴In 1933, in response to Agudat HaRabbanim’s petition of the Reform rabbinate to keep kosher, Reform Rabbi Max Raisin of Congregation B’nai Jeshurun of New Jersey responded that indeed the slugfest for the top of the *kashrut* empire was alienating Jews everywhere:

Unfortunately the cause of real *kashrut* is hurt by its supposed friends. The Orthodox Rabbis of the community, in Patterson, New York and it would seem everywhere fight among themselves on this very question. What one Rabbi declares to be kosher the other Rabbi will declare to be trefa.

See Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Silver Era in American Jewish Orthodoxy* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1988), 133.

⁴⁵Ibid. Though Yeshiva College had an active relationship with the Orthodox Union, the main competitor of Agudat HaRabbanim for *kashrut* supremacy, even when taken cynically, the editorial expresses broad views about Agudat HaRabbanim’s struggle to maintain a firm grasp on American Jewry during the 1930s.

⁴⁶Kaplan Diary, 23 June 1945.

⁴⁷Rakeffet-Rothkoff, 114.

⁴⁸The *teshuvah* was officially approved in 1935 by the Conservative movement’s Committee on Jewish Law. It was later published more completely in a volume devoted to the legal concept of the *agunah*. See Epstein, *Lishelat HaAgunah* (New York: Ginsberg Linotype Company, 1940).

⁴⁹*HaPardes* 10, no. 1 (April 1936): 3, English translation cited in Marc B. Shapiro, *Saul Lieberman and the Orthodox* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 12–13.

⁵⁰According to religious law, only a man has the right to initiate the steps for a divorce. Therefore, women can be left “chained” (*agunah*) to their husbands and unable to remarry. Epstein suggested that the couple could sign a statement at the wedding that would legally authorize the rabbinic courts to issue the documentation necessary for the divorce pre-facto according to agreed-upon conditions. Epstein first published “A Solution to the *Agunah* Problem” and the translated Hebrew version, “Hazaah Lemaan Takanat Hagunot,” in 1930 in the form of an

article. In 1935, he published the legal responsum, “Adjustment of the Jewish marriage Laws to Present-Day Conditions.” For each of these documents, see *Proceedings of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement 1927–1970*, II, ed. David Golinkin (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1997), 619–672.

⁵¹Designed to diverge from Maimonides’s Thirteen Articles of Faith, the Wants sought to “make a demand upon Jewish unity,” as Kaplan found it impossible to agree on abstract principles, such as Maimonides’s original creed. See Kaplan, *Communings of the Spirit*, ed. Mel Scult (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 218.

⁵²Kaplan, “The Thirteen Wants,” <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/wants.htm> (accessed 19 April 2010).

⁵³Ira Eisenstein, Mordecai Kaplan, and Eugene Kohn, eds., *Sabbath Prayer Book* (New York: The Reconstructionist Foundation, 1945), 1.

⁵⁴Kaplan Diary, 16 May 1945.

⁵⁵Caplan, 53.

⁵⁶Eisenstein, Kaplan, and Kohn, xxiii.

⁵⁷My teacher, Rabbi Eliezer Diamond, noted that as part of the *Musaf* service—the additional service on Shabbat that accounts for the extra sacrifices of the day—Kaplan wrote a liturgical introduction that praises individuals during Temple times for tangibly giving of themselves to God. While Kaplan is often portrayed as one who excised texts indiscriminately because the liturgy lacked application to modern life, he had the utmost respect for the Temple cult and was jealous that moderns could not experience this tangible connection with the Divine:

Our worship is one of prayer and praise. But when we think of the piety of our fathers, who from their meager store of cattle and grain, the yield of the shepherd’s care and the farmer’s toil, offered their best in the service of God, can we be content with a gift of mere words that costs us neither labor nor privation? Shall we not feel impelled to devote our substance to the service of God? Shall we not give of our store to the relief of suffering, the healing of sickness, the dispelling of ignorance and error, the righting of wrongs and the strengthening of faith?

See Eisenstein, Kaplan, and Kohn, 189–191.

⁵⁸For example, Kaplan conceived that God could be explained according to the laws of nature. Therefore, he excised parts of the *siddur* that petitioned God to change the weather, such as the second paragraph of the *Shema*. Instead of the traditional recitation of Deuteronomy 11:13–21, he began with Deuteronomy 11:21 and continued with a Deuteronomy 1–6, which states that if one heeds God one will be blessed in all places. In this case, he eliminated the idea that God would reward people with rain, a theology that could not be logically deduced through reason.

Kaplan also eliminated references to the selection of Israel, seen most clearly through how he changed the blessings over the Torah from “Blessed are you Lord our God that chose us from the nations and gave us the Torah” to “Blessed are you... that brought us closer to your work and gave us your Torah.” Such changes in the liturgy would later become a staple in Reconstructionist texts. For a complete catalogue of changes that Kaplan made to the liturgy, see Caplan, 46–125.

⁵⁹Letter from JTS faculty to Kaplan, 30 April 1941, as cited in Wertheimer, “Kaplan vs. ‘The Great Do-Nothings,’” 25.

⁶⁰Scult, “Kaplan’s Heschel: A View from the Diary,” *Conservative Judaism* 54, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 5.

⁶¹Ibid., 7. Kaplan drew immensely from the philosophy and educational theory of twentieth-century thinker John Dewey.

⁶²Eisenstein, Kaplan, and Kohn, 236–565.

⁶³Kaplan would also co-edit a prayer book devoted to American holidays. While contemporary readers might not view this book as a *siddur*, per se, Kaplan and his coeditors situate the book as such, as the introduction illustrates:

Each program in this book has the form of a religious service. It begins with an invocation or a message conveying the importance of the day. This is followed by varied selections in prose and poetry, some of them designed for reading by the leader, some for responsive reading by leader and assembly, some for silent reading.... It is recommended that an address by a person qualified to relate the message of the day to current social and moral problems be inserted at some appropriate point in the service.

See Kaplan, J. Paul Williams, and Kohn, *The Faith of America: Prayers, Readings and Songs for the Celebration of American Holidays* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1963), xxv. For how this prayer book fits into Kaplan's broader conceptions of American civil religion, see Beth Wenger, "Making American Civilization Jewish: Mordecai Kaplan's Civil Religion," *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 56–63.

⁶⁴"Nosah Hahlatat HaHerem," 3. This paragraph reads in full:

Those who ask why Agudat HaRabbanim did not enact a *herem* against the Reformers, who also printed a prayer book, and added and removed from the liturgy whatever to their hearts' content, and also are inciters and instigators, the answer: These same Reformers have already separated from the community of Israel, for every man of Israel knows that he does not have any connection with them (the Reformers). And the *geonim* [leading Jewish authorities] of Israel already declared in their time, such as the Gaon Rabbi Akiva Igger, the Gaon Rabbi Moshe Sofer, and the Gaon Rabbi Jacob of Lissa, and the Gaon Rabbi Mordechai Banet, who were alive during that same era, the beginnings of the creation of Reform Temples, and there they fought with them with all of their might and strength. For there were greats of Israel in that day who said, "It is more comfortable for a Jew to enter a Church and not to enter a Reform Temple." But this same man, Dr. Kaplan, he is *within* [emphasis added] the children of Israel, speaking and behaving as a Jew, and he has a synagogue where Jews make mistakes by following him and come there to pray. And he serves as an educator of the children Israel, and it is said about him "*vayaavek ish imo*" [and a man struggled with him] (Genesis 32:25). And as our sages said (Babylonian Talmud Hullin 91), "Like a sage he appeared, and took honor from Jacob;" see the interpretation of Rashi on this passage. So too is the man Dr. Kaplan dressing himself as a sage (*taamid hakham*), bringing Jews to follow after him, and he is leading them astray from belief in God and His Torah, which is far worse than the Reformers. And therefore they did as they did, according to the law of the Torah, lawfully and justly.

The text asserts that the Reformers already separated themselves so much from traditional doctrine that they were no longer a threat to the core, which was not the case with Kaplan, who "clothed himself" as a traditional Jew and sage. Additionally, the great sages of the nineteenth century had already fought the battles that needed to be fought with the Reform movement, and thus Agudat HaRabbanim, which formed in 1901, did not feel the need to continue this battle. The biblical citation in the passage comes from the narrative of Jacob wrestling with his adversary, suggesting that Kaplan will both physically and spiritually injure the Jewish people, Israel. The Talmudic citation, as interpreted by Rashi, comes as part of a discussion of how the man appeared to Jacob in Genesis. Rav Shmuel bar Aha states that the angel appeared to Jacob "clothed" as a Torah scholar, and therefore Jacob positioned himself on the left side of the man, as Rav Yehudah said, "One who walks to the right of his teacher does not possess proper manners." For that reason, he was able to attack Jacob's right side. In the same way, this text suggests that Kaplan appears to Israel as a Torah scholar but really is an adversary out to fool and injure the Jewish people.

⁶⁵In the months following the excommunication, Sidney Morgenbesser suggested that excommunicating Kaplan was the epitome of hypocrisy:

If Judaism consists in accepting all of the *mitzvot* of the Torah as binding, why should Bialik and Brandeis be recognized as Jews? Why are even the Orthodox so proud of Einstein and Herzl? Seriously, why not excommunicate all Jews who “keep their places of business open” on Saturday? Why not excommunicate all who accept money from such sources? Why not excommunicate all who suspect that the Greeks may have had something to contribute to human values? Why not excommunicate all who may believe that the world is at least 100,000 years old or those who proclaim in public that America is their home and not a temporary purgatory? The truth is that the Orthodox cannot. There would be no one of any consequence left.

See Morgenbesser, “Is Orthodoxy Consistent with Democracy?” *The Reconstructionist* 11, no. 10 (5 October 1945): 24.

⁶⁶“Orthodox Rabbis ‘Excommunicate’ Author Of Prayer Book Though He Is Not a Member,” A11.

⁶⁷Joshua Trachtenberg, “Religious Activities,” *American Jewish Year Book* 47 (1945–1946): 217.

⁶⁸“Orthodox Rabbis ‘Excommunicate’ Author Of Prayer Book Though He Is Not a Member,” A11.

⁶⁹“Prof. Mordecai M. Kaplan ‘Excommunicated’ by Orthodox Rabbis,” *The Jewish Exponent* (22 June 1945): 1.

⁷⁰Interview with Selma Goldman, conducted by Marilyn Price, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Oral History Project. There is no halakhic justification not to sell food to an excommunicated individual, and certainly not his children. In addition to this anecdote, one of the secretaries at Kaplan’s Society for the Advancement of Judaism quit her job specifically because of the decree.

⁷¹Letter from Max Arzt to Kaplan, 13 August 1945, Milton Steinberg Collection (P–369), Box 17, Folder 7 (“Reconstructionist Prayer Books”), AJHS, New York.

⁷²Rabbinical Assembly, *Proceedings* (1945): 29.

⁷³“Mikhtav u’Teshuva B’Inyan HaHerem Al Sidduro Shel Kaplan,” *HaDoar* 25, no. 33 (13 July 1945): 739.

⁷⁴Kaplan Diary, 16 June 1945.

⁷⁵Professor Chaim Tchernowitz of the Jewish Institute of Religion, who wrote under the pen name of Rav Tzair, criticized Kaplan in the press, as he had also done after the publication of the *haggadah*. Overall, Tchernowitz was confused about the *siddur*, for example, suggesting that Kaplan’s reinterpretation of sacrifice was a Christian idea stemming from non-Jewish sources. He also said that the Hebrew was “difficult even for those well-versed in Hebrew.” Meanwhile, the Orthodox Union (OU) wrote its review of the *siddur* before the excommunication edict and thus did not refer to Agudat HaRabbanim in its review. Like Kaplan, the OU also felt that this was a time when Judaism needed a saving grace. It just happened that the OU viewed Kaplan’s document as a destructive force rather than a medium of salvation. For the OU, the prayer book manifested the very problem facing Jews in America: “The United States of America in a new sad aspect has become the country of undreamt-of possibilities.” See Rav Tzair, “A Misguided and Misleading Siddur,” *Jewish Criterion* (2 November 1945), Milton Steinberg Collection (P–369), Box 17, Folder 7, AJHS, New York; “Liturgic Blasphemy,” *The Orthodox Union* 12, no. 5 (June 1945): 2. The Hebrew version of Rav Tzair’s lengthy critique of the *siddur* appears as “Siddur Tefillah shel Toim u’Mar’im,” published in 1946. See “Siddur shel Toim u’Mar’im,” *Karhon* 7, no. 13 (Tishrei 5706): 1–24.

⁷⁶*New York Times* (22 June 1945): 15.

⁷⁷*Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook* (1946): 28–29.

⁷⁸“Gilui Daat,” *HaDoar* 25, no. 39 (1945): 904–905. This letter was later translated in “A Declaration about Dr. Kaplan’s Siddur,” *The Jewish Forum* (January 1946): 7.

⁷⁹Lieberman in particular showed discontent for Kaplan throughout their careers at the Seminary, especially after the publication of the *siddur*. Kaplan describes in his diary how the Talmud scholar hurriedly walked away from Kaplan one day when they passed in the hallway. Kaplan could only question Lieberman, “Why are you mad at me?” See Kaplan Diary, 1 June 1945.

⁸⁰Eli Ginzberg explains that his father “believed in academic freedom, but had little sympathy for those who sought to alter tradition... More important, he had reached the conclusion that any effort at reconciling historic Judaism with American life was doomed to failure.” Therefore, Ginzberg felt that Kaplan’s *siddur* was inevitable heresy, one that damaged the Jewish community at large. As Eli Ginzberg describes, “In one of his more sarcastic formulations, my father would ask, ‘What point is there to revise Jewish theology for pants-makers?’” Eli Ginzberg, *Keeper of the Law* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966), 143–144.

⁸¹“A Declaration about Dr. Kaplan’s Siddur,” 7.

⁸²For example, the three rabbis indicated that Kaplan completely misread the fact that a *herem* condones the assassination of the person banned, when in fact the *Shulkhan Arukh* states that the banned individual may actually open a store to maintain a livelihood and the community has the obligation to support the life of the excommunicated; killing the individual would therefore be considered homicide. *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸³Eleventh-century French commentator, Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak (Rashi), defines the word *min* as someone who is an intense idolater, such as a priest.

⁸⁴“Mikhtav u’Teshuvah b’Inyan HaHerem Al Sidduro Shel Kaplan.” The law stems from Rav Nachman’s opinion in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Gittin*, 45b. The text differentiates between a Torah scroll written by a *min* and a *goy*, a non-Jew (Christian sensors would later change the text to *oved kokhavim*, idolaters). Rashi understands a *min* to be someone who is a fervent Jewish idolater, such as a priest (*aduk b’avodat kochavim, k’gon komer*). Rashi suggests that the Torah scroll must be burned because it clearly was written for the purpose of idolatry. Accordingly, a Torah scroll written by a non-Jew cannot be used for ritual purposes and therefore must be hidden [buried].

Both Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah* and Josef Karo’s *Shulkhan Aruch* codify this principle in the legal codes. The printed edition of the *Shulkhan Arukh* reads, “A Sefer Torah written by an *apikorus* must be burned.” The original reads “*min*” instead of “*apikorus*.” This is apparent from the commentary on the *Shulkhan Arukh* of Rabbi Shabbatai ben Meir ha-Kohen, commonly known as the “Shakh,” who defines *apikorus* as Rashi did in his commentary on the Talmud—“a *min* who is fervent in idolatrous acts and wrote the *Sefer Torah* for the sake of idolatry.” See Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Tefillin, Mezuzah v’Sefer Torah, 1:13; *Shulkhan Aruch*, Yoreh Deah, 281:1. None of the halakhic literature speaks explicitly of burning a *siddur*, but through an *a fortiori* argument (*kal v’chomer*), one can assume that if the law applies to a Torah scroll, it would apply to a *siddur*, as well.

⁸⁵“A Declaration about Dr. Kaplan’s Siddur,” 8.

⁸⁶Gordis responded directly to Kaplan’s *haggadah* in his 1942 speech to the RA on “Authority in Jewish law.” He spoke about the greater problems of authority and definition in Conservative Judaism and why Kaplan could so dramatically affect the movement. Robert Gordis, “Authority in Jewish Law,” *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* (1942): 64–97.

⁸⁷Personal interview with Gillman, 14 February 2005.

⁸⁸Louis Finkelstein, “The Jew in 1950,” *Conservative Judaism* 6, no. 4 (May, 1950): 1.

⁸⁹Rabbinical Assembly, *Proceedings* (1942): 48.

⁹⁰Morris Adler, “The Seminary as Interpreter of Judaism to Modern Jews,” delivered at the Conference on the Role of Judaism in the Modern World, Congress Hotel, Chicago (19 April 1942), 91, The Ratner Center Archives of The Library of JTS, New York.

⁹¹Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, and Robert M. MacIver, eds., *Approaches to National Unity: A Symposium* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), v.

⁹²Ibid., xiii.

⁹³Marshall Sklare, "The Conservative Movement: Achievements and Problems" in *The Jewish Community in America*, ed. Marshall Sklare (New York: Behrman House, 1974), 179.

⁹⁴Louis Bernstein, *Challenge and Mission: The Emergence of the English-speaking Orthodox Rabbinate* (New York: Shengold, 1982), 7.

⁹⁵Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 283.

⁹⁶Yoni Lipschitz, "Recollections and Reconsideration: Revisiting the Path of Rabbi Norman Lamm," *The Commentator* (17 December 2007), <http://www.yucommentator.com/2.2828/recollections-and-reconsideration-revisiting-the-path-of-rabbi-norman-lamm-1.297600> (accessed 26 April 2010).

⁹⁷For a comprehensive look at America's attempts to fortify the center during this era, see Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949).