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RABBI SIMON JOSHUA GLAZER: EARLY 20TH CENTURY WORDSMITH

Dr. Yitzchok Levine
Posted Jul 01 2009

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Virtually all of the *rabbonim* who came to America during the latter part of the nineteenth century did not speak English. A few did master the language and become proficient at speaking and writing it; one of these was Rabbi Simon Joshua Glazer, who did more than just learn to speak and write in English - he also acquired a substantial secular education.

Simon Glazer was born in Erzwilg, Lithuania on January 21, 1878.

At the age of nine, he entered the yeshiva of Yurburg, where he studied under Rabbi Wolf Pollack. Following his bar mitzvah, Glazer continued his Talmud studies at several Lithuanian yeshivas including Eurologa, where his scholarship advanced under the guidance of Rabbi Moshe Sadovsky. At the age of 18, Glazer received rabbinical ordination from Rabbi Alexander Moshe Lapidus and Rabbi Isaac Rabinowitz.

In 1896 Glazer moved to Touvorig, near the Prussian border, and began teaching at the local synagogue. To avoid service in the Russian army, Glazer left Touvorig shortly thereafter, crossing the border to Koenigsberg. After failing to receive permission to remain in Koenigsberg, he departed for Palestine in 1896. Finding no satisfactory means to earn a livelihood in Palestine, Glazer immigrated to America one year later.¹

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In New York he met Kasriel Sarasohn, the editor of the Orthodox newspaper the Yiddische Gazeteer. Sarasohn advised Rabbi Glazer to study English and a variety of secular subjects because America needed rabbis who were not only Talmudic scholars but who were also secularly trained.

The rabbi took Sarasohn's advice and devoted the next four years mastering English and acquiring secular knowledge. His spent the winter months immersed in the study of secular subjects, while

during the summer he served as a cantor and Hebrew teacher in several American cities. In this way he was able to support himself while he studies. At the end of those four years Rabbi Glazer emerged as an individual with a rare combination of skills - a secularly educated, European-trained *talmid chocham* who spoke English fluently.

In 1902 Rabbi Glazer married Ida Cantor of Buffalo, New York, and accepted his first full-time position as the rabbi of Congregation Bnai Israel in Des Moines, Iowa. In 1904 he published his first book in English, *The Jews of Iowa*.² It was to be the first of 26 books he would write; he also contributed hundreds of articles to newspapers and journals.

A 1905 review of Rabbi Glazer's first book reads:

The Jews of Iowa, by Rabbi Simon Glazer, of Des Moines, is a readable volume of 359 pages. The book, which is of recent issue, is intended to narrate a history of the Jews of Europe and of North and South America in modern times and to give a brief history of Iowa with a complete history of the Jews of Iowa, along with an accurate account of their religious, social, economic, and educational progress. The volume covers an

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unworked field; for, as the author writes, "The greatest and most difficult task was to collect data for the history of the Jews of Iowa. Not a single paragraph was to be found ready, not a single fact was on file with any Jew; and not a page was ever devoted to chronicle the annals of the Jewish pioneers of Iowa. The old newspapers had to be consulted, but there only a name sounding Jewish could be discovered. When a Jew donated or bequeathed money for any philanthropic purpose, the papers only recorded the fact that a prominent citizen by such and such a name offered a most generous gift, and, as there were no Jewish horse-thieves among the pioneers, no need was found to brand the genealogy of the individual in describing him."³

The Jews of Iowa is an astonishingly comprehensive volume, and the breadth of Rabbi Glazer's scholarship is impressive. In his preface he writes:

This volume contains a history of the development of the modern Jews as well as an account of a small group of American Jews - The Jews of Iowa. The student, or reader, will easily be able to discover the mode of Israel's adventure during the sublimest epoch in the world's history and, subsequently, will readily discern the enigmatic tangles which are creating Jewish problems upon every continent. Besides, the general public will find in this work useful facts about a misunderstood class which seems to be struggling upon the waves of Time without interruption, and a mutual benefit is, therefore, inevitable.

Rabbi Glazer stayed in Des Moines for three years. He subsequently went on to serve in numerous congregations in the United States and Canada, including Toledo, Ohio (1905-1907); Montreal, (1907-1918); Seattle (1918-1920); Kansas City, Missouri (1920-1923); and various synagogues in New York from 1923 until his passing in 1938. In each community he left his mark, and we shall describe some of his activities in future articles.

¹ Orthodox Judaism in America, a Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook by Moshe D. Sherman, Greenwood Press, 1966, page 75.

² This book may be downloaded at:

http://books.google.com/books/pdf/The_Jews_of_Iowa.pdf?id=cqMdAAAAMAAJ&output=pdf&sig=TdyAxmAQKIMz6Ia4QcUQmnU-qxU

³ Iowa Journal of History and Politics, edited by Benjamin F. Shambaugh, Volume III, The State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 1905, page 478. This publication is available at: http://books.google.com/books?id=qXcSAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA478&lpg=PA478&dq=the+jews+of+iowa+glazer&source=web&ots=vjdoj0x6Jl&sig=Fq4FKxwhiYsI-mQqEJ9xb3_OdPY&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=4&ct=result

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Wise counsel is needed in this century!

Date 01:07, 07-11, 09

Truth was the truth in early 20th century and ethics was finding out absolute meanings of those established meanings. I had to write this letter on ethics to a leader in the Baptist organization-(ERLC)

Mr.Richard Land, magna cum laude is a Latin term as anno Domini is a Latin term, now which one should receive more attention?

Many Christians are being disparaged due to your lack of attention on ethics.

I am just one of those many.

Stop Rabbi Eckstien from teaching blasphemous doctrines that Christians are the persecutors, while asking for money.

James E Reeves
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