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THE Breslau Seminary and the Rabbiner Seminar

Dear Editor,

In his letter to the editor that appeared in the March 16, 2007 Yated, C. H. presented a number of quotes from Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman's excellent biography of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l. Rav Hirsch pointed out many shortcomings of the Breslau Seminary of Zecharia Frankel. There is no question that Rav Hirsch's condemnation of this institution was on the mark.

What Yated readers may find of interest is that Rav Hirsch was also "uncomfortable" with the unquestionably Orthodox Rabbiner-Seminar that Rabbi Ezriel Hildesheimer founded in Berlin. On pages 262-264, Rabbi Klugman writes: "Rabbi Hirsch harbored deep suspicions of the Wissenschaft methodology even in the hands of those of impeccably Orthodox credentials. These apprehensions came to the fore with the founding of the Berlin Rabbiner-Seminar by Rabbi Ezriel Hildesheimer in 1873. Rabbi Hirsch privately expressed his fears that the sanction of spurious Wissenschaft methods by an Orthodox institution would in the long run have an even more devastating effect than the Breslau Seminary. [Students in the Rabbiner-Seminar pursued university studies in conjunction with their rabbinic studies in the Seminary.

Despite the great respect which Rabbi Hirsch had for Rabbi Hildesheimer, and the latter's unequivocal opposition to the Breslau Seminary, Rabbi Hirsch's son Isaac challenged the Rabbiner-Seminar, in an article published in Rabbi Hildesheimer's own *Judische Presse*, to provide an explicit clarification of the lines of demarcation between it and Breslau. No such declaration was ever forthcoming, and the irritation of those close to the Berlin Seminary at being called upon to prove their Orthodoxy created a rift between Berlin and Frankfurt that never entirely healed.

"In 1874, not long after the establishment of the Seminary, one of its leading educators, Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann, published *Mar Shmuel - A Portrait of the Life of a Talmud*

Scholar. In a private letter, Rabbi Hirsch leveled withering criticism at Mar Shmuel, which seemed to follow the path of Graetz in interpreting various halachoth propounded by its subject as an outgrowth of his great love of mankind. In addition, he saw the work as giving credence to “critical history” in Orthodox circles. He was disturbed by references to “new laws” instituted by the Sages of the Talmud, and the fact that Rabbi Hoffmann did not shy away from quoting Graetz and other Wissenschaft scholars, whom Rabbi Hirsch considered completely beyond the pale. Taken as a whole, the work constituted a “stumbling block,” in Rabbi Hirsch’s opinion. The appearance of this work by one of the Seminary’s most prominent teachers so soon after its founding only fueled Rabbi Hirsch’s misgivings.

Whatever his private misgivings about the Rabbiner-Seminar, Rabbi Hirsch never went public with his criticisms. Emanuel Schwarzschild, Chairman of the Board of the IRG and one of Rabbi Hirsch’s most devoted followers, was a central figure on the board of the Rabbiner-Seminar, something he would never have done without tacit approval from Rabbi Hirsch.” Rabbi Hirsch’s refusal to engage in a public dispute with the Seminary no doubt reflected his own recognition that its teachers and students were unquestionably Orthodox, and that the already weak Orthodox camp could not afford a bitter public split. “It must be said that Rabbi Hirsch’s fears concerning the Rabbiner-Seminar never materialized. In its first 12 years of existence, only one graduate departed from the tenets of Orthodox Judaism, and Rabbi Hildesheimer revoked his ordination and publicized his revocation in the press. From then on, each ordination contained a proviso that it was retroactively void if the recipient served in a synagogue with an organ or without the traditional prayer book.

“Besides Rabbi Hoffmann, other leading scholars who taught in the Berlin Seminary included: Rabbi Avraham Eliyahu Kaplan, the famous Slabodka illui; Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, author of the four-volume Seridei Eish, who headed the Seminary from 1924 until its closure by the Nazis; Dr. Abraham Berliner and Dr. Moshe Auerbach. Its list of illustrious graduates included Rabbi Meyer Lerner, Chief Rabbi of Altona; Rabbi Ezra Munk; Dr. Leo Deutschlander, who was dispatched by Jacob Rosenheim to Poland to assist Sarah Schenirer in founding the Bais Yaakov movement; Rabbi Joseph Carlebach of Hamburg and Rabbi Avrohom Wolf, headmaster for many years of the Bais Yaakov High School of Bnei Brak, which bears his name. The Rabbiner-Seminar produced three generations of pious, upright and erudite rabbonim, who served as the backbone of Orthodox Jewry in Germany until its destruction at the hands of the Nazis.”

Two prominent Baltimore Orthodox rabbis were graduates of the Hildesheimer Rabbiner-Seminar - Rabbi Dr. Henry W. (Pinchas Ha Levi) Schneeberger (1848 - 1916) and Rabbi Dr. Schepschel Schaffer (1862 - 1933). Rabbi Schneeberger was the first American born, university educated, Orthodox ordained rabbi in America. He served for forty years as the rabbi of Congregation Chizuk Emunah, which was, of course, Orthodox during his tenure. Rabbi Schaffer was the first rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel, served in his position of rov for forty years, and was succeeded by Rav Shimon Schwab.

By the way, while the Breslauer Seminary most certainly contributed to the undermining

of Orthodox Judaism, there were graduates of this institution that were Orthodox and did much to aid Orthodoxy. One such man that deserves mention is Rabbi Dr. Bernard Drachman (1861 - 1945). Raised in a non-Shomer Shabbos home, he went to public school in Jersey City, N.J. and then Columbia College. While in high school and college, Rabbi Drachman also attended the (reformed) Temple Emanuel Hebrew Preparatory School of New York City for six years. In 1882, he graduated Columbia with honors and decided to study for the rabbinate. Temple Emanuel granted him a scholarship with the idea that he would prepare for the reformed rabbinate. He pursued his studies in Europe at the University of Breslau and the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau from which he received his rabbinical degree. He also matriculated at Heidelberg University which conferred upon him the degree of Ph.D. Magna Cum Laude! in 1885.

Upon returning to America he was immediately confronted with the conscientious question as to what attitude he should assume on the issues of reform against Orthodox Judaism. His venerable friend and patron, Dr. Gustav Gottheil, was desirous of having him as his assistant and had indeed expected that such would be the case, but the young rabbi's views and inclinations were all on the side of historic Judaism and his studies in Germany had intensified his attitude. It was a difficult choice. He chose the less glamorous and less remunerative field of activity, since it was in accordance with his convictions. He speedily became known as an enthusiastic and energetic champion of Orthodox Judaism, one of the then very few English-speaking representatives of the ancient faith in the America of that time." [Memorial Journal published by the Congregation Zichron Ephraim, 3/31/46]

Rabbi Drachman was in the forefront of "everything" Orthodox in America during the last part of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th Century. Early in his career, the synagogue that he served voted to have mixed seating. Without hesitation, he resigned his position. After this, he served for many years as rabbi of Congregation Zichron Ephraim, serving until his passing in 1945. The synagogue, located at 163 East 67th Street, N.Y., is known today as the Park East Synagogue. Rabbi Dr. Drachman's accomplishments include:

- He was a founder of the Jewish Theological Seminary (which many may not realize was founded as an Orthodox institution);

- He was one of the original organizers of the Jewish Welfare Board. The Board was formed from a variety of Jewish organizations as a result of World War I, attending to needs of Jewish servicemen, and supplying funding to enlist rabbis at military posts. The Welfare Board laid great stress upon its spiritual work, upon bringing the message and the comfort of religion to the soldiers. An essential part of the work was the preparation of a suitable abbreviated prayer book. It was recognized at once that men engaged in active war service, in the midst of the constant alarms and peril of daily combat, could not be expected to use the full ritual of the Jewish order of prayer. [The Unfailing Light, Bernard Drachman, The Rabbinical Council of America, New York, 1948, footnote page 365.] Dr. Drachman took a leading role in the preparation of this abbreviated prayer book.

- In 1913, Dr. Drachman became the second president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. "Through the retirement of Dr. Mendes from the Presidency due to ill health, Dr. Drachman became the only logical candidate." [OU online] Rabbi Drachman had been involved in the OU from its inception in 1898. "A special unit of the Union, designated the Jewish Sabbath Association, was instituted to focus on this area. Besides educational work to rally loyalty to Sabbath observance and prevailing upon business establishments to remain closed on Shabbath, employment opportunities were sought for the Shomrey Shabbath. In 1907, Dr. Bernard Drachman, as chairman of that committee (which subsequently became an autonomous organization, the Jewish Sabbath Alliance), reported that within the preceding years, jobs had been obtained for 1,500 Sabbath observers." [OU online]

- In 1912, he became a candidate for Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue of London. However, he was not elected to this position, in part because of his staunchly Orthodox views.

- In 1899, he published the first English translation of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch's The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel. From the Heart of Israel or Jewish Tales and Types first appeared in 1905. Dibre Haribos (Matters of Controversy, a rabbinical disputation between Zerachiah Halevi and Avrohom ben Dovid) was published from a manuscript (Unicum) in 1907. In addition, he contributed countless articles to the English and Yiddish press that furthered the cause of Orthodox Judaism.

As with almost everything else in life, not everything at the Breslauer Seminary should be considered all bad. Rabbi Drachman was certainly one man who was able to focus on the positive there and use this to become an important American Orthodox rabbi.

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