

## *What Makes Journalists Tremble*

In remarks originally made at an awards dinner honoring journalists who brave danger to do their work in distant corners of the world, ABC newsman Ted Koppel says in *The Nation* (Nov. 24, 1997) that, in some ways, journalism may be in greater peril here in America.

*We celebrate the men and women whose dedication to the collection and distribution of facts threatens their very existence. When they antagonize those with money, political power and guns, they risk their lives. We, on the other hand, tremble at nothing quite so much as the thought of boring our audiences. Antagonizing the rich and powerful is our bread and butter; far from involving any great risk to our safety, it is one of the more reliable paths to professional advancement. The preferred weapons of the rich and powerful here in America are the pollster and the public relations consultant. But they are no threat to the safety of journalists. Our enemies are far more insidious than that. They are declining advertising revenues, the rising cost of newsprint, lower ratings, diversification, and the vertical integration of communications empires.*

*They are the breezier, chattier styles insinuating themselves onto the front pages of our more distinguished newspapers. They are the fading lines between television news and entertainment. There is, after all, a haunting paradox in the notion that, even as we honor journalists abroad for “risking personal and political peril in upholding the highest standards of their profession,” their own stories and the stories they cover are increasingly unlikely to lead any of our broadcasts or appear on any of our front pages. We celebrate their courage even as we exhibit increasingly little of our own.*

offenders repeat their crime is apparently not supported by any research. The real figure is probably much lower. And most sex offenses are not committed by strangers; 90 to 95 percent involve incest or acquaintances. “Maybe that’s the kind of question a newspaper ought to ask,” says Alex MacLeod, managing editor of the *Seattle Times*. “What danger do these people pose? I don’t know that we’ve ever tried to answer that.”

Another problem that bothers editors is the accuracy of the official lists. Critics say they

typically have a high rate of error, with many wrong or outdated addresses. Some newspapers now only print the names and addresses on a case-by-case basis.

In the end, the courts may spare the news media further anguish. In New Jersey—the state in which seven-year-old Megan Kanka, for whom Megan’s Law was named, was raped and murdered in 1996—the state has frozen the sex offender notification process pending a court challenge to the law. The plaintiffs: 20 convicted child molesters.

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### *The Myth of Jewish Liberalism*

“American Jewish Liberalism: Unraveling the Strands” by Steven M. Cohen and Charles S. Liebman, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Fall 1997), Sociology Dept., Univ. of Maryland, College Park, Md. 20742–1315.

American Jews are well known for their liberalism. Some scholars contend that this evolved naturally out of Jewish tradition, with its strong concern for social justice and the welfare of the poor. After analyzing combined data from national surveys conducted between 1972 and 1994, the authors con-

clude that the extent of Jewish liberalism is much exaggerated and Judaic values are not at its root.

The perception that political liberalism is unusually strong among Jews does have a basis in fact, write Cohen, a professor at Hebrew University, in Jerusalem, and Lieb-

man, a professor of religion and politics at Bar-Ilan University, in Ramat Gan, Israel. American Jews are more likely than gentiles to identify themselves as liberals (47 percent, compared with 28 percent) and as Democrats or pro-Democrat (72 percent, compared with 52 percent). Jews are also more likely to oppose prayer in public schools; to favor civil liberties for atheists, communists, and homosexuals; to take permissive stands on abortion, divorce, and other social issues, and to favor increased government spending in such areas as health, education, and the environment. However, the level of Jewish support for increased spending on welfare, and for government efforts to aid the poor in general, was little different from that among non-Jews. The authors' big discovery: when education, income, and other such factors are taken into account, the gap between Jews and gentiles is significantly reduced in almost all instances. On civil liberties, for instance, the 21-percentage-point difference shrinks to 10 points. The gap nearly vanishes with respect to support for government efforts to help the poor and ill, sympathy for African Americans, and

opposition to capital punishment.

"Historically," Cohen and Liebman point out, "the premodern [Jewish] religious tradition harbors deep antagonism to, not to mention suspicion of, non-Jews." In this tradition, the concern for social justice and the welfare of the poor was chiefly about *Jews*. However, sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset, a Wilson Center Senior Scholar, and others have argued that contemporary Jews have universalized this tribal sense of responsibility. But if traditional Judaic values underlie contemporary Jewish liberalism, Cohen and Liebman argue, then Jews who attend synagogue more frequently should be more liberal than other Jews; in fact, however, they are less liberal.

American Jews "have historically seen themselves as a vulnerable minority group and have seen the Democratic Party as the party more favorable to their group interests," Cohen and Liebman note. For similar reasons, Jews have supported a high barrier between church and state. Most Jews (the Orthodox excepted) also have taken a relatively permissive stance on sexual matters. But otherwise, conclude the authors, Jewish liberalism seems more myth than reality.

## *The Unfolding of Faith*

Feminist Elizabeth Fox-Genovese explains in *Crisis* (Nov. 1997) how she has come to join the Roman Catholic Church. For her, she says, conversion "has been less an event than an unfolding."

*Why or how could a non-believing, woman intellectual—and a reputedly Marxist-feminist one at that—be joining that bastion of tradition and hierarchical authoritarianism, the Catholic Church? Those who, for years, had doubted my radical credentials and targeted me as a pernicious ideological opponent did not take long to decide that that is precisely what they would have expected if only the thought had crossed their minds. (It is an inadvertent testimony to the radical secularism of the academic world that the thought had not.) But even people who were friendlier toward me probably harbored similar thoughts, if for dissimilar reasons.*

*For such people, the friendly and the unfriendly alike, the notion of conversion, and indeed the very idea of religious faith, has become so foreign that the only plausible explanation for it must necessarily be political: In their view, my conversion merely marked the culmination of my progress toward political and cultural conservatism. . . .*

*The growing struggle in my heart and soul was not, however, a matter of left and right, but rather one of right and wrong and our ability to recognize them. Throughout the 1980s, I was increasingly writing and speaking about women's issues, especially abortion, and it was the attempt to understand their full implications that gradually pulled me toward church membership and faith. . . .*

*There are kinds of knowing that transcend the play of words and ideas. Of such quiet certainty, but more deeply so, is the knowledge of faith, which steals into the soul.*