

House Of Lords Reluctant To Try Nazi War Criminals

LONDON (JTA) — Britain's chief rabbi, Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, got a lukewarm response from his peers in the House of Lords recently, when he asked them to support a bill that would allow the trial of suspected Nazi war criminals in British courts.

To let the henchmen of Hitler go unpunished "would be handing the tyrant a posthumous victory," Jakobovits declared. "We would make it easier for the dominion of evil to assert itself once again, at an incalculable cost in human suffering and degradation."

But despite his eloquent, reasoned and impassioned plea, few peers who took part in the debate thought it would be wise to have war crimes trials in Britain.

Their reasons ranged from a dislike of retributive action so long after the event to a genuine worry that the trials would arouse latent anti-Semitism in Britain.

The peers were debating the report of an inquiry on Nazi war criminals living in Britain, conducted by Sir Thomas Hetherington, the former director of public prosecutions, and William Chalmers, his Scottish counterpart.

The report, published in July, concluded that there was sufficient evidence against at least three individuals to warrant criminal prosecution.

Douglas Hurd, who was home secretary at the time, said the government would listen to the views of both houses of Parliament before deciding whether to introduce a bill.

'Fight Against Evil'

Jakobovits said he spoke neither as a Jew, a rabbi or even a refugee from Nazi persecution, but as a member of the human race.

"Until the perpetrators of crimes against humanity knew they would never be allowed to find safe refuge from justice, humanity would not be safe and justice would never be vindicated," he said.

"We now have an historic opportunity to affirm the ceaseless fight against evil, by the unrelenting pursuit of mass murderers," the chief rabbi said.

He argued vehemently against suggestions that Jews were seeking vengeance, an attitude often falsely attributed to the Old Testament.

"Let me once and for all lay the ghost of this vicious canard" to rest, he said. "My faith abhors vengeance."

The chief rabbi said he was less interested in securing criminal convictions than in demonstrating moral convictions.

Helping Converts Learn What It Means To Be A Jew

By Rabbi Steven Foster,
Temple Emanuel, Denver, Col.

Editor's Note: Outreach to non-Jewish spouses and courses for potential Jews-by-choice were major topics at the recent national biennial assembly of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. In this article, reprinted with permission from REFORM JUDAISM magazine, a highly successful conversion course is discussed by the rabbi who founded the program.

Conversion to Judaism, whether it be through Reform, Conservative or Orthodox auspices, is a difficult and lengthy process, one that involves not only study but also attention to the psychological dimensions involved.

In Denver, many candidates study for several years, converting only when they are completely satisfied that their commitment is real. Our program allows the greatest opportunity for discovering one's intimate connection with Jewish life.

Of those seeking conversion, we require these

His position was strongly backed by the Hetherington report, which stated that "the crimes committed are so monstrous that they cannot be condoned. To take no action would be to taint the UK with the slur of being a haven for war criminals."

However, the bishop of St. Albans, the Rt. Rev. John Taylor, warned that war crimes trials could raise anti-Semitism.

"I fear for the Jewish community in our midst. I am becoming conscious of a revival of anti-Semitism in this country. I have seen it in my diocese," the bishop said.

He expressed concern that proposals to prosecute the last surviving war criminals would be used by the enemies of Judaism to promote hostility against the victims seeking justice instead of the criminals.

Taylor urged the government to re-examine the possibility of extradition, a move rejected at an earlier stage.

Lord Mayhew, who was a junior foreign office minister responsible for war crimes problems in 1946, explained why the government, two years later, decided to end war crimes trials, investigations and extraditions.

"The overriding reason was that we felt retribution had gone far enough," he said.

Mayhew added that "the major difference between the policy we then established and the policy now recommended by the inquiry is that we thought that retaliation should end, and the inquiry recommends that retaliation should be revived."

The only non-Jewish peer to support Lord Jakobovits' position was Viscount Tonyandy, a former speaker of the House of Commons.

"I am old enough to know that if we close our eyes on an issue of this sort, we shall not be in harmony with the heritage of our people," he said.

five elements:

1. That they attend a 26-week class in basic Judaism.
2. That they read a wide range of books coordinated with class lectures.
3. That they meet in groups with others going through the conversion process. In these sessions, the following concerns often are raised:
 - Does the non-Jewish family accept the possible conversion of one of its members?
 - How does the Jewish family respond to the needs of the Jew-by-choice?
 - How observant does the Jewish partner want the converted spouse to be?
 - Which religious symbols (for example, Christmas trees) and activities are inappropriate in a Jewish home?
4. That they meet privately with the rabbi to discuss personal matters concerning their conversion. These encounters allow the rabbi to evaluate each student's readiness for conversion.
5. Finally, that all potential Jews-by-choice regularly attend synagogue services so that they become familiar with Jewish worship and establish their own pattern of observance.

Upon completing the formal study program and declaring a desire to join the Jewish people, the would-be convert considers various ritual options. While most Reform rabbis do not require either immersion in the *mikveh* (ritual bath) for women or immersion and circumcision (and/or drawing a drop of blood from the foreskin) for men, it is important that those who are converting to Judaism understand the alternatives. Many Reform rabbis conduct a conversion service in the synagogue, often using a beautiful liturgy that is meaningful to the Jew-by-choice.

Traditionally, a convert to Judaism must undergo ritual immersion and make a commitment to observe *halachah* (religious law). In each case, the understanding is that the individual will abide by the Ten Commandments.

The Convert's Ten Commitments

We also expect of Jews-by-choice that they live by a set of "Ten Commitments" as their basis for entering Jewish communal life. They are:

1. Lighting Shabbat and holiday candles.
2. Fasting on Yom Kippur.
3. Placing a mezuzah on the doorpost of one's house.
4. Giving *tzedekah* (charity).
5. Observing, at least partially, the dietary laws. (For some converts, this may mean keeping a kosher home; for others, it may mean eating matzah on Passover.)
6. Affiliating with a synagogue.
7. Worshipping regularly.
8. Continuing Jewish study.
9. Supporting the State of Israel.
10. Raising children as Jews.

May it be said of us, as we welcome Jews-by-choice into our midst, that their commitment to Jewish life has intensified our own.

Happy Chanukah

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