Extremism as a Religious Norm*

CHARLES S. LIEBMAN†

Contrary to prevailing paradigms of modernization and secularization, I contend that extremism is the religious norm, and that it is not religious extremism but religious moderation that requires explanation. Relying on impressions from contemporary Judaism, extremism is defined here as the desire to expand the scope, detail and strictness of religious law; social isolation; and the rejection of the surrounding culture. Religious extremism is an impulse or an orientation which, when objectified in persons and institutions, is invariably moderated.

Religious moderation can be accounted for by the mixed motivations of religious adherents, either individuals or groups, who temper their "religious" impulses in order to achieve "non-religious" goals at the individual or communal level. Religious moderation may be a strategy to persuade or convert others, or to protect the religious community itself against a hostile environment. In all instances, moderation is associated with religious prestige and strong communal commitments. The decline of the religious community permits the breakthrough of extremist tendencies. This is facilitated by the decline of the secular culture with which the religious moderates were associated.

This theory is applied to two types of Jewish religious extremism in Israel, one anti-nationalist and the other ultra-nationalist in orientation.

This study is an effort to understand the apparent growth of what has been called "religious extremism."[1] My focus is on Judaism in Israel. My assumption is that the rise, or perceived rise of religious extremism is not limited to Judaism in Israel, therefore, the explanation offered cannot be peculiar to that religion or that country. On the other hand, it would be quite remarkable if developments in the belief and behavior patterns of religious adherents, particularly those most zealous in their attachment to the religion, were entirely accounted for by developments extrinsic to the religion. As David Martin notes, the ethos of a church "colours whatever may be the functional logic of its social position" (Martin, 1978: 24). Hence, the focus on Judaism is not meant to suggest that this is what has happened to every historical religion but rather to raise issues through which other religious communities can be compared and distinguished.

WHY STUDY RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM?

The rise of religious extremism was quite unanticipated by modernization theories prevalent a decade ago. (See, for example: Inkeles, 1969; Smith, 1970; or the literature cited in Creevey, 1980: 207-208). The explanation to be offered in this paper is an illustration of how prevailing paradigms among social scientists lead to the wrong question and a focus on the wrong sorts of information. But even if the explanation offered here were incorrect, this study of religious extremism draws attention to an important topic for

1. I recognize that this is an unfortunate term since the connotations are pejorative. But it has the advantage of being readily comprehensible to scholars and lay people. Religious zealousness is a more value neutral albeit awkward term. Proponents prefer the term "religious revival" or "renewal."

the scientific study of religion. Extremism, whatever form it takes, is an affirmation of "the more the better." Hence, it is helpful to know what it is that the extremists want "more" of. What elements of religion do different extremist groups focus on? Are they similar from one religion to another? Can the internal structure of the particular religion or of religion in general help account for the particular emphases? Can we distinguish types of extremist groups within the same religion by the elements they focus on, and are these groups identifiable by standard social characteristics such as age, occupation, income, education, religious background, etc?

DEFINITION OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Religious extremism can refer either to a process or to an institution. We can talk about this or that individual or group becoming more or less religiously extreme or we can talk about religiously extreme groups or individuals. To say that one finds an increase of religious extremism can mean that more and more people are behaving in a religiously extreme manner, or that there is an increase in strength and/or influence of groups identified as religiously extreme. The two phenomena may, but need not necessarily, be associated. In theory, strengthening the process of extremism might weaken the attraction of institutional extremism.

This study assumes that in most contemporary societies there is a term comparable to or interchangeable with religious extremism, and that the processes or institutions to which it refers are readily identifiable, even if not easily definable. The scholar's first task is to define religious extremism in a way that corresponds as closely as possible to that which is popularly identified as religiously extreme. The following definition is based on my impressions of what Jews in general and Israeli Jews in particular label religious extremism and on the characteristics of those groups whom the public identifies as extremist (or zealous).

I will propose three dimensions of religious extremism. The first dimension contains three components.

Expansion of Religious Law

The first dimension of Jewish religious extremism is the drive to expand the *halakha* (religious law). Religious law is the set of rules persons are obliged to obey lest they sin against God. The sin may be a violation of one's responsibility to God or to other persons. Its sanction may be a matter of human and/or divine judgement. This is irrelevant for purposes of definition. Judaism, like Islam, is defined and distinguished from other religions and cultures by its particular code of law. Because of the prime importance of the law, it stands to reason that Jewish religious extremists will express their orientations, at least in part, in their conception of *halakha*. Perhaps this is less true among Christians or Buddhists among whom religious law plays a smaller role. Perhaps law, by its nature, (objective, clear cut, authoritative) is an especially attractive focus for extermists from all religious traditions. The question merits further study. '

An extremist orientation to *halakha* has three components. First, extremists seek to expand its scope. One can conceive of a continuum of activity from the collective to the

private in which religious law is relevant. At one end of the continuum would be collective behavior; for example the political or economic structure of society as expressed in public law. Further along the continuum are aspects of public law which are concerned with private as opposed to collective behavior. Family law is "the last bastion of the religious concept of law" in the sense of public law imposed on all citizens (Smith, 1970: 3). But the continuum of religious concern extends further along the continuum to the realm of private behavior which finds no expression in public law. It is hard to conceive of a religion prepared to admit that it has nothing authoritative to say to its adherents about education or sex even if that religion eschews enactment of its injunctions in public law. Extremists are at the first end of the continuum. They seek to extend the scope of religious law to include the public as well as the private realm, and to matters of collective as well as private behavior within that realm. For example, the religious adherents of Gush Emunim (Sprinzak, 1981) believe that the *halakha* obliges them to oppose Israeli withdrawal from territory captured in the Six Day War since all that territory is identified as part of the biblical boundaries of the Land of Israel which God promised to the Jews. The dispute between Gush Emunim and the religious moderates is not over the boundaries of the Holy Land but over the relevance of political, security and foreign relations considerations, as opposed to purely *halakhic* considerations, in determining foreign policy.

Expanding the scope of *halakha* means that Jewish extremists have a social program and are critical of existing social institutions; though there may be different groups of extremists, each with their own program. Extremists may seek to impose their program on society, thereby necessarily involving themselves in political conflict; or they may withdraw from society, awaiting a more propitious time, perhaps Divine intervention, for the realization of their program. In the latter case, political conflict may be limited to the defense of the extremists' autonomy. The conquest tendency as opposed to the withdrawal tendency may be a function of a realistic assessment of the political environment and/or a function of the group's ideology. Of course, in some cases neither option may be feasible, as Ivan Marcus notes (1981: 87), and the extremists then live *in* but not *of* the world.

The second component in the extremists' orientation to *halakha* is in the elaboration of the details of the law. For example, religious law requires modesty of dress, particularly among women. The question is: Does the *halakha* require "modesty" and allow each individual or each community to decide on its application? Or, as extremists aver, is the law detailed, requiring, for example, sleeves or hemline of a certain length?

The first two components in the extremists' orientation to *halakha* share a common characteristic. They emphasize the objective, the ordained, and they limit the authority of the subjective, the optional and personal interpretation. They do not, however, minimize the importance of inward motivation, to which extremists tend to ascribe great significance.

The third component in the expansion of the law is the question of strictness versus leniency in interpretation. The law, even if detailed, might be lenient (for example, requiring sleeves to the elbow and hemlines to below the knees) or it might be strict (requiring all parts of the body to be covered). The term strict does not necessarily mean closer to the "letter of the law." The "letter of the law" often suggests a lenient interpretation. Strict refers to the imposition of greater restrictions and hardships, which is what the extremist welcomes (see Williams, 1980, for an Islamic example).

Social Isolation

The second dimension of religious extremism is its attitude toward those elements of society who do not accept extremist norms. The characteristic approach of extremism is one of isolation. However, when coupled with efforts to convert or persuade other individuals, the isolation is tempered and special safeguards may be erected to mitigate the dangers which the inevitable contact with outsiders invites. The pure form of social isolation among Israeli Jews is that found within the Edah Haredit (the Community of the Pious) in Jerusalem with a secondary center in B'nei B'rak (Friedman, 1975). The Lubavitcher Hasidim (Shaffir, 1978) are an extremist group whose conversionist orientation (aimed at other Jews, not non-Jews) involves them in certain aspects of intense relationships with non-religious in which they themselves avoid emotional involvement. The religious adherents of Gush Emunim are committed to organizational activity in consort with non-religious Jews, and their ideology legitimates this cooperation. But, this is the most problematic aspect of their program and has been increasingly challenged by many of their own religious leaders (Liebman, forthcoming).

Judaism is probably the most ethnically oriented of all historical religions. Whereas isolation from non-Jews is encouraged, distancing oneself from other Jews is a problem. It has only become halakhically normative in the modern era (Liebman, 1965: 38-40). In fact, I suspect that one difference between groups of modern and pre-modern Jewish extremists is that the latter had to develop a distinctive program and elaborate world view to legitimate their isolation from and/or hostility toward the Jewish community. In this respect, extremist groups in the pre-modern period tended to be sects. In the modern period, the rise of extremism as a process, for reasons to be discussed later, has legitimated isolation. This is, in fact, the strategy religious Jews as a group adopt in their relationships to non-religious Jews. Extremist groups within the religious world need no longer seek elaborate legitimation for their position. Non-sectarian religious extremism may, therefore, be a particularly modern phenomenon among Jews. Thus, an extremist group is not necessarily sectarian nor are sects necessarily extremists. Sects (and cults) are distinguished by their world view or meaning system in addition to their independent organizational structure. Extremists don't necessarily have a world view or meaning system which distinguishes them from the majority of religious Jews, although they give greater emphasis to one aspect or another of the prevailing world view or meaning system. Over the long run, extremists may become sectarians developing a world view which elaborates their own interpretation of the religion, protects them against hostile outsiders, and explains their condition, but this is less likely in our time precisely because there is no organized community of outsiders other than that which the extremists create in their own minds.

Cultural Rejection

The third dimension of religious extremism is the rejection of cultural forms and values that are not perceived as indigenous to the religious tradition. Such a position is difficult to maintain for any but the strictest sects. Pursuing the goals with consistency would mean the creation of alternate channels for cultural transmission (publishing houses, newspapers, radio, television stations). Even if the group is small and intimate enough

to forego such channels, it must still prohibit exposure to the media in the hands of the outsiders. This is what the Edah Haredit does. Other groups may be less extremist, less willing to adopt a public stance of hostility toward the media, or more anxious to use the mass media to convince others of their cause. However, they protect their own adherents by so occupying them with all kinds of activity (study of sacred text is an example), that they have no leisure time for exposure to the mass media.

THE LIMITS OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Religious extremism, as defined here, is destructive of any communal structure. The obvious question is whether extremism doesn't destroy itself in the long run. The answer is that it would if it could exist in pure form. Extremism is "pure" religion in the sense of being totally differentiated from other forms of culture and independent of all social institutions. That is why it might be best described as an ideal typical impulse rather than as objectified in individuals or institutions. All historical religions recognized the destructive capacity of extremism and sought strategies to contain it. In fact, I believe that Jewish extremism is on the rise because the breakdown of the Jewish community has weakened its capacity to check extremist impulses. But once extremism or extremists organize to attain their goals, the process of organization introduces the very communal type constraints from which extremism initially freed itself. Extremism cannot exist in reality. Metaphorically, it might be said that extremism searches for freedom from communal constraints and with success, it begins to restrain *itself* in order to achieve the very purposes for which it sought its freedom. This problem merits more rigorous empirical examination which can draw on the church-sect literature (Troeltsch, 1931; Wilson, 1973; and Hill, 1973: 47-67 for a good summary of the literature) and other case studies among Jews as well as non-Jews.

EXPLAINING RELIGIOUS MODERATION

The central argument of this paper is that a propensity to religious extremism does not require explanation since it is entirely consistent with basic religious tenets and authentic religious orientations. It is religious moderation or religious liberalism, the willingness of religious adherents to accommodate themselves to their environment, to adapt their behavioral and belief patterns to prevailing cultural norms, to make peace with the world, that requires explanation. As suggested, however, objectifying extremism in persons or institutions, distinguishing extremists from non-extremists, leaves the misleading impression that there is a pure form of extremism in reality. If our description of the extremist orientation is correct, then extremism is a tendency to which every religiously oriented person is attracted. What are some factors of major importance which have mitigated the natural propensity of religion toward extremism?

The most obvious factor is the historical association of religion, culture and society. Religious institutions arise within a specific culture and society. Religious extremism assumes a very high level of religious differentiation. Extremism is restrained when religion is an organic part of the society diffused throughout its institutions. Where differentiation has taken place, the religious institution is often impelled to worldly activity in order to

maximize its automony, control its environment, protect itself, attract adherents, etc. The need for the approval of others and the interaction with other economic and political institutions introduces a compromising or adaptationist tendency.

Also, the success of religion confers status and material benefits on its leaders and attracts to its ranks individuals with self interested motivations, orientations and propensities (O'Dea, 1961) inconsistent with extremism.

Finally, religion is not unidimensional. It not only finds room for, but may even cultivate, qualities and orientations such as contemplation and study, quietude and passivity, the search for a sense of peace, which are inconsistent with extremist orientations.

If, at the present time, we are witnessing a rise in religious extremism, the explanation must lie in a weakening of the very forces that negated extremism in the past. Our case study is drawn from Judaism in Israel, but to understand the rise of extremism there, one must begin with the condition of Jewish orthodoxy in the modern period.

THE RISE OF MODERN JEWISH EXTREMISM

The watershed period for all of modern Judaism is associated with Jewish enlightenment and the movement for political emancipation (Katz, 1973). This begins in Central and Western Europe in the middle to late 18th century, extends to Eastern Europe by the middle of the 19th century and begins penetrating the Jewish communities in Muslim lands at the end of the last and beginning of the present century (Deshen, 1979).

The enlightenment and emancipation were distinctive movements whose combined impact destroyed traditional modes of religious thought and behavior at the individual level, and the capacity of the Jewish community to enforce its regulations at the communal level. The outcome meant the differentiation of religious and secular authority, the diminished capacity of all Jewish leaders to impose their injunctions upon individual Jews, and the diminished legitimacy of community wide authorities. One consequence was the destruction of the most important force mitigating religious extremism: communal unity. Communal unity was not only a religious value but a necessity for Jews as protection against a hostile environment. It was facilitated by the medieval world which required Jewish corporate organization. The corporate Jewish community, its leaders in particular, were sensitive to the threat which extremism evoked, however legitimate that extremism might have been in religious terms. It would be most instructive to note how the community dealt with extremism prior to the emancipation period. Apparently, it utilized techniques of cooptation as well as excommunication. But it could not leave extremism unchecked, lest it generate a momentum that would destroy the community.

In the pre-emancipation period, extremist tendencies or inclinations were probably present among many, if not most Jews, rabbinical leaders in particular. But these tendencies were in tension with and held in check by a sense of responsibility for the material and physical welfare of the entire community, and by the network of interrelationships between more religious and less religious Jews as well as between Jews and non-Jews. This last point may appear paradoxical. After all, the enlightenment and emancipation presumably permitted Jews much freer contact with non-Jews. While that is true, these contacts occurred in a relatively religiously neutral context. The contacts in the new period did not occur between Jew and non-Jew but between two persons engaged

in business, or between merchant and customer or doctor and patient, one of whom happened to be a Jew and one of whom happened to be a non-Jew. As the fact of one's Jewishness became less and less relevant to the points of contact between Jews and non-Jews, the interrelationship itself, at least in some respects, became less Jewishly relevant. It certainly freed the extremist from responsibility for the consequences of his behavior on interrelationships between other groups of Jews or Jews and non-Jews.

If this was the case in the pre-emancipation period, then one implication is that orthodox Jewry in general is more extreme today than in the earlier period. The pre-modern period, of course, is hardly cut of one cloth. But if we compare orthodox Jews and their leaders in the post-emancipation period with the Jewish community and its religious leaders in the pre-emancipation period, then most contemporary religious Jews are more extreme (according to the definition of extremism offered here) than were their predecessors.

The major battle front around which extremism formed itself was its rejection of the enlightenment and the emancipation, or at least their consequences, for the Jewish polity and its culture. We will call the consequences "modernity," although it is clear that relevant features of modernity have not yet been delineated. Jacob Katz has observed that traditional religious leaders were alarmed by the accumulation and severity of deviations from Jewish law and the claim of "the transgressors that they were acting from conviction and therefore had the right to go their own ways" (Katz, 1973; 146). The claim that acting from conviction affords one the right to dictate the nature of one's spiritual life evokes Peter Berger's definition of modern consciousness as "the movement from fate to choice" (Berger, 1979: 11).

Those Jews who rejected modernity or its consequences now had to develop institutions and structures to insulate the tradition from the new environment. The affirmationists were Jews who remained committed to the religious tradition but welcomed or made accommodations to the opportunities afforded by the modern age, even if they were conscious of its dangers. Both affirmationists and rejectionists, to borrow a term Peter Berger has applied to Christianity's confrontation with modernity (1969: 156), were religious innovators. The rise of extremism is the story of the rise of the rejectionist and decline of the affirmationist orientation.

Was affirmationism an authentic religious response? It depends on how one understands the term "authentic." Affirmationism can be partially accounted for by self-interested motivations of religious leaders and adherents to whom religion continued to provide respectability and status well into the twentieth century. An important factor was the sense of overwhelming power and attractiveness which modern culture had for many Jews, particularly in the West. Rabbinical leaders in the west often spoke of the futility of opposing modernity as though they were reconciled to affirmationism as a strategy for survival. But many of the same leaders were themselves attracted by aspects of contemporary culture. The great rabbinic authority who sang German operas after his Sabbath meal (Ellenson, 1981a: 295) was not reconciling himself to modern culture for instrumental purposes. But there were also those who viewed the political and social changes wrought by the emancipation as the "beginning of the Redemption" and a sign that humanity was capable, by its own efforts, of undertaking the tasks that would culminate in the coming of the messiah. At one point, the rejectionists were forced to argue less against the emancipation itself than against the notion that it had created a novel

condition in Jewish life when things had never been so good (Salmon, 1981). While the affirmationists may have had reservations and doubts about their own ability to withstand the forces of modernity, they never doubted that they were in closer touch with the forces of the future than were the rejectionists.

THE DECLINE OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION

What were the forces that weakened the affirmationists and strengthened the rejectionists? First of all, economic prosperity had opposite effects on each group. Among the former, prosperity and increased secular education resulted in religious laxity, the adoption of more liberal religious beliefs, a rejection of ritual and the substitution of ethical conceptions of religion comparable to that found among the non-Jewish population (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975: 162-166; Douglas, 1973). But the rejectionists eschewed secular education, so its impact was reduced. Economic prosperity strengthened their independence and facilitated their isolation or insulation from the social and cultural environment (Liebman, 1966; Mayer, 1979). Economic prosperity, for example, permitted the establishment of an elaborate educational network providing intense socialization to rejectionist values. Increased wealth has meant that children (sons in particular) can be maintained in such institutions into their late twenties. In Israel, major support for these institutions comes from the government, a function of both the political influence of the religious sector but also of a level of national prosperity which permits the maintenance of such institutions by the public sector.

The breakdown of the corporate Jewish community, the *kehilla* (Elazar, 1981; Friedman, 1982), and the substitution of a voluntaristic pluralistic community has meant that rejectionists are no longer accountable to the more moderate elements. The path is now open to the creation of independent rejectionist institutions. The consequences of voluntarism and pluralism are not pronounced among the religious elite, among whom one would expect to find the strongest propensity to extremism because they are more religiously committed than the non-elite and because the kind of education required to become a master of religious law socializes the student to a recalcitrant point of view. In addition, the general decline of the status and role of religious institutions in the society means that people are less attracted to religion for self-interested purposes. Hence, the more worldly, more accommodationist, less principled type of individual who might have once sought a position of religious leadership now looks elsewhere.

In the past, rabbinical authorities, responsible for the entire community, were reluctant to interpret religious law in such a manner that the vast majority of Jews would find its observance excessively burdensome. Halakhic authorities have been relieved of this constraint by their sense that the vast majority wouldn't observe Jewish law regardless of how they interpreted it. On the other hand, the Orthodox minority are ready to accept whatever halakhic authorities dictate. Furthermore, the voluntarism and pluralism of the community exposes the affirmationists to the influence of non-Orthodox and even non-Jewish conceptions of appropriate religious belief and behavior.

Cultural institutions built on principles of eternity and inerrancy have difficulty absorbing the rapidity of change characteristic of modernity. The rejectionists are not only unaffected but perhaps even strengthened by the contrast between their own

seemingly uninterrupted unchanging culture and that which surrounds them. The affirmationists, on the other hand, face the dilemma of reconciling their religious conceptions with this self-consciously changing culture.

Ideological factors also operate to the benefit of rejectionists and the disadvantage of affirmationists. Among orthodox Jews, there are three ideal typical affirmationist reponses. None exist in pure form. Virtually all religious Jews, even most religious thinkers and institutions, reflect elements of two or even all three responses. But most affirmationist thinkers and institutions are identifiable in terms of their basic tendency to one or the other of the three models.

The first model reinterprets the tradition in the light of contemporary culture or values. The second model maintains that contemporary culture or values are to be understood in the light of tradition. In accordance with this model, Zionism was interpreted as consistent with the tradition and, moreover, the beliefs of avowedly atheistic settlers were reinterpreted as "part of the Divine plan destined to bring man to a higher stage of development" (Luz, 1981: 123). The third model compartmentalizes life into Jewish and universalist realms. In the latter realm, which includes political and economic activity, science, public law and many aspects of culture, the religious Jew is bound by the same general kinds of commitments and responsibilities incumbent upon the non-Jew.

I have suggested the problems with each of these positions elsewhere (Liebman, forthcoming). But common to all is the absence of widespread rabbinical sanction. Religious commitment in the context of the Jewish tradition means, first and foremost, a commitment to the observance of Jewish law as it is interpreted by leading rabbinic authorities whose own credentials rest on their mastery of the knowledge of the law. The legitimacy of the affirmationists is not only undermined by the paucity of masters of law in their camp, but also by the presence among them of those elements of the population who seek legitimacy for what rejectionists condemn as religious deviation. In other words, the motives of the affirmationists are suspect, and the rejectionists appear more devout in the eyes of the affirmationists themselves. (There are, of course, exceptions to these observations. Outstanding rabbis have been attracted to affirmationism in the past [Ellenson, 198a, forthcoming] and continue to be found in its ranks today. But they are a distinct minority and, therefore, can be explained away.)

If one is not necessarily looking for a strategy to affirm modern culture and values, affirmationist models are not particularly convincing. If, therefore, the rejectionist position has gained influence in recent years, the reasons must also be sought in the declining attractiveness of modern culture and civilization. Indeed, the decline of modernist confidence, the loss of direction characteristic of contemporary western culture, and the decline in ideological certainty has resulted in a decline in that religious orientation which affirmed the value, or at least inevitable triumph of modern culture. This has special significance in Israel where secular Zionism (the worldview that provided the ideological and symbolic foundation for the state of Israel, its identity, legitimacy, and its relationship to world Jewry and the Judaic tradition) has lost resonance (Liebman & Don-Yehiya, 1983). The decline of Zionism in Israel has meant the decline of a meaning system through which the vast majority of the Jewish population found answers to basic questions of collective existence and through which many also found personal and private meaning. This also helps account for a new form of religious extremism in Israel.

RELIGIOUS ULTRA-NATIONALISM

The logic of religious ultra-nationalism, given the assumption that the Zionist movement and the creation of the state of Israel are steps in the path to Redemption, is convincing. The alternatives to religiously serious youth in Israel are not affirmationism or rejectionism but ultra-nationalist extremism on the one hand, or the older form of rejectionism (which is anti-Zionist), on the other. But why has ultra-nationalist influence only become noticeable after 1967?

Among the background factors, there was the network of educational institutions dominated by the religious ultra-nationalists which first developed in the 1950's. Their graduates began assuming important roles in the religio-social and political network in the late 1960's and 1970's. But my central argument is that religious moderation enjoyed an "unnatural" period of domination because of its association with Zionist-socialist parties who were perceived as instrumental in achieving the national goals to which religious Zionists themselves were committed. The decline in their status was critical. The religious moderates defined their position in the context of a national secular enterprise. The extremists, with their totalistic ideology, provided a meaning system independent of the ideology of secular Zionism and were therefore unaffected by its decline.

Israel's victory in the Six Day War pointed to the immediate realization of many of the political quests of the ultra-nationalists which the moderates had, heretofore, dismissed as utopian. The victory quickened hopes for Redemption among broad segments of the religious camp. These hopes are basic to the religious tradition. Centuries of defeat, disappointment and despair had transformed them from the realm of the natural and the material to the purely metaphysical and supernatural. Thus, it was not the religious tradition which the extremists distorted in their expectation of imminent deliverance. It was, rather, the constellation of social factors prior to 1967 which weakened the constraints on an authentic religious orientation in the Jewish tradition.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon identified as religious extremism is best accounted for by the decline in influence of those factors which led to religious moderation in the past. A characteristic feature of religion is the overriding commitment which it evokes. Indeed, the fact that religion has this meaning in popular usage (e.g., "it's like a religion to him" or "he does it religiously") suggests just this association. Such commitment reflects and supports an extremist orientation.

In the first place, religion claims absolute truth about ultimate reality. It knows the route one must follow to live one's life in accordance with that which is ultimately right and ultimately just. Hence, it is reasonable to expect that religious adherents will welcome the extension of the scope and detail of religious injunctions which heightens their confidence that everything they and the society of which they are part does is in accord with the right way. The search for stricter or harsher interpretation of the law is consistent with a desire to assure oneself and others that one is indeed living in accordance with what one is commanded to do rather than simply in accordance with what one would like to do.

Secondly, whether understood in symbolic or normative terms, culture can be evaluated in terms of religious truth. The injunction to distance oneself from all forms of culture which are not consistent with religious truth is entirely explicable within the framework of religious assumptions, just as religious knowledge is a standard by which one can judge and measure other forms of knowledge and other forms of truth.

Thirdly, since religious commitment is a total commitment, and the behavior it elicits is by definition moral behavior, religious adherence becomes a criteria by which other people can be evaluated. The religiously committed individual will experience moral repugnance in associating with non-religious. Also, other things being equal, religious commitment leads one to social isolation for reasons of self-protection from the influences (accidental or intended of others, an orientation that may itself be incorporated in the religious framework of injunctions.

In short, religious commitment leads to the three characteristics which define religious extrmism. I don't mean to argue that other implications cannot be derived from religious commitment or that true religious belief and practice invariably lead to extremism. I do argue, however, that extremism is an understandable and, other things being equal, the most obvious consequence of religious commitment.

REFERENCES

Argyle, Michael and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi
    1975 *The Social Psychology of Religion.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Berger, Peter
    1969 *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Anchor Books.
    1979 *The Heretical Imperative.* Garden City, N.Y. Anchor.
Creevey, Lucy
    1980 "Religion and modernization in Senegal." In John Esposito (Ed.), *Islam and Development,* 207-222. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
Deshen, Shlomo
    1979 "The Judaism of middle eastern immigrants." *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 13: 89-110.
Douglas, Mary
    1973 *Natural Symbols.* New York: Random House, Vintage Books.
Elazar, Daniel J.
    1981 "The Kehillah: From its beginnings to the end of the modern epoch." Sam Lehman-Wilzig and Bernard Susser (Eds.), *Public Life in Israel and the Diaspora,* 23-63. Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press.
Ellenson, David
    1981a "Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the quest for religious authority." *Modern Judaism* 1: 279-297.

    forth- "Church-sect theory, religious authority
    coming and modern Jewish orthodoxy: A case study." Marc Raphael (Ed.), *Approaches to Modern Judaism.* Brown University Studies in Judaica.
Friedman, Menachem
    1975 "Religious zealotry in Israeli society." In Ernest Krausz (Ed.), *On Ethnic and Religious Diversity on Israel,* 91-111. Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University.
    forth- "The changing role of the community rab-
    coming binate." *Jerusalem Quarterly.*
Hertzberg, Arthur
    1959 *The Zionist Idea.* New York: Harper and Row.
Hill, Michael
    1973 *A Sociology of Religion.* London: Heinemann Educational Books.
Inkeles, Alex
    1969 "Making men modern: On the causes and consequences of individual change in six developing countries." *American Journal of Sociology* 75: 208-225.
Katz, Jacob
    1973 *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation 1770-1870.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Liebman, Charles
    1965 "Orthodoxy in American Jewish life." *American Jewish Year Book 1965,* 21-98. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

1966   "Changing social characteristics of or-
        thodox, conservative and reform Jews."
        Sociological Analysis 27: 210-222.
forth- "The growth of neo-traditionalism among
coming orthodox Jews in Israel." In Louis
        Greenspan and William Shaffir (Eds.), *Iden-
        tification and the Rise of the New Religious
        Orthodoxies.*

Liebman, Charles and Eliezer Don-Yehiya
1983   *Civil Religion in Israel: Political Culture
        and Traditional Judaism in the Jewish
        State.* Berkeley: University of California
        Press.

Luz, Ehud
1981   "Spiritualism and religious anarchism in
        the teaching of Shmuel Alexandrov"
        (Hebrew). *Daat,* no. 7 (summer): 121-138.

Marcus, Ivan
1981   *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of
        Medieval German.* Lieden: E. J. Brill.

Martin, David
1978   *A General Theory of Secularization.* Oxford:
        Basil Blackwell.

Mayer, Egon
1979   *From Suburb to Shtetl: The Jews of Boro
        Park.* Philadelphia: Temple University
        Press.

O'Dea, Thomas
1961   "Five dilemmas in the institutionalization
        of religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study
        of Religion* 1: 30-39.

Salmon, Yosef
1981   "The response of the Jewish public to the
        society for the settlement of Eretz Israel"
        (Hebrew). In Mordecai Eliav and Yitzhak
        Raphael (Eds.), *Sefer Shraga,* 15-39.
        Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook.

Shaffir, William
1978   "Witnessing as identity consolidation: The
        case of the Lubavitcher Chassidim." In
        Hans Mol (Ed.), *Identity and Religion,*
        39-57. Beverly Hills, California: Sage
        Publications.

Smith, Donald E.
1970   *Religion and Political Development.*
        Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Sprinzak, Ehud
1981   "Gush Emunim: The tip of the iceberg."
        The Jerusalem Quarterly, no. 21 (Fall):
        28-47.

Troeltsch, Ernst
1931   *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches,*
        2 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago
        Press.

Williams, John
1980   "Veiling in Egypt as a political and social
        phenomenon." In John Esposito (Ed.),
        Islam and Development, 71-86. Syracuse:
        Syracuse University Press.

Wilson, Bryan
1973   *Magic and the Millenium.* New York:
        Harper and Row.