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Lessons from the American Rabbinic Experience

What Muslim Clergy Need to Know!

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Abstract

Immigrant Muslim clergy (imams) coming to America are currently facing many of the same issues, problems, and challenges faced by the immigrant Jewish clergy (rabbis) during the last half of the nineteenth century. This paper explores the parallels in situation between twenty-first century imams and nineteenth century rabbis immigrating to America with special attention to the striking similarities and the blatant differences experienced by both groups. Whereas the immigrating rabbis found their way and established themselves as leaders, the immigrating imams are struggling to find their way.

Introduction

[1] Immigrant Muslim religious leaders (herein called clergy) are facing a multitude of professional challenges as they attempt to insinuate themselves into the American religious fabric. While holding true to their Islamic training prior to coming to America, they are now confronted with demanding expectations from their own faith community upon their arrival. Not only are they to lead the masjid (mosque, increasingly called “Islamic Community Centers” in the U.S.) in its religious observances, the imams in this country are expected to do a lot more than that. They are to be ministry professionals not unlike priests, pastors, and rabbis. To be a clergyman in America is radically different from being an imam in a Middle Eastern town or village. The challenges faced by immigrant Imams coming to America in the early twenty-first century, however, are not unlike the challenges faced by immigrant rabbis coming to America at the end of the nineteenth century.

[2] The following is a careful assessment of selected essays edited in Marcus and Peck's splendid little classic, *The American Rabbinate*, within the context of work I have done in my recently published book, *Muslim Clergy in America*. In an earlier work titled *Scholar, Priest, and Pastor*, I did a data-base study of one thousand clergy in each of four Christian traditions – Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Methodist – in which similar questions were addressed regarding the nature and function of the ministry as a profession. But Marcus and Peck have not only made a major and lasting contribution to Jewish history and particularly rabbinic studies in America, they have, possibly unwittingly, made a major contribution to the education of Muslim religious leaders in America as well. Their study of the American rabbinate resonates much more clearly with the current Muslim experience in America than my earlier study of Christian clergy, but happily parallels observations made in my book on Muslim clergy. Therefore, we will draw primarily from these two more recent studies in the following investigation.

[3] The questions raised in my study of Muslim immigrant clergy have their answers imbedded in the Marcus and Peck book on the history of rabbinic training institutions in America. American Jewry faced questions and challenges at the end of the nineteenth century that are similarly being faced by American Islam at the beginning of the twenty-first century. That Muslims can learn from Jews is quite clear; that they will learn from the rabbinic experience in America has yet to be determined. What follows is an explication of the lessons learned by the American rabbinate that may prove of great benefit to the immigrant Muslim clergy in America. My book on *Muslim Clergy in America* first pointed to the parallels in the two traditions and here I will further explore and articulate those parallels.

[4] Before we launch into a full scale inquiry regarding the Jewish-Muslim parallels in acculturation experience in America, a comment regarding the characterization of the imam as a clergyman should be made. In regards to this analysis, it does not matter what the subtle distinctions made between one school of thought or another might be because “Americans,” both Muslim and otherwise, “perceive” the imam as being the masjid’s clergyman and spokesperson for the religious community. That there may be some question as to whether or not imams are really clergy in terms of the Islamic tradition begs the question in the American context. Americans, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, demand that there be leaders in all religious institutions. That perception is all that matters at this point because it is precisely the “perception” of the imam as clergyman that is producing the necessity for him to become “professional” in the role he is being expected and even forced to assume by both his own community and the larger society. All historical and theological arguments aside, the social and existential reality is, the imam in America is a Muslim clergyman whether or not he likes it, understands it, or desires it. If Islam is to establish itself in America, then the imam must take on the role, training, and duties of a clergyman or Islam in America is destined to remain marginalized and precluded from being a full participant in the democratic arena of American religious institutions. Young, Griffith, and Williams have given special attention to the pastoral demands placed upon African American imams.

The Rabbinate Come to America

[5] Now, let us turn our attention to the Jewish-Muslim parallels. Just over a century ago and under the formative leadership of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, Hebrew Union College

commenced a rabbinic training program which has become epic in its contribution to American Jewry. For the first time in America, American-trained, sometimes American-born, and English-speaking rabbis began to fill the empty pulpits of American Judaism (Sarna 1983: 1). Thanks to Rabbi Wise and the Hebrew Union College, rabbis who were born, bred, and educated in America became commonplace on the Jewish scene. And, to foster this advancement, the Association of American Orthodox Hebrew Congregations was created in the 1880s “to encourage, foster and promote the observance of the Orthodox Jewish religion . . . (and) to designate, support and maintain a Chief Rabbi.”

[6] A major source of tension, however, was inevitable between the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati, representing Reform Judaism, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York City, representing a configuration intending to pave a path between a radically liberalized Judaism on the left and an Eastern European Orthodoxy on the right (Sarna 1983: 2). According to Sarna, Rabbi Jakob Joseph of Vilna, who had been chosen by the Association to reside and function in New York City as the Chief Rabbi, sought to exercise an Eastern European-style rabbinic authority in America in the face of a relentless westernization and even a secularization process operative within American Jewry. Whereas the Chief Rabbi represented a “resistance” to this Americanization process, the Jewish Theological Seminary was busily attempting to implement an “accommodation” to that very process. The former sought to retain the old ways of Eastern Europe while the latter sought to implement the modernization of Judaism and the rabbinic. Inevitably, this led to conflict, confusion, and frustration both within the rabbinic and among the laity of American Jewry.

[7] Of course, as Sarna has pointed out, “the same continuum, with only descriptions changed, could be used to describe the leadership of a great many ethnic and religious groups, for the tension between accommodation and resistance . . . is a pervasive one in America, leaders being no less divided on the subject than their followers” (1982: 59-67). The fact that this is essentially a truism does not in any fashion diminish the importance of the observation or the central significance of the reality. As with rabbis, so with Irish and Italian priests, and, as we are beginning to see today, the same holds true with immigrant imams coming to America from all over the world, not just the Middle East, but India and Indonesia as well as Eastern Europe.

[8] The issue of rabbinic authority, the setting of professional standards for rabbinic training and practice, the nature and scope of “outside” relationships with non-Jews and non-rabbinic professional clergy among Christian groups, Catholic and Protestant, and, the struggles implicit in the complex relationship between rabbi and congregation, all bespeak a reality that all immigrant religious communities and their leaders have faced and are facing. The Americanization of the rabbinic inevitably led to a perception of the rabbi as a kind of “Jewish minister,” according to Sarna, because, as he explains it, “that is what their congregants have come to expect.” Not so much like the Catholic priest as the Protestant pastor, this Americanization of the rabbinic has sometimes been regrettably called the “Protestantization of the rabbinic!” On the other hand, explains Sarna, “The professionalization of the rabbinic in the form that we know it today, complete with selective training schools, formal organizations, standard uniforms, and bureaucratic rules . . . began at the end of the nineteenth century . . . just when other professions were emerging” (1982: 63; see Bledstein; Haskell; and Scott).

[9] As has already been mentioned, these “shifting perceptions and expectations” of the role of the rabbi in the modern westernized communities of America was undergoing a radical change and with it re-definitions of professional ministry, for rabbis as well as for Christian clergy. Such shifts are now most certainly occurring within the American Islamic communities also. For the rabbinate, the Eastern European rabbi burdened with his nineteenth century lifestyle, worldview, and ethos could not keep pace with Americanization. Speaking English with a harsh European accent, dressing in the old way, and comporting oneself in public in the ancient style of the rabbinate not only did not work effectively in America but was often the occasion for embarrassment within younger Jewish communities. As Marcus Jastrow put it, the modern Jewish constituency came “to look upon their ministers as those who are good for any service required but otherwise should be as much as possible excluded from active presentation in public affairs” (64). The inadequacies of the immigrant imams in terms of professional performance in sermons, counseling, administration, etc., are now becoming all the more apparent to both imams themselves and their masjid constituencies. And, the recognition of these inadequacies is leading to a rise in emotional stress within the imam’s family life as well as within the community.

[10] Because the acculturated Jewish community gradually became embarrassed and ashamed of the old-style demeanor of their immigrant rabbis, fearing the unfavorable comparison to Catholic priests and Protestant pastors who were trained in the American educational system, Sarna says that “anti-clericalism became quite common in Jewish circles.” As with the immigrant Irish and Italian priests, the immigrant rabbis gave way to a new breed of rabbis coming out of the excellent rabbinic schools which were being built in America, particularly the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Hebrew Union College, and Yeshiva University. “Rabbis,” explains Rabbi Jacob Bloom, “increasingly became *representative Jews*, visible symbols of those values which American Jews held dear” (59). First generation immigrant imams are a decade or two away from this possibility occurring. The absence of a recognized American training center for the development of American educated imams to serve modern American communities comparable to what the Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Theological Seminary have managed to do exacerbates the problem considerably. Ali, Milstein, and Marzuk pointed out that whereas Christian and Jewish seminaries have been offering and now requiring “pastoral counseling training” of their intended ordinands (clergy candidates), Islam has no such training in their tradition. The immigrant imams in America (and every imam in America is an immigrant except the African American imams) have had no institutionally mandated or provided clinical pastoral education. Although nearly 70% of the imams report an increase in calls for counseling from members of their masjid, says Ali, Milstein, and Marzuk, they are ill prepared to offer such assistance.

[11] Among the Orthodox Jews and their rabbis, “foremost was the fear that the infusion of American-style trappings and social activities were simply the first steps toward the abandonment of traditional Judaism’s theological teachings” (Gurock: 83). Unfortunately, but predictably, in light of their Eastern European history, major battles over control of kashrus became frequent and persistent during the late nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth century. Younger American rabbis, raised and educated in America increasingly by Americans, began to seriously challenge the heretofore dominance and unquestioned proprietary rule of the immigrant rabbis. The young rabbis did not share nor

did they tolerate the old way of doing things and consultation with the immigrant rabbis became less frequent and eventually taboo for the newly ordained American rabbis. Today, young immigrant imams continue to find themselves squeezed between the traditional demands of the old ways and older imams and the challenges and opportunities being presented to them and their faith communities in western societies.

[12] “Ironically,” explains Gurock, “these rising leaders were products of an institution which the *Agudat ha-rabbanim* (Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada) had been instrumental in founding and maintaining, namely the Rabbi Issac Elchanan Theological Seminary” (84). Interestingly and importantly, the RIETS, as it came to be called, evolved into a leading training center at Yeshiva University in 1897. The distinguishing characteristic of the RIETS curriculum was that it emulated the rabbinic curriculum of the old countries, imitating what the Eastern European rabbis had been doing for centuries. Up until this time and in the face of ever rising pressures from young American born rabbinic students, little or no thought had actually been given to adjusting the curriculum to meet the new American secular environment. “Soon, however,” says Gurock, “the question of what types of competencies a man needed to possess in order to serve effectively as a rabbi in America became a major point of dispute at RIETS” (27).

[13] The dilemma and challenge faced by the early rabbis assuming the responsibility of assessing the pastoral needs and scholarly requirements of the new and soon-to-be dominate American rabbinate is not unlike what the immigrant imams in America are being confronted with today. The difference is, at least for the present, whereas the nineteenth century rabbinic leaders were somewhat divided as to how they were to create an American rabbinate, they were unequivocally united in their commitment to do it, while, on the other hand, there is a great deal of equivocating, vacillating, and waffling on the part of the American Islamic religious leaders. Their lack of vision and clarity of direction is exacerbated by their lack of unity amongst themselves in determining to create a training program for young American imams to serve the growing American population of Muslims. This ambivalence must be overcome if American Islam is to enjoy the kind of leadership which the Jewish community has been privileged to enjoy over the past century. With 19% of the American masjids without an imam (Bagby, Perl, and Foehle), the Muslim community is in dire need of pastoral leadership and pastoral care, and the sooner the Muslim leadership in America addresses effectively the issue of training centers for aspiring imams, the sooner this problem can be resolved.

[14] The wake-up call for the rabbinic leadership came in the form of a student boycott in 1908 which, among other things, insisted upon a redress of the curriculum that needed a wider “secular” focus with heavy emphasis upon written and spoken English. There was a call for instruction in rhetoric, i.e., public speaking and sermon preparation and delivery, and exposure to Hebrew literature and Jewish history. The results of such a move on the part of the student body led, surprisingly at the time, to a reorganization of the RIETS in 1915 as the “Rabbinical College of America.” Gurock reminds us that the conservative movement within Judaism “had emerged during the interwar period as American Jewry’s numerically predominant religious denomination” (46). Whereas American Jewry has conveniently settled into a tripartite division – Orthodox, Conservative, Reform (and later Reconstructionist) – the American Islamic community has not found either a way to unite

totally or to subdivide conveniently into manageable and identifiable constituencies of workably different but congenial ideologies. The lack of cohesion within the American Muslim population is both stifling and crippling, and the situation cries out for resolution and leadership. A data-base study of the pressures being felt by American imams, due to the demand for and lack of training in counseling services within the Muslim community has been conducted by three outstanding researchers who produced a pioneering article in the journal, *Psychiatric Services* (Ali, Milstein, and Marzuk).

[15] This Conservative movement became dominant by virtue of creatively mixing a traditional liturgy with a liberal social and community agenda. This shift, not in the faith of Judaism but in its communal expression, became very attractive to American Jews wishing to practice their faith while embracing acculturation. Less inclined to retain the old European ways yet withdrawing from a radical liberalization of Jewish practice that was finding expression within Reform Judaism, this Conservative movement seemed to have the answer for both worlds – the best of the old and the brightest of the new. “They found in conservatism,” explains Gurock, “a theology and practice attuned to the quickly developing suburban life-style, prepared to make religious accommodations to America’s work clock and transportation revolution and yet still remain philosophically and practically within older Jewish traditions” (91). Essentially, this meant English sermons and prayers interspersed with Hebrew, families sitting together, and lectures dealing with social and community issues beyond the traditional pale of Hebrew rabbinic recitations. Traditional content but with a liberal style and appeal became the hallmark of Conservative Judaism in America.

Jewish and Muslim Parallels and Disparities

[16] Herein lies what some have proposed to be the unmovable object within Islam, namely, the inability, not just the unwillingness, to imagine and implement a modulated form of Islamic traditionalism in the face of Americanization. The recognition and acknowledgment of the Americanization of Islam is anathema to many Muslims and their religious leaders who, justifiably, fear that the Americanization of Islam will inevitably lead to the Muslim communities’ loss of ethnic identity and the secularization of American Islam itself. This challenge was met, addressed, and responded to by the nineteenth century Jewish community and their rabbinic leaders, and the results has been, according to some historians, the “salvation” of Judaism as we know it today in America. There was a price paid for this adjustment. No historian will deny that Islam will also pay a price, for the Americanization, loss of ethnic identity, and secularization of Islamic practice cannot be denied by any reasonable person on any reasonable grounds. However, failure to embrace the inevitable carries with it a price as well, namely, the perpetual marginalization of American Islam. The question before the Islamic leaders in America is plain – which option will serve the Muslim community the best in the long run, i.e., a ghettoized Islam with no essential impact upon American society or a reformed Islam equipped to face the challenges of secularization with confidence in the strength and durability of Islam itself. The range of questions confronting Muslim clergy in America regarding this choice has been explored by Nimer in some detail.

[17] Today, Conservative Judaism has more or less a thousand congregations organized within the United Synagogue of America and serviced by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America as its rabbinic training school. Conservative rabbis hold membership in the

Rabbinical Assembly of America, but as early as the mid-1860s there had developed what Jonas Bondi called in 1866 “a golden middle way” that was neither “orthodox” nor “reformed” but embodied the best of both worlds of Judaism. However, Bondi asserts this conservative movement was “hated on both sides” (4). Under the leadership of Imam Dr. Omar Shahin, Executive Director of the North American Imams Federation (NAIF), there is a fledgling organization for American imams, but with a membership of 150 in a field of 1,500 immigrant imams, the organization has a long way to go before it can claim either to speak for American imams or represent them to the country and to the Islamic community. Whereas the Rabbinical Assembly carries a great deal of weight with both Conservative rabbis as professional clergy and with the Conservative congregations being served by and in need of Conservative rabbinic ministrations, NAIF has neither power nor representation yet.

[18] It was Rabbi Solomon Schechter, the first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary, who was intent upon making his institution a seat of learning and worldwide scholarship in Judaism. His criticism of the Hebrew Union College, which was older and well established, was that, from his perspective and that of the Eastern European rabbinic tradition, there was a laxness in the scholarship and a casualness about the rigor of rabbinic studies. “It is hardly necessary,” he is reported to have said, “to remark that the Jewish ministry and Jewish scholarship are not irreconcilable. The usefulness of a minister does not increase in an *inverse ratio* to his knowledge” (Schechter: 19). Here again the rabbinic community has historically set the bar very high in terms of scholarly expectations of its training. A rabbi trained at any of the rabbinic training centers in the country, particularly Hebrew Union College, Jewish Theological Seminary, and Yeshiva University, is known and respected, inside and outside the Jewish community, as a scholar, teacher, and pastor. This tradition of rabbinic scholarship, especially as recognized by the non-Jewish community of professional clergy, was not won easily and is maintained consistently with due diligence. Without question, Islam has a long and outstanding tradition of scholarship but its presence in America, particularly among non-Muslim ministry professionals, has not yet occurred and will require a great deal of diligence to establish and maintain. The Muslim community will do well to pay close attention to Rabbi Schechter’s counsel to the nineteenth century rabbinic and Jewish community and follow his example in establishing a school and fostering a commitment to scholarship.

[19] The criticism of Rabbi Schechter regarding the absence of and need for greater scholarly diligence among the immigrant rabbis in America is not unique to the rabbinic experience. As I have found in the study of both Catholic priests and Protestant clergy, there has always been a tendency to imply that the American style of theological scholarship pales in the face of traditional European scholarship. For instances, when the four thousand Christian clergy – Methodist, Lutheran, Catholic, and Episcopal – were questioned regarding the amount of time they spent exercising their “scholarly” role as pastor, namely, sermon preparation, studying theology and Scripture, all four denominational clergy groups registered “stress” resulting from the conflict they felt between what they wanted to do and what they perceived their faith communities wanted them to do (Morgan 2001: 137ff.). The American religious community across the board has not been consistently vigilant in fostering a dedication to scholarship among its clergy and we are seeing that same sentiment played out among Muslim clergy in America. The American imams are finding the same disparity in

their assessment of Islamic training here as compared to their homelands (Morgan 2010, 2001.) When European trained rabbis in the late nineteenth century and Middle Eastern trained imams in the early twenty-first century, both groups of whom were American immigrants, were asked to compare their training to that of the training available for their younger peers in America, they consistently derided the poor quality of the American training. However, when asked if America had or could produce rabbinic and Islamic scholars, both groups, then and now, were confident that a scholarly tradition would eventually emerge in the U.S. Whereas the Jewish seminaries have greatly facilitated this scholarly rise, the Muslim clergy are still left without a major training center for imams to grow in scholarship and pastoral skills.

Models for Muslim Clergy Education

[20] There are at least three possible models of Islamic clergy education that present themselves as a potential resolution to this conspicuous void in American Islam. Though somewhat outside the pale of this present inquiry, I might just recite the three with brief descriptions by way of telegraphing a future article on the subject specifically. It merits attention for Muslim clergy are only going to be produced in America for Americans by Americans when the Muslim community addresses itself to this problem, namely, the absence of and need for an American training center for American imams. The three models being discussed in a variety of circles are (1) a free-standing seminary with faculty, library, and curriculum worthy of an American initiative in the training of imams; (2) the establishment of a “house of studies” immediately adjacent to a nationally-recognized secular (rather than religiously aligned) university; and (3) the reliance upon already existing degrees in Islamic studies at degree-granting institutions without allegiance to Islam for the training of imams one at a time. Arguments exist to defend and defeat all three, but let me recite one or two positive and negative features of each.

[21] The nineteenth century rabbinic community faced the very problem then that the Islamic community is facing now, namely, the absence of and the need for a training facility for American rabbis. They responded by establishing three free-standing seminaries. In a recent conversation with Rabbi Shirley Idelson, Dean of Hebrew Union College in New York, she indicated that the zeitgeist of the nineteenth century lent itself to such a resolution of the problem whereas, she suggested, the zeitgeist of the early twenty-first century does not seem to lend itself to the establishment of a free-standing theological training center. The insight is provocative and fosters the need for a closer investigation of the operative variables in making the decision, then to build and now not to build. Certainly, the Islamic community seems not to have the will to create a major training center nor has it taken on with gusto the opportunity of establishing liberal arts colleges and hospitals the way the nineteenth century Jewish community did. The socio-cultural and economic variables, as pointed out by Rabbi Idelson, are radically different and those factors have resulted in the failure of the Islamic community to insinuate itself into the American fabric by building schools and hospitals the way the Jewish community did in the nineteenth century.

[22] The second option for American Muslims seems more practicable given the lack of will to appropriate funds and work together to build a major theological institution for imam training. Some Christian denominations, such as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

have taken the “house of studies” approach, particularly at the University of Chicago. The house is residential and maintains oversight in the curriculum choices of the intended clergy student but the house does not assume responsibility for faculty and library outside the specific denominational theology. An Islamic House of Studies could provide curriculum oversight with residential faculty dealing with specifically imam-relevant subject matter, leaving the balance of a degree program in science and humanities to the adjacent university. This is not so very dissimilar from the early days of the relationship between the REITS and Yeshiva University.

[23] The third option, namely, passively acknowledging the existence of a number of graduate training programs in Islamic Studies to which imams, one at a time and with their own initiative and finances, might pursue. This is least viable as it provides no formal or standardized training specifically for imams who aspire to be recognized, trained, and accepted as professional clergy. A Ph.D. in Islamic Studies, even from the Graduate Theological Foundation that facilitates study opportunities at Oxford University and the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, is not designed specifically for the training of imams but rather for the scholarly pursuit of Islamic Studies. Though there are many outstanding Ph.D. programs in Islamic studies, the Graduate Theological Foundation’s program does provide a scholarly pursuit of Qu’ranic exegesis and recitation as well as opportunities for imams to study such things as compassionate care and counseling under the oversight of imams who themselves hold Ph.D.s in Islamic Studies. Such a curriculum more fully emulates the professional curriculum of rabbinic and Christian seminaries training clergy as ministry professionals rather than strictly theologians and religious scholars. Much more needs to be explored on this topic and I have begun that exploration in my latest book (Morgan 2010).

[24] The requirements for rabbinic training leading to ordination at the Jewish Theological Seminary were, without question, rigorous. For ordination, the future rabbi would have to complete four years of undergraduate studies leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree, obtain an effective use of the Hebrew language both spoken and read, cultivate an ability to translate and interpret on sight any portion of the Pentateuch and demonstrate a working knowledge of the prayer book and of Jewish history. And, either sarcastically or ironically, Schechter said, “It would not even injure the Rabbi if he should from time to time engage in some scientific work, publishing occasionally a learned article” (Gurock: 115). The mention of such a thing at the beginning of the American rabbinate may have, at the time, seemed extreme, but today it is expected of the rabbi with ambition to demonstrate scholarly ability in writing and publishing. Mention of such things among American immigrant imams is extremely rare and there is yet to be another generation pass before Muslim clergy in America are expected by their peers or their faith communities to aspire to scholarly publishing. But, as with the rabbis and priests and pastors of Christianity, that expectation will emerge and is even now emerging. In my study of Muslim clergy in America, I have found that 75% desire to pursue the Ph.D. in Islamic Studies, a phenomenon quite out of the norm for imams in the Middle East and West Africa (2010: 47).

[25] One of the key problems facing the first generation and subsequent generations of American trained rabbis in the late nineteenth century was the increasingly expansive expectations and demands of the faith communities themselves, looking to their rabbis to be ever more visible, accessible, and gifted in a wide range of social, pastoral, and counseling

skills. The expectations ran out ahead of the training that was being offered and the rabbi, consequently, found himself ever more pressured for performances that he was ill prepared to offer. The 1940 Convention of the Rabbinical Assembly chose to address itself specifically to issues and concerns related to and affecting the rabbinate. Rabbi Morris Adler of Shaare Zedek congregation put it this way: "As our teacher . . . once pointed out, whereas in our day of specialization every profession has contracted the area of its intensive study and operation, the office of the rabbi has, on the contrary, assumed new and multiple duties . . . He is, or is expected to be, at once scholar, teacher, priest, pastor, preacher, administrator, communal-leader, social worker and ambassador of good-will. To him come many and diverse appeals for assistance, for counsel, for leadership . . ." (89). This story could be repeated a thousand times within the rabbinic community, the Islamic community, and the Christian community. Special attention has recently been brought to bear upon the demand for counseling services within the Muslim community to be provided by the imams, few who have themselves had any training in psychological care at all (Ali, Milstein, Marzuk).

[26] As specializations in ministry have arisen, the broadening of expectations has expanded as well. An even more poignant observation was made by Rabbi Max Davidson in his presidential address at the 1952 rabbinic Assembly Convention and it is worth quoting here: "I have referred on several other occasions to the helplessness and dependence of many of our rabbis . . . We minister to people most of whom fully believe that they are wiser than we, better than we, certainly richer than we. When rabbis have attempted, e.g., to promote Sabbath observances, or to campaign for Friday night closings, they were not fully supported by the laymen . . . When rabbis attempted to protect Jewish self interest and dignity, or their rights as American citizens in communities and schools with Christmas and Easter celebrations, they were not wholeheartedly supported by their congregations . . ." (111).

Redefining the Clergy's Role

[27] According to Gurock, historians of the American rabbinate have pointed out, however, that there was a measurable shift in satisfaction in the rabbinate from the 1950s when the level was very low and movement was near 40% annually compared to the 1970s when satisfaction accelerated. "Why the change? Why such a sense of unease and lack of accomplishment in earlier decades, and the apparent feeling of achievement and satisfaction in the 1970s? The answer may lie," suggests Gurock, "in the functional redefinition of the office of the rabbi" (160). American imams may wish to pay close attention to Gurock's observations on this point particularly, for my study of Muslim clergy in America found that 75% of the American imams thought of themselves as first teachers and then concerned with what is called in the Muslim community "compassionate care." While teaching continued to be listed as the highest priority among post-1970s rabbis, counseling replaced preaching as next in order of importance in the mind of the rabbis. Gurock found "this was particularly so for Conservative rabbis, the majority of whom served in relatively new, suburban congregations." He observes, "the focus of the rabbinic mandate was turning from preserving the faith to serving the person" (56). Milstein, Midlarsky, and Link have given a splendid recitation on the issues confronting the rabbi as relates to counseling issues and have compared that role to the community psychologist's function and range of responsibility. Milstein, who is becoming increasingly considered the authority in this

growing field of research, has called for a dialogic encounter between the professional clergy and the psychiatric professional.

[28] In my studies of one thousand Catholic priests, one thousand Lutheran pastors, one thousand Episcopal priests, and one thousand Methodist clergy, the same shift in sentiment and ministry functions was found (Morgan 2001: 93). “The rabbinate,” observes Gurock, “was becoming less a religious calling and more a service profession.” Gurock has been extremely helpful in his analysis by making a clear distinction between “a calling” and “a profession.” This distinction is most certainly as relevant for Christian and Muslim clergy as for the rabbinate. “A calling,” explains Gurock, “must have dissatisfaction as a constant component; can its practitioner ever be satisfied that he has fulfilled even a discreet portion of its mandate?” However, he continues, “a profession is less demanding. It requires but high competence and serious devotion, and its achievements, dealing as it does with defined, hence limited, projects, can be noted and enjoyed” (59). By using this distinction, we can understand more clearly the shift in satisfaction that occurred during the middle and late twentieth century within the rabbinate, namely, a shifting sense away from a call to religious service and a greater sense of professional engagement. “It may well be,” concludes Gurock, “that rabbis turned from ‘preaching the faith’ to ‘counseling the individual’ because the former was fraught with frustration while the latter brought satisfaction” (95); see Morgan 2001: 85). In other words, explains Gurock, “The Conservative rabbi wanted to be the prophet (but) his congregation needed a priest to officiate at its rites, to celebrate and to console” (163).

[29] At the beginning of this enquiry, we set out to identify parallels between the late nineteenth century rabbinic experience in America and the early twenty-first century imams’ experience in America. Thanks to cautions registered by Rabbi Shirley Idelson and other historians of the rabbinate, we have registered awareness of the contrasting zeitgeits of each community. Yet, within the context of that caution and that carefulness, we have unquestionably identified several striking parallels of experiences and responses to those experiences. The early rabbis, as immigrant European clergy coming to a new world, were faced with the questions of to what extent they were willing to allow the “Americanization” of Judaism and to what extent they would be able to control that process as it was beginning to occur. So it is with immigrant imams coming to America. The rabbis responded by, inadvertently but productively, creating three options for American Jews – Orthodoxy, Conservatism, and Reformation. It worked and much of that success has been assured by the creating of three outstandingly solid theological training centers for the ordination of rabbis. It seems that Islam in America is being confronted with the same kind of issues regarding Americanization, loss of ethnic identity, and secularization, and their ability to respond to these challenges constitutes the crisis underway in every Muslim community in America today. How those communities are going to respond, under the leadership of their imams, and within the context of their willingness to become proactive in the establishment of preeminent American training centers for Muslim religious clergy, will be the making or undoing of American Islam for the twenty-first century.

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