HOLY PEOPLE, HOLY PLACE
Images of the Synagogue and its Leadership in Progressive Judaism[1]

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He is our God; we are the people of his pasture, the flock of his hand. (Psalm 95:7)

I come into Your house through the greatness of Your love. I worship in Your holy Temple in reverence. (Psalm 5:7)

Introduction

The purpose and thesis of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to enable rabbis, honorary and paid officers of synagogues, and those who train and support them, to gain a clearer understanding of the demands upon synagogue leaders. No leadership role can be understood without an understanding of the institution or organisation which is led. The demands of running a school or a theatre or a government department or the proverbial whelk stall are different, because the aims, ethos, scale and context of each enterprise is different; though they all include certain generic skills like planning, budgeting and holding intelligent conversations. The paper therefore sets out to explore how can we most usefully describe progressive synagogues as institutions.[i]

I shall develop the thesis that the life and leadership of progressive synagogues in Britain are shaped by two images, which I have called 'Holy People' and 'Holy Place'. I shall suggest that both images manifest themselves in the life of every synagogue, with varying dominance, and that the demands of leading a synagogue are different, according to which image is dominant on any occasion. I shall also suggest that the weight of official definitions, rabbinic training and the organisation of progressive Judaism is upon the Holy People image, with the result that synagogue leaders are relatively unsupported as they seek to respond to the pressures of congregants seeking a synagogue which fits the Holy Place image.

Background

These reflections arise out of a series of workshops organised since 1986 by Leo Baeck College, under the title 'Partners in Leadership', for mixed groups of rabbinic students and honorary officers, rabbis, and administrators (with various titles) from synagogues affiliated to the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain (RSGB) and the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues (ULPS). The workshops have been led by Lina Fajerman, Colin Eimer, Tim Dartington, Paul Bates and myself. What I have learned from the workshops has been supplemented by reading,[ii] some direct glimpses of synagogue life,[iii] and numerous conversations.[iv]

The core activity in the workshops is a systematic teasing out of specific situations in synagogue life, described by individuals and examined through questioning, offering diagnoses and suggesting options for action. These sessions have provided a rich anthology of case studies in synagogue affairs.

I am writing as a student of, and consultant to, organisations, from the perspectives of systems thinking, psychoanalysis and group dynamics, and as a graduate in Christian theology and a nominal Anglican. So I am a stranger within the gates of Jewry. My hope is that what I see and say from my perspective may be illuminating to Jews, and that their responses may be illuminating to me. If justification for this undertaking is needed, it may be provided by William Blake's aphorism: 'A fool, if he persists in his foolishness, may become wise.'

Structure of the paper

The first section of the paper (pp. 2-5) identifies some recurring features of synagogue life, as described by workshop participants and in some recent documents. This is the raw material on which the thesis is based.

The thesis is then stated and developed (pp. 6-12), drawing upon concepts from group and organisation theory and sociology.

The last section (pp. 12-15) examines the pressures upon synagogue leaders and the structures which support and authorise them in sustaining these pressures.

The footnotes (p 18) are reflections and quotations not essential to the main argument. References are at the end.

Synagogue Life and Leadership: The View From the Workshops

Organisation and professionalism

All synagogues are organised, but some are more organised than others. Some are led entirely by honorary officers, with no paid staff; some employ a rabbi; some employ a secretary; some employ a head teacher; some have a team of rabbis and 'lay' staff.[v] These different degrees of organisational sophistication correspond in part to the stage of evolution of the synagogue, from a small community meeting, perhaps in a hired hall, to an established institution with its own premises. The demands of running a synagogue are different for leaders of small and large institutions.

These manifest organisational differences correspond to other subtler differences in the character of the synagogue and in relations between its members. These include differences in the structure of the membership. My impression is that, in the smaller synagogues, the membership have a sense of being one community who 'own' the synagogue. The penumbra of less committed congregants is small. In larger and more established synagogues there is a group of committed members, including paid staff, keeping the synagogue going for a wider circle of occasional attenders. There is talk of the overburdened few and the uncommitted many. If there are men and women willing to take on responsibilities now, it is not clear where their successors will come from. Workshop participants referred to larger-scale social changes, which mean that there are fewer people — women in particular — who are available to undertake what is increasingly seen as 'voluntary work'. This increases the pressure on the synagogue to employ more staff, and upon the rabbi to allow the pressures of administration to squeeze out study and preparation.

Particularly in the larger synagogues, there was talk of members expecting a standard of service from their synagogue which was comparable with that provided by secular bodies. These were believed to regard their membership fee as a payment for services — religious services, access to the rabbi, *bar* or *bat Mitzvah* preparation for their children. In contrast, the core group of members were seen as giving their membership fee to the community and hence to themselves (as a *mitzvah*, perhaps): they did not regard themselves as buying anything.

Thus, from an organisational point of view, synagogues have typically developed from small informal gatherings towards sizeable institutions in purpose-built premises. They have been changing this way as a species — for many years, I imagine — and each new synagogue shifts in this direction as it evolves. This evolutionary process includes fateful transitions. When the first paid member of staff is appointed, this redefines the work of unpaid members as `voluntary', and involves the synagogue in the difficulties which other voluntary organisations have to live with, about relations between honorary officers, voluntary workers, and salaried staff. When a rabbi is appointed, this invites non-ordained members to undervalue and relinquish their own knowledge and spiritual leadership in the synagogue. And as salaried administrative staff have more responsibility and influence, the culture of the synagogue has to change to accommodate their standards and expectations.

Nevertheless, the image of the convivial gathering of community members is not discarded. Members tend to be unimpressed by elaborate organisational arrangements: they think primarily of persons — of a community, and of individual men and women and children — and only secondarily of roles and positions. There is still an acceptance of volunteers who get things done in their own way and in their own time — an awareness that efficiency is not everything.

The original request to us, from Leo Baeck College via the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, was that we should provide training in management for rabbinic students. This reflects a recognition that most congregational rabbis are in practice managers of small organisations, accountable to its council and membership. They are not only the teachers and spiritual leaders of a community, but also the full-time executives of a small institution which, like any other, must pay its bills, secure its income, maintain its premises, and organise a programme of events.

Rabbis thus encounter honorary officers and congregants in more than one role-relationship, and are used to this idea. One said in a sermon: 'You may criticise me strongly at a synagogue council meeting one day, and the next day suffer a bereavement and meet me as your rabbi. Such things blur the boundaries between roles in the rabbinate and make it more difficult for you and me' (Eimer, 1990a). His choice of language underlines the difficulty he refers to: it implies that he does not meet his council members as their rabbi. He has that *title* 'Rabbi' all the time, but in council meetings sees himself in the *role* of employee, or colleague, rather than rabbi.

Expectations and pressures

Rabbis, and also honorary officers and administrators, referred frequently to the unrealistic demands made upon them by members of their congregations. Leaders are expected to be perpetually available, and to be able and willing to respond to all the life-crises of their congregants. A Reform rabbi summed up her experience in this way:

> The task [of the rabbi] is limitless, and every congregant will expect us to be good at the things they are interested in, and do not realise that we might be good in one area and be doing a superb job over here. They will still complain because we are not doing that job over there... When they phone us on our day off they think they are the only one doing it. They feel that between services or between their phone calls we are sitting twiddling our thumbs or watching our videos.

> The average congregant also expects us to be a model family. There should be no rows in the families of rabbis, the children should behave themselves perfectly in all situations. (Tabick, 1986)

Many Chairs of synagogue Councils too were bewildered by the expectations focussed upon them. Administrators encountered similar expectations. One described how she was presented with severe marital and personal problems by people who phoned the synagogue, as though she were a rabbi. Another described how she was deluged with messages when she came to a *Shabbat* service, as though she had no needs of her own. It is as though anyone who is seen as representing the synagogue may be pressed into taking this all-providing role.

Hearing and reading these anecdotes, I was reminded of church life as I encountered it during an extended research study, with Bruce Reed and other colleagues at the Grubb Institute, in the 1960s and 1970s (Reed, 1978). We were struck by the childlike dependence, usually upon clergy, of lay people who were, at other times and in other places, competent and resourceful men and women. The quality of this dependence is best conveyed by an incident involving a young Anglican curate, who described how

> ... he had been responsible for a weekly evening meeting in the crypt of his church, at which visiting speakers lectured on cultural and religious subjects. One evening during the meeting a woman fainted. People on either side of her drew back and looked expectantly at the curate. Although he had no clear idea what should be done in such circumstances, he did his best to revive her, and eventually with help assisted her outside into the fresh air. It was only later that he recalled that over half those present were doctors and nurses from London hospitals. (Reed, 1978, p. 46)

We also encountered many instances of individuals and communities who seemed to have high expectations of members of their families or neighbourhood who went to church, but seldom or never attended themselves. It was as though they participated in services vicariously, through other people. Others vigorously resisted the closure of churches whose doors they never darkened. And most churches attracted individuals and families who expected a service for baptisms, weddings and funerals, and might go to church for the big festivals, but were never seen at any other time.

Leaders of synagogues described similar instances. An RSGB report expresses a familiar unease: 'Often membership reflects concern over costs/rights of burial, rather than any positive commitment during a lifetime.' (RSGB, 1986a)

Participants in one workshop discussed how some members paid subscriptions over many years, apparently only to secure burial rights, when they could be buried at less expense through the state system.

I was perplexed by all this, because I had set myself to see what is different about Jewish congregational life. I am now in no doubt that much is different, behaviourally as well as doctrinally, but that the similarities are not to be ignored. As I shall suggest, they are expressions of an image of the synagogue or church as a Holy Place, and its rabbi or priest as a holy person.

Viability and authenticity

The situations described by many participants reveal a preoccupation with the viability of their synagogues. There is pressure to maintain membership as older people die or move away, and as younger people cease to attend and perhaps marry outside the Jewish community. There is the delicate problem of raising membership fees without alienating members, and of how to assess who should be allowed to contribute less than the prescribed fee. There are communities who are endangered by their own success: they decide they require larger premises, and then find themselves trapped in problems of planning permission, escalating building costs, and holding people's commitment during the transition period.

Underlying these management concerns is a deeper anxiety about the decline of Anglo-Jewry. Although the RSGB reports an increasing membership, and the ULPS reports the establishment of new synagogues, there is a belief that, the movements are running up a 'down' escalator. Progressive historians write:

> In Great Britain Anglo-Jewry, optimistically numbered at half a million in the post-war years, is now more realistically assessed as between 350,000 and 400,000; it is, in common with other Ashkenazi communities of Europe, an elderly population, with a declining birth-rate. (Goldberg and Rayner, 1988, p. 188)

They go on to acknowledge (and to disbelieve) the threat to Judaism as a whole:

> It would be tempting, looking at Judaism and Jewish society today, to concur with the historian Arnold Toynbee's judgement that it is a 'fossilised religion', and to conclude that it will inevitably be swallowed up by assimilation, as were the ten lost tribes 2,700 years ago. (Op cit, pp. 190f.)

Counterpointing concern about synagogue viability is concern about the authenticity of synagogue practice — about its spiritual seriousness, and about its faithfulness to the Torah and tradition and the values these enshrine. Colin Eimer writes about a comfortable Judaism, in which:

> ... prayer has become formalised and rote. In many of our [progressive] synagogues it is a spectator sport. The *bimah* has moved to the front — this alone emphasises its spectatorial nature. (Eimer, 1990b)

There is the concern I have mentioned about families who want *bar* or *bat Mitzvah*, or a Jewish burial, without any serious commitment to synagogue life and worship. A ULPS rabbi talked in an interview about the Jews as the messianic people, as described in Isaiah 42, but saw this vision as beyond the ken of synagogue congregations.

Progressive synagogues can be seen as seeking to steer like Odysseus between two perils: on one side, becoming an efficiently run Jewish club with no spirituality; on the other, driving away members and going broke through maintaining an authentic Judaism which is incompatible with the lives Jews and potential converts want to lead. Alternatively, this may be posed as a creative dilemma: how to nurture community life and practice in a way which successfully integrates the demands of viability and authenticity.

Images of Organisations

In looking for a way of organising these diverse observations, it has proved fruitful to suppose that our understanding of what goes on in any organisation, including a synagogue, and the way we behave in it, reflects images (or models) of the organisation which we carry in our minds.

This is not a new idea in organisation theory. It has been expounded most elegantly by Gareth Morgan (1986), and was applied to synagogues by Margaret Harris in a 1989 lecture at Leo Baeck College. It should be made clear that this is a way of explaining people's behaviour, not judging it. It is an explanatory hypothesis. It does not assume that people will necessarily recognise or own up to these images if asked, although they may. They behave *as if* they know what to do, and understand what is happening, because they have in their minds an image, map or working model of a synagogue.

I wish to illustrate this notion, and introduce my main theme, by looking at two pieces of writing. The first is an essay by Lionel Blue entitled 'The Synagogue, The Holy Town Hall' (1975). The title itself proposes an image of the synagogue. The writer begins:

> The first thing you must understand is that a synagogue is not a church, not a good one, nor a defective one either. It is not the best place to have a religious experience, because it is usually too noisy ... The piety is not in the place, but in the people ...
>
> It is more than a house of prayer, it is the town hall, the parliament, the meeting hall, and, above all, the university of the community who use it — their holy school. It does not tolerate or know any division of reality. (Blue, 1975)

The essence of the *authentic* synagogue, as Lionel Blue sees it, is that 'the piety is not in the place, but in the people'. They carry their specialness, their holiness, around with them: they do not find it in a special place. Within this culture[vi] there is no distinction between sacred and profane: 'it does not tolerate or know any division in reality'.

In contrast to Rabbi Blue's essay, a ULPS pamphlet defends the specialness of times of worship, in an imaginary dialogue between a questioner and a respondent:

> Why do you insist on 'decorum'? Is it not true that the Synagogue is a House of Social Meeting? Your Synagogue reminds me of a Church.
>
> It is true that the Synagogue is (a) a House of Prayer, (b) a House of Study, (c) a House of Social Meeting. We want the Synagogue to be used for all three purposes — but not at the same time! (...) The only valid point of comparison [with a church] is an atmosphere of reverence, for which we make no apology, and in which we are proud to be linked with all people who take their communal worship seriously ... (ULPS, 1972)

The questioner, like Lionel Blue, seems to prefer conviviality to the decorum of the liberal synagogue, which reminds him (or her) of a church (not a black pentecostal church, presumably, but a traditional Anglican parish church). The respondent is sensitive to the jibe about being like a church, but takes his stand with 'all those who take their communal worship seriously' unlike the noisy crowd at the questioner's synagogue.

Both texts distinguish between a synagogue and a church. But there are also two images of the *synagogue*: the noisy 'holy Town Hall', and the place of decorous communal worship. Each text affirms one image of the synagogue and repudiates the other; yet in doing so each acknowledges the power of the rejected image.

I have taken my cue from these texts in proposing the terms 'Holy People' and 'Holy Place', for two dominant images of the synagogue.

Images of the Synagogue

I wish now to develop these two images of the synagogue from several different perspectives. Corresponding to each image there is a complex way of doing things — a pattern of beliefs and practices which I am calling a culture. No actual synagogue corresponds to either image in its pure

form: both images manifest themselves in the life of every synagogue, at different times and on different occasions. Overall, some synagogues approximate more closely to one image, some to the other.

The Basic Model

The 'Holy People image' is one of a community with a distinctive culture and history, *clearly differentiated* from the non-Jewish world and its culture or cultures. It is also one in which there is *no sharp distinction* between the culture of members of the community when they are dispersed in their homes and places of work, and when they are gathered in the synagogue.

The 'Holy Place image' is the reverse of this: the Jewish community is *not clearly differentiated* by culture from the non-Jewish world; but there is a *sharp difference* between the culture of members when they are gathered in the synagogue and when they are dispersed. It will be seen that the very use of the term 'community' becomes question-begging in conjunction with the Holy Place image.

One way of describing most actual synagogues is that they have an inner circle of members for whom the Holy People image is strong. These preserve the synagogue for a wider circle for whom it is the Holy Place. If the only person holding to the Holy People image is the rabbi, he or she may become a `vicarious Jew' (see quotation on p. 125).

To expand on these sparse definitions:

The Holy People

A Holy People synagogue is the gathering-place of a community of people whose behaviour and lifestyle distinguish them clearly from the wider society. This is clearest if they live in a geographically distinct locality, so that all the institutions of everyday life — shops, schools, medical services, leisure activities, are embedded in the distinctive Jewish culture. Members of the community are distinguished from others by language, dress, calendar, food, rules about sex and marriage, burial ground, and many other things.

When the community meets in the synagogue what happens is experienced as everyday life in a concentrated form. The faces and relationships are familiar. The rabbi is recognised as having a distinct position, but he or she is not a mysterious figure who has no existence between one *Shabbat* and the next. Their everyday life has been on view like everyone else's: they have been seen getting wet in the rain and pushing a trolley in the supermarket.

The community creates the synagogue by gathering together (as the etymology of the word 'synagogue' implies). The synagogue is the community, just as the community *is* Israel, in that it is the manifestation of Israel in that place. When worshippers gather they may repeat the ancient text: 'How goodly are your tents, 0 Jacob, your dwelling places, 0 Israel.'

But I chose the term 'Holy People' rather than 'Holy Community' for this image. I did this before I knew why. I see now that it was because the word `community' has a primarily contemporary (synchronic) reference, whereas the word 'people' has an historical (diachronic) reference. The living generation of the people gather from their houses and rehearse a history of past generations which began in tents. The rabbi is the history-bearer. 'Judaism is the historical religious experience of the Jewish people' (Declaration of Principles of the [Reform] Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1937, cited in de Lange, 1986, p. 7). 'The piety is in the people.'

The Holy Place

Those who gather in a Holy Place synagogue are, in the limiting case, culturally indistinguishable from other members of the wider society. They may hope to be, and may indeed be, *ethically* distinguishable, in that they strive more consistently to be compassionate and altruistic; but in this respect they are more readily seen as better exemplars of the human race, than as a race apart. But — in the limiting case — they speak, dress, eat and drink like everyone else, order their lives

according to the same calendar, and find spouses and work associates according to individual choice. Or, more precisely, they differ from each other as much as they differ from non-synagogue attenders.

Conversely, the culture and practices of the synagogue are different from those of everyday life — they are special. The piety is in the place. The people who gather are special to each other, because they may only meet each other there. They do not see each other in the shops or drop their children at the same schools; or if they do, they are slightly at a loss, not knowing how to acknowledge their relatedness to each other. For the most part their lives away from the synagogue are blanks to each other; taxi-drivers, nurses, teachers and bank managers shed the skills, knowledge and sense of social status which go with these occupations when they walk through the synagogue door.

The rabbi partakes of the specialness of the place. He or she is invisible to most people for the rest of the week: they cannot imagine what the rabbi is doing. Congregants suppose that they can ring or call on the rabbi at any time of the day or night, and they will find him or her ready and available as a rabbi — not in the bath or having a day off. As the rabbi quoted earlier said: 'They feel that between services or between their phone calls we are sitting twiddling our thumbs or watching our videos.' (Tabick, 1986) Rabbis have to work hard to convince people they are doing a full week's work.

The Holy People synagogue is created by the community. For a Holy Place synagogue the flow is reversed: the activities and occasions of the synagogue create the community. Or perhaps we should instead say that it creates a community, because those who come to see themselves as committed to the synagogue as an institution crystallise out of the larger constituency who attend synagogue events less frequently. This inner group may indeed develop a shared culture. They may do this willingly and joyfully, or with a lurking resentment of the other congregants who they feel do not pull their weight.

Organisational and Sociological Perspectives

The images of the synagogue which we have been considering have partial parallels in more general theories of social institutions.

1. Organisational models

Margaret Harris (1989) suggests that 'some people bring with them, to their synagogue involvement, organisational images and expectations derived from the voluntary sector'. She draws on a theory of voluntary organisations put forward by Charles Handy (1985), in developing this idea. Handy proposes that all voluntary organisations approximate to one of three models (or a cross between two or three):

- The Mutual Aid organisation (e.g., Weight-watchers, Alcoholics Anonymous): this is 'a group of people with a common problem (loneliness, handicapped children, or alcoholism, for instance), who come together to comfort, help and support each other. Such organisations have a strong sense of identity, bolstered by their insistence that they be run *by* people like us, *for* people like us'. Most if not all workers will be volunteers (Handy, 1985).
- The Service organisation (e.g., Dr Barnardo's, The Spastics Society), in which 'the emphasis is on providing help to those in need. The key to success is effectiveness in delivering that help, so that the staff needs to be professional, usually paid ... Volunteers sit on management committees, raise funds or distribute literature — they will not be the core of the organisation' (op cit).
- The Campaigning organisation (e.g., Greenpeace, Oxfam): 'Here it is a cause rather than a problem which unites people. They are concerned to raise consciousness, to change laws, to influence policies. Efficiency is important only in the organisation of events; it is rhetoric, argument and charisma that carry the day' (op cit).

Handy adds that the Campaigning organisation is led, the Service organisation is managed, and the Mutual Aid organisation is served (by a secretary of the group).

When we look at synagogues, my impression is that smaller, newer congregations are closer to the Mutual Aid model, and larger congregations with a longer history to the Service model. In young congregations everyone is involved, no one is paid for their services, there is a strong identification with `our' synagogue. In older congregations there are paid rabbis, teachers and administrative staff. They and a core group of committed honorary officers and volunteers organise services and activities for a larger circle of members and visitors.

What about the Campaigning model? Sub-groups within synagogues may adopt this model (taking up environmental concerns, or the cause of Jews in the Soviet Union, for example), but this is seldom the dominant model. Contemporary Judaism is not a proselytising movement (as for example the Jehovah's Witnesses are).

This is a useful clarification. It also has limitations as a typology for synagogues. The categories of 'service' and 'mutual aid' are inadequate as terms for what synagogues do and provide. Perhaps most seriously, they are all by definition images of voluntary organisations, in which people invest a segment of their time and energy — part of themselves — on a voluntary basis. They are all forms of what I shall in the next section call Association. They exclude any image of a synagogue as the focus of the life of a community with a history, which embraces every aspect of its members' lives — the Holy People image. The Mutual Aid model resembles the Holy People image in the way a square resembles a cube: the shape is familiar, but a dimension is missing.

2. Sociological

Sociological and anthropological writers have come up with a series of paired terms to describe what they see as two fundamental forms of human relatedness. One set of terms refers to conditions of solidarity and mutual identification, the other to conditions of differentiation and individuality. (These terms are listed in Reed (1978, p. 69)). The connotations of these paired terms are not identical; but there is little doubt that each writer is making a similar cut through the manifold forms of human relatedness.[vii] Rather than use the language of any one writer, I propose here to use the terms Community and Association. (These approximate most closely to the terms coined by Frederick Tönnies (1887), and by Emile Durkheim (1893). I shall use initial capital letters when the words have this specialised meaning.)

- In Community, the ties between people are powerful and comprehensive. Individuals are 'tied to each other not by some specific, partial interests or aspects of their social life but in the totality of their social existence ... There is never any doubt as to whom an individual belongs with' (quotes from Berger and Berger, 1975, pp. 329f).
- In Association, 'the ties between people are partial and less committing'. 'Relations between people are largely indirect, of superficial quality, and relating to only parts of the lives and personalities of those concerned'. There is often doubt 'as to just who is part of the group with whom an individual is in society' (op. cit., pp. 329, 332).

It is difficult to define these terms without smuggling in hints about which is `better', and sociological writers have their preferences. From a descriptive point of view it is more useful to point out the consequences of each mode of relatedness. For example, Community (defined in this way) provides a greater sense of security for an individual than Association. I am a member of my family no matter what I do, but my membership of my employing organisation comes to an end sooner or later. It is sharply contingent on what I do: I can get the sack. On the other hand, Community defines what is true and what is permissible, and to be expelled (or excommunicated) from Community is worse than getting the sack: it is a psychological disaster. One whose life is lived in Association has liberty of belief and conscience, and is less dependent on any one set of relationships. But the price of this liberty is the loneliness of living in a society without a secure moral order, without Torah — under conditions of what Durkheim (1897) called 'anomie' (from the Greek *a-nomos*, without law).

Sociological writers describe an inexorable transformation of all relations in Western society, from Community to Association. The change is aptly summed up (from a post-Christian perspective) by the philosopher, William Barrett:

> Religion to medieval man was not so much a theological system as a solid psychological matrix surrounding the individual's life from birth to death, sanctifying and enclosing all its ordinary and extraordinary occasions in sacrament and ritual. The loss of the Church was the loss of a whole system of symbols, images, dogmas, and rites which had the psychological validity of immediate experience, and within which hitherto the whole psychic life of Western man had been safely contained. (Barrett, 1961, p. 21)

What is the relationship, if any, between the sociological concepts of Community and Association and the two images of the synagogue previously put forward? As I see it, they are not exact equivalents; but

1. the Holy People image implies relations between synagogue attenders which are Community-like; whereas
2. the Holy Place image makes no assumptions about the relations between synagogue attenders.

Holy People image

It follows from this that, in contemporary Western society, in which Association is the dominant form of social relations, the Holy People image will always be vulnerable to attrition. Synagogue leaders for whom this is the authentic form of Judaism will feel that the tradition and values of Judaism are under threat. It will only be possible to maintain what is seen as the authentic image, to the extent that the life of the community is insulated from that of the surrounding society; otherwise, even though Holy People language and symbols continue to be used, they will tend to be assimilated into a Holy Place pattern of synagogue life. For example, the rabbi will be described as a teacher but treated as a priest; and the scrolls of the Torah will be described as a book for study but treated as objects of veneration.

This may be related to the picture built up in *The Dynamics of Religion* (Reed, 1978). This study implies that contemporary religious institutions provide occasions in which worshippers can still make contact with the 'solid psychological matrix' provided by Community. Through this contact they are empowered to reengage with the freedoms and anxieties of Association (see later, p. 120). But it seems to me that there is an ambiguity about this experience of Community. It is unlikely that a medieval rabbi or monk would recognise our most Community-like gatherings, any more than Bach would make sense of a piece of music by Britten (let alone Webern). The *experience* of Community, when it happens, is real to the worshipper; but its continuity with any life in Community outside the synagogue or church is tenuous, if it is there at all.

Holy Place image

Since the Holy Place image is compatible with Association-like relations, it will not be under the same threat of attrition. The leaders of the Holy Place synagogue will not need to insulate its life from the culture of the surrounding society, and it will therefore tend to adopt the Association-like forms of organisation of the society. This is one way of understanding the trend towards secular models of organisation and professionalism — for example, towards more precise definitions of roles and contractual obligations, described earlier in this paper.

The essay by Lionel Blue which I have already quoted conveys what I take to be a similar understanding:

> Such a strong link exists between the synagogue and the society around it, that the sickness of one infects the other, there is so little division between them. Formerly the tides of religious awareness flowed from the synagogue into the daily life of the community. There was no artificial barrier between them. Today the tides of secularism

flow from the outside world back into the synagogue. Once again no artificial barrier separates them.

Because the outside world has lost its religious character, the synagogue has had to become more consciously religious, perhaps artificially so. There is a great stress now on decorum, and on the sermon. Children no longer play between the pews. The arguments get fewer, and the Jews are more self-conscious. They no longer dispute before the ark, or relax with a volume of Talmud and a glass of lemon tea. God has to be treated with respect, because there is a distance between Him and His people. If you don't know someone well, it's better not to take liberties or be over-familiar.

Probably the marble halls will have to be given up, together with the organs and the building funds, for He is really a desert God, who reveals Himself in odd places, at a waste place in Sinai, and in hired rooms In Babylon. (Blue, op. cit., p. 53f)

Lionel Blue chooses his words with precision. Formerly the tides of religious awareness flowed from the synagogue into *the daily life of the community*. Today the tides of secularism flow from *the outside world* back into the synagogue. The symmetry is not complete. What he is describing is not only a reversal of flow: there is also a change in the context of the synagogue. Formerly it was the community of the holy people (Community); now it is the world of secular affairs (Association).

His sense of the direction of flow is also significant. In contemporary synagogues the distinctively Jewish culture of the congregants is maintained and developed through the activities of the synagogue: participation in synagogue life holds them against the centrifugal pull towards total assimilation into the secular culture. But the values and practices disseminated from the synagogue are themselves continuously modified by the tide of secular values which flows into the synagogue, locally and on a wider front. And the men and women who come to the synagogue bring what Lionel Blue calls the sicknesses of their everyday lives into the synagogue — the anxieties of Association. The rabbi and core community must therefore, as we have seen, either build uncompromising flood-barriers, or else find some way of responding to this in-flow. I shall suggest later (pp. 13ff) that their grounding in the traditional Holy People image does not equip them for this.

The Essential Process

In order to understand the pressures upon synagogue leaders it is necessary to look at the synagogue from another, psychological perspective, and to attempt to describe what it actually does which is unique (and which distinguishes it from local gatherings of Alcoholics Anonymous or Friends of the Earth). I shall refer to this unique activity of the synagogue as the essential process of the synagogue.[viii]

I have had several discussions with Jews and non-Jews about this essential process. Early on we said that synagogues were concerned with Jewish identity — with confirming Jews in their identity as Jews. A recent article by Lawrence Kushner starts from a superficially similar assertion:

If synagogues were businesses, their product would be Jews. The more Jews they could manufacture from otherwise illiterate, assimilated, and un-self-aware members, the more successful they would be. That (to continue the metaphor) is the bottom line. (Kushner, 1984, pp. 87ff)

These statements seem to me to be useful, but simplistic. We need to explore further the psychological processes by which Jewish identity is confirmed or 'manufactured', and the differences between the processes which are the essence of the Holy People and the Holy Place images — bearing in mind that in every actual synagogue both images are in evidence at different times.

The Holy People image is of the synagogue as a gathering of the Jewish community, of Israel. The synagogue does not 'manufacture' Jews: they are already there:

The unity of the whole people of Israel is not a pious hope or a goal to be worked for: rather it is a starting point, an axiom which may be taken for granted and from which other ideas and positive actions follow. (de Lange, 1986)

It might be better to say that the community manufactures the synagogue, but this is an argument which chases its tail, or, to change the metaphor, it is another version of the familiar conundrum about the chicken and the egg.

Instead let us say that the process of gathering in the Holy People synagogue is a process by which dispersed individuals and families confirm, celebrate and draw strength from their membership of a community with a history. Because they are physically together in the synagogue, they are together in spirit when they are dispersed about their everyday affairs. Because they are aware of their relatedness when they are about their everyday affairs, they assemble periodically to affirm their relatedness.

So this image is one in which the synagogue exists in the first instance for the community, not for the individual. (The community has never heard of individuals, in the post-Enlightenment sense of that word.) The acid test of the vitality of the synagogue is not what happens within its walls, but the quality of the life of the community, in particular its faithfulness to the Torah and the tradition.

The essential process of the Holy Place synagogue is different. According to our original model, those who assemble are not already a community. In the limiting case they are indistinguishable in behaviour and lifestyle from the rest of society. They are individuals (in the modern sense) who are part of the anomie of the Association-like relations of society. Through participation in the activities of the Holy Place they recover a sense of wholeness and identity as human beings:

> People come together round the effort and hope of creating a ... path of life that reconnects what have become the separated areas of our lives: work, leisure, politics, sex, family; that infuses them all with a sense of awe and celebration. (Waskow, 1978, pp. 2f)

To sum up:

- the essential process of the Holy People synagogue is to repair, confirm and enrich the bonds which join the dispersed members of the community into a people.
- the essential process of the Holy Place synagogue is to repair, confirm and enrich the psyche of fragmented individuals, so that they return to everyday life with a sense of wholeness.

Actual synagogues have always fostered both these processes: it is the balance which has tipped since medieval times. Thus writings as early as some of the psalms depict a solitary person who changes, through the psalm, from fragmentation to wholeness; but this restoration of the person is a subplot of the restoration of Israel. Conversely, in contemporary synagogue life, a community, however fragile, is created and maintained; but this process is dependent on the prior process by which fragmented individuals are made whole.

Psychological Pressures

Leaders and professionals in every type of occupation — long distance lorry drivers, nurses, actors, politicians, entrepreneurs, teachers — have to be able to survive and work with the distinctive psychological demands of their work. When we say that we could never do someone else's job, we usually mean that we could not tolerate the stress or the anxiety or the conflict or the boredom.

Leading a religious institution has its distinctive demands. These are most clear for the rabbi, but impinge in varying degrees upon non-ordained officers and employees too. Since different images of the synagogue include different images of its leaders, the demands of leadership are different when different images predominate.

Leadership in the Holy Place

I am taking the pressures upon Holy Place leaders first, because they are more familiar to me. They appear to be similar to those upon parish priests, as we observed them in the Grubb Institute studies I have mentioned, and which are also discussed by Wesley Can (1985, and in Ecclestone, 1988). There is not space here to expound the theory in detail. Briefly, individuals use the Holy Place to regress to a childlike state of dependency (cf the illustration of the Anglican curate, p. 110), in which they can feel valued and cared for, and in which they can re-establish a sense of relatedness to a benign power — a sense they can carry back into the outside world (Reed, 1978). Wesley Can writes about the individual bringing the irrationality and madness of modern life into religious institutions, where it is acknowledged and given meaning. To those who are unfamiliar with this idea it may seem peculiar; but as I have said, many synagogue leaders are acutely aware of the irrationality and dependency which manifests itself in synagogue life and focuses upon themselves. Wesley Carr writes (of church life):

> Every minister knows how amazing the irrational behaviour of a congregation and its members can be. It sometimes seems that, when in the church, otherwise sane people lose their wits. They go to the stake for unimportant trifles. The home of love and fellowship is a hotbed of bitchiness ... This can cause despair, until we recognise that such behaviour is not merely the product of church life and religious belief, but is also a function of the external roles that church people hold in the world. (In Ecclestone, ed, 1988, p.119)

Leadership of the Holy People

When we look at the Holy People synagogue, we find that it too is an emotional place, and makes profound demands on the rabbi and non-ordained leaders: churches do not have a monopoly of bitchiness. I have seen no psychological study of a Holy People community, comparable to the studies just quoted, so the account which follows is necessarily tentative.

The leaders of the Holy People synagogue have to be able to lead, support, advise, teach and mediate, in all the occasions and crises which arise in the life of any community: birth, puberty, marriage, separation, death and bereavement; conflict and reconciliation; celebration and catastrophe; cycles of days, weeks and years. They have to be men and women for all seasons, to respond sensitively to a range of emotions: joy, sorrow, desire, anger, jealousy, compassion, despair, hope. But the range of emotions they must experience and work with have something in common: they are the emotions of people whose membership of a community is not itself in doubt. The life of the community proceeds in conditions of what Erikson (1968) has called 'basic trust', and John Bowlby (1969) has called 'secure attachment'.

So, for members of the Holy People synagogue, doubts about their right or worthiness to attend do not arise, because they *are* Jews. In contrast, for those who come to the Holy Place synagogue, basic trust and secure attachment are themselves uncertain. They bring with them the immediate anxieties of life in Association, perhaps also deeper anxieties about the long-term survival of Judaism in this country.[ix] They have no taken-for-granted security of belonging. The question 'Who is a Jew?' is inside them, and when they come to the synagogue from their partially assimilated life they cannot take their belonging for granted. The convert is a Jew by choice; so his or her belonging depends not on birth but on individual inclination. But, as Jonathan Magonet has suggested, the position of hereditary Jews may not be so different:

> All American Jews are in a certain sense 'Jews by choice'. They are totally free to identify with the community or not, to be committed or not on any terms they wish — religiously, politically or socially. We are close to the same situation in Britain. (Magonet, 1989, p. 23)

Incidentally, the usage of the word 'convert' in the preceding paragraph illustrates how the two images of the synagogue have their corresponding languages (and see also note 5). 'Convert' is the language of the Holy Place. The equivalent Holy People term is 'proselyte':

> Converts are normally spoken of, not as converts but as proselytes, a Greek word which originally meant 'immigrants'. To become a Jew is essentially to join a people. (de Lange, 1989, p. 20)

One way of clarifying the different pressures upon leaders is to consider where specialness (or holiness) is located. When the community as a whole is special, the rabbi may have a distinct role, but is essentially an ordinary person. He or she is therefore free to be a teacher, without the trappings and deference of priesthood. This is why the newly-ordained rabbi, inducted for five years into the Holy People image of a rabbi, gets a rude shock when she (in the case I shall quote) encounters the irrational dependency of the Holy Place:

> Everybody turns up on your doorstep. Leo Baeck College does not prepare you for being mummy and daddy. This is the role of the rabbi, not teacher — that is an outmoded idea. (From interview)

Structures Supporting Rabbis

This brings me to my concluding point. It appears that rabbis (and other synagogue leaders) take up their roles without the support of external organisational arrangements and internalised ideas (what I am lumping together here as 'structures') which help them to sustain the pressure of the Holy Place aspect of their roles, and to work creatively with it. They are like people engaged as divers, who turn up with their snorkels and flippers and find they are expected to work at the bottom of the North Sea. No doubt experienced rabbis find ways of sustaining the pressure and working creatively; although the debate in the progressive movements of a few years back, about malaise in the rabbinate (see Tabick, 1986), suggests that some do not. By comparison, parish priests have the support of structures more congruent with the pressure they are subject to (or had, at the time of the studies I am familiar with).[x] I shall refer to these, not to score points for the Church, but to make clear what I mean by supporting structures.

1. As we have seen, the traditional images of the synagogue as the Holy People and the rabbi as its teacher, do not match the image of the synagogue as Holy Place, and the rabbi as holy person, implicit in the expectations of many congregants. Insofar as the former images are dominant in rabbinic training, newly appointed rabbis may be unprepared for this aspect of their ministry. The Reform movement explicitly repudiates a priestly (Holy Place) role for the rabbi:

> The prime mission of the rabbi is to teach Judaism ... The present stress on the rabbi as priestly functionary and 'vicarious Jew' is a distortion of the traditional role of the rabbi as a teacher of the community. (RSGB, 1986a)

2. In most stressful occupations, people are supported in their roles by various rituals and 'context markers': induction ceremonies, uniforms, titles. The *position* of congregational rabbi (as distinct from the *status* of rabbi, conferred at *semicha*) is only weakly designated, compared with that of the parish priest. Judaism has no distinct title, corresponding to 'vicar', for the rabbi serving a congregation. The vicar is installed in his parish by a bishop, according to a ceremony prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer; the installation of rabbis in congregations is more low-key. The domain of responsibility of the vicar is clearly defined by a parish boundary. It is true that parish boundaries are often anachronistic, particularly in urban areas; nevertheless, they do symbolise a finite, territorially limited task. Wesley Carr writes:

> The parish boundary is designed ...to give the clergy clear boundaries, without which they would go mad. (In Ecclestone, op cit, p. 116)

3. In contrast, at least within Reform synagogues, the rabbi's responsibility is explicitly not restricted to the congregation:

> Rabbis, together with lay leaders, must be committed to fulfilling their responsibilities to Judaism and Klal Israel as well as to serving the needs of their own synagogue community. (RSGB, 1986b)

This statement is wholly consistent with the Holy People image, and in that sense 'right'. There is no distinction between the local and the wider community: both are Israel, and the obligations of rabbis and 'lay' leaders are to Israel wherever it manifests itself. But when this awareness of Israel has become attenuated, leaders have, beyond the congregation, no clear boundary to their responsibilities

There is therefore a dilemma. Insofar as they see the synagogue as a form of Association, employing a member of staff, synagogue councils understandably want to feel that they are getting a week's work for a week's salary, and may wish, as some councils are doing, to pin their rabbi down to a clear job description. If he or she spends some time counselling or writing or broadcasting, this can be justified only if it brings kudos to the congregation. But insofar as they see themselves as a local manifestation of *Klal Israel*, they may wish, and feel privileged, to support a rabbi who ministers to *Klal Israel* according to his or her particular abilities; they may therefore be happy to rely on unwritten and unquantified conventions to define how much time the rabbi should spend serving their own members. This is, as I see it, a dilemma to be lived with, not a problem to be solved by coming down on one side or the other.

4. From quite another perspective, Jonathan Magonet has suggested that progressive Judaism, with its roots in nineteenth-century rationalism, is not finely tuned to the irrational element in life:

> In throwing out ritual and whatever traditions seemed irrational, my predecessors
> overlooked the importance of such symbols and systems in purifying and refining our
> emotional life. (Magonet, 1988)

This lends support to those who are seeking to rediscover the richness of myth, symbol and ritual within synagogue life and worship, rather than regarding these as the domain of psychotherapy (referred to by Alix Pirani (1988) as `unofficial Judaism').

Progressive Judaism is less restrictive but also less supportive than traditional Judaism in its more liberal and discretionary interpretations of the Torah. Men and women who already have more freedom than they can bear may prefer not to have the additional anxiety of deciding what God's laws mean. It is soothing to have clear rules. Noah would have gone crazy with anxiety about the rain if he had not had a very precise specification for the building of the ark.

The horns of this dilemma are particularly sharp: for many people, fundamentalism and literal conformity are not options; yet to hold any other boundary between all and nothing proves to be extremely difficult. As David Martin says about the Catholic Church:

> What I do believe, as a sociologist, is that the liberalising notions that got into the
> Catholic Church after 1960 [Vatican II] did a great deal of organisational damage ... You
> may say that they got closer to the theological truth *and* lost people. (Martin, 1988)

Afterword: Living With Dilemmas

I do not know what the practical consequences of this analysis are, for synagogue leaders or for those who train, deploy and support them; nor am I best placed to work out what they are. I am clearer about the leadership *posture* (or style) which is required. It is the posture required for leading an institution in which there is an unavoidable tension between two images of what it is and what it is doing. It includes a preparedness to contemplate, discuss, describe and seek to understand the way things are now, without in the first instance worrying about changing anything. It entails regarding the difficulties of synagogue leadership which we have identified as dilemmas to be lived with, rather than as problems to be eliminated,[xi] accepting that there will sometimes be creative resolutions and sometimes only untidy compromises. Such a flexible posture is I believe consonant with the evolution of new authentic forms of synagogue life.

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Notes

[i] My knowledge is restricted to progressive synagogues, to which the word 'synagogue' refers throughout this paper.

[ii] I am grateful for several papers given to me by Colin Eimer and Jonathan Magonet.

[iii] I am particularly grateful to Lina Fajerman for several invitations to take part in events at Barkingside Progressive Synagogue, and for her colleagueship throughout this project.

[iv] There would have been no paper without my many formal and informal conversations with workshop participants and tutors, and with Marcus Bower, Sidney Brichto, Raymond Goldman, Margaret Harris, Michael Hilton, David Lipman, Jonathan Magonet, Maurice Michaels, Bruce Reed, Rosita Rosenberg, Sheila Shulman and Joe Swinburne. I also want to thank Jane Aaron and Lina Fajerman for reading the paper in draft, and for their extremely pertinent suggestions.

[v] The word 'lay', distinguished from 'ordained', is Holy Place language. In Holy People language everyone would be 'lay', including rabbis, because the word is derived from *laos*, meaning 'people'.

[vi] Culture: 'the invariant patterns of behaviour that connect, inform, and provide a context for, even the most diverse actions of individuals, and help to distinguish behaviour in *that* community from behaviour in others'. (Wilk, 1987, adapted)

[vii] I shall not discuss another distinction, made in the sociology of religion, between `church', 'sect', and (a later addition) 'denomination'. This is because it may create more confusion than clarity, to introduce terms so deeply embedded in a Christian context. A church is a religious group which is in a predominantly positive relationship to society. It considers itself uniquely legitimate, and does not recognise the legitimacy of the claims of any other religious group. A sect is in a relatively negative relationship to society, and like the church considers itself uniquely legitimate. A denomination is in a positive relationship to society, but recognises the legitimacy of other religious groups. For what it is worth, one writer, applying this typology to the USA, regards the Jewish *Chasidim* as sect-like, and Reform and Conservative Jews as denominations. (McGuire, 1987, pp. 118ff)

[viii] I have borrowed the term 'essential activity' from an unpublished paper by Andrew Smith. Writers in the Tavistock school have used the term 'primary task' to describe organisational functioning (e.g., Miller and Rice, 1967). The Grubb Institute (1987) have sought to clarify ambiguities in these terms, by distinguishing between the purposes of any institution, as seen by their leaders and others (which may or not be fulfilled); and the *self-referent* rules of the institution (determining the repeating patterns of activity through which the institution maintains its relations with its context and stays the same).

[ix] It may be that Jews bring distinctive and acute anxieties, as recent books suggest (e.g., Spiegelman and Jacobson, eds., 1986; Cooper, ed., 1988; Freedman, 1988). Jonathan Magonet writes about the 'frenzied insecurity' of Jews (1988, p. 189), and Howard Cooper about 'the insecurity of the outsider' (p. 225), and about the effects of the *Shoah*, which he describes as 'a very deep wound in the collective Jewish unconscious' (p. 227). Freedman reports a level of stress amongst American rabbis greater than that of people living near Three Mile Island immediately after the nuclear accident.

[x] Wesley Can (1990) believes that these structures have now virtually disappeared for many clergy, who 'lack even the rudimentary security of familiar role defences... Recent views of training for ministry have veered away from the traditional skills and behaviours of clergy. They have been encouraged, partly because of the adoption of inappropriate therapeutic models, to be too human. They thus lack either the defence of their role, or the therapist's protection of time, territory and payment'.

[xi] I am indebted to Charles Hampden-Turner (1989) for this concept of living with dilemmas.