

Rejoinder to the Responses to *The Report of the Commission on Structure, Function and Priorities of the Organized Jewish Community*

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THE report of the Commission on the Structure, Function and Priorities of the Organized Jewish Community including the opinion survey of the NCJCS membership sponsored by the Commission was mailed to NCJCS members shortly before last Spring's annual conference. It has recently been mailed to them again in the form "approved at (the) annual meeting June 5, 1974."¹ The only difference, besides the color of the covers, is that the new version contains two responses largely reacting to the survey rather than the Commission's report and recommendations. As the one who conducted the survey and authored its report, I must respond to these reactions which range from dismay with certain of the findings ("Response of the Association of Jewish Community Organization Personnel") to a broadside attack upon the survey as invalid and valueless ("Response of Association of Jewish Community Relations Workers"). While this rejoinder is obviously a defense of my scholarly and professional competence from what I shall show to be unwarranted criticism, it is also intended to clarify several issues of significance to Jewish communal service.

AJCOP's response which, among other things, challenges the soundness of the views expressed or implied by certain findings of the survey is substan-

tively unexceptionable. What I do take exception to is the manner of presentation which permits the reader to infer that these are my views rather than those of the survey's respondents. For they are dealt with as "reactions to the Findings and Conclusions as stated by Dr. Kutzik." As it happens I join in the response's first-listed disagreement with the implication that "Federations have not kept pace with new and changing concerns and are not responsible (*sic*) to problems of Jewish identity and survival" but disagree with the second point that it is a "disservice to the Jewish community to see conflict existing between support for local vs. overseas needs." I also agree that many respondents' views of communal decision-making require clarification and that other of their "perceptions must be taken into account and dealt with, no matter how erroneous they may be." But the perceptions in question, whether erroneous or not, are those of the respondents and not mine, as the reader might again assume from the phrase introducing the last quote: "While reality may not support the perception of what exists that pervades the Conclusions . . ." Aside from these apparently inadvertent unclaritys, I find AJCC P's response to the survey and the Commission's recommendations both responsive and responsible.

I cannot say the same for that of AJCRW, which attempts to discredit the survey in order to discredit its findings that community relations has a lower

¹ *Report of the Commission on Structure, Function and Priorities of the Organized Jewish Community*. New York: National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, December, 1974.

priority for most respondents than activities like fund raising and fields like Jewish education and social service. Despite certain weakness in the questionnaire pointed out in the response — without noting that these had already been pointed out in the survey report² — the facts remain that only 7.8 percent of respondents thought that “improving intergroup relations” and 10.3 percent that “social action to improve the security of Jews” should be among the three top communal priorities, while 31.1 percent and 15.3 percent, respectively, thought these should be among the lowest three priorities. Instead of taking a professionally sound position, like AJCOP’s, that these views of respondents “must be taken into account and dealt with, no matter how erroneous they may be,” the framers of AJCRW’s response decided on the strategy of denying the reality of many respondents’ devaluation of community relations by impeaching the validity of the survey. After declaring the survey “faulty in concept and method,” the response asserts that the survey questionnaire was confused and confusing as to the meaning of the term “organized Jewish community,” although this was explicitly defined for purposes of the survey as equivalent to “Jewish communal service” and the organizational-institutional components of the latter detailed on the face of the survey questionnaire. This definition was repeated and discussed at considerable length in the survey report because a number of respondents (and participants in the community meetings which were part of the Commission’s study) had been so clear about what the survey meant by the “organized Jewish community” that they had objected to it.³ While the framers of the AJCRW response are entitled to their

² This is discussed in detail below.

³ For the survey report’s discussion see *ibid.*, pp. 15-16 and for the reaction of some participants at meetings see the Commission report *ibid.*, p. 7.

opinion that “it was virtually impossible for a respondent to distinguish” between priorities for the “organized Jewish community” (that is, for Jewish communal service); “priorities for the whole Jewish community, including religious, Zionist and fraternal organizations” and “priorities for the organization the respondent works for,” I found no evidence of this in the survey data. On the other hand, I find abundant evidence in AJCRW’s response that its framers found it virtually impossible to distinguish between priorities for Jewish communal service and priorities for their field of community relations.

After discussing the foregoing “minor fault,” the response moves on to what it characterizes as a “major fault:” “the incompleteness of the categories for ordering of priorities.” Specifically, it scores the omission from the list of categories of Jewish communal service which respondents were asked to rank in order of priority of “such activities of the Jewish community as telling the story of Israel to the American people, helping to rescue the Jews in the Soviet Union and other areas where Jewry is threatened, and even fund-raising for relief of Jews overseas outside of Israel.” These, the response contends, should have been part of the list including such activities and fields as fund-raising for Israel and American Jewry, Jewish education, Jewish social service, intergroup relations and health care. Again those who advance this contention are entitled to their opinion. But it should be understood that what they consider a major omission constituting a major defect of the survey was not so considered by the thirty-five members of the Commission, including a representative of ACJRW and leaders of the CR field, who reviewed the questionnaire before it was put into use and previewed the data resulting from its use. Nor, it may be assumed, was it so considered by any of the

701 survey respondents, since none of them added the above-mentioned “vital activities” to the program areas listed in the questionnaire in the space specifically left for “other” areas at the end of the list.

After dealing with this “major fault,” the response discusses the “additional confusion” supposedly caused by the fact that one of the listed program areas was “fund-raising for American Jewish agencies and causes” while “others included these very causes.”⁴

It is hard to see (argues the response) how one can distinguish with respect to priority, between advancing a cause and raising money for it.

It is hard for me to see what a question asking communal workers “to rank in order of importance what you think should be the top three (communal) priorities and the lowest three priorities” has to do with advancing as opposed to raising money for them. On the other hand, understanding the strategic objective of the response, it is not hard for me to see why it devotes a paragraph to additional confusion.

Finally, the response presents what it considers to be the fundamental weakness of this survey of communal priorities, namely, that it is a survey of communal priorities.

Our primary concern is with the very concept of “priority” used in the study. The study rests upon the process of assessing relative priorities of individual programmatic areas as if each could be rated on the basis of inherent worth, rather than as a compo-

⁴ Again, the response neglects to mention that the survey report acknowledges the error of having included “fund-raising for American Jewish agencies and causes” and “fund-raising for Israel” in the same questions with fields of service. And that the result was not the alleged confusion but the far more problematical skewing of responses in the direction of consensus since practically all respondents understandably placed fund-raising among the top communal priorities and functions.

nent within a balanced and integrated program of Jewish community service.

This statement is followed by a sophisticated, unquestionably sound and entirely irrelevant discussion of two different policy implications which may follow from the ranking of communal priorities: a policy of supporting only high priority programs (which it somehow attributes to the survey) and a policy of “taking care” of high priority programs “before all others” (which it favors). However, this is mistakenly presented as a discussion of two “meanings” of communal priority. The fact of the matter is that there is only one possible meaning of this term, which the response tautologically and argumentatively but more or less correctly defines and attributes to the survey: communal priorities are the results of “a process of assessing relative priorities of individual programmatic areas . . . rated on the basis of inherent worth.” More precisely, the survey rests upon the commonplace assumption that communal priorities can be nothing other than the results of rating what the rater believes to be the relative worth of particular programmatic areas for the Jewish community. The response attempts to deny this truism understood by every respondent to and reviewer of the survey questionnaire — including the authors of this response, whose discussion of the survey’s “minor” and “major” faults and “additional confusion” assumes such an understanding.

What accounts for the refusal to accept the universally accepted meaning of such a concept as priority and willingness to exaggerate or invent faults in the methodology of the survey? If it is not yet apparent that this unfounded attack on “the concept and method” of the survey is actually an attack upon those of its findings which show that respondents rated community relations a low communal priority, the remainder of the response makes this crystal clear. For con-

siderably more than half the discussion is devoted to presenting the argument that such CR programs as "protecting freedom of religion" and "combatting anti-Semitism" deserve to be communally supported although they are presently low priority since, as in the past, they may in the future become high priority, that they are and should be considered "part of the overall Jewish community service program, however low the(ir) . . . priority at present."⁵

Anyone reading the response would infer, as its framers evidently have, that the survey questionnaire or report expressed or at least encouraged a position excluding presently low priority programs from communal support. However the questionnaire includes "improving relations" and "social action to improve the security of Jews" among the "communal priorities" and "to combat anti-Semitism" and "to improve relations between Jews and non-Jews" among the "communal functions" it asks questions about. The survey report similarly treats the findings relating to these areas. Perhaps what prevented the framers of the response from perceiving this was their concern that, since CR programs were rated low priority by a large proportion of respondents, those who read the report might conclude that community relations programs should not be supported by the Jewish community. On this score, I must ask whether the framers of the response read the report or just glanced at the tables. For, recognizing that lack of knowledge of the full scope and importance of community relations activities on the part of many respondents had influenced their rating this field so low in priority and that similar lack of knowledge on the part of

⁵ I have avoided confusing the reader with the response's infelicitous "distinction" between what it calls "quantitative" and "qualitative" communal priorities, roughly approximating present and potential priority.

many readers might lead them to misinterpret such rating as calling communal support of community relations into question, I footnoted the discussion of priorities in the report's conclusion as follows:

A caveat is in order here as regards the low priority it seems respondents assigned to community relations. Unlike other of the program areas listed in the question eliciting responses on priorities, "improving intergroup relations" and "social action to improve the security of Jews" did not coincide with the field primarily responsible for such activities, i.e., community relations. If the major programmatic emphases of community relations agencies on Jewish identification-survival and support of Israel during the last two decades had been identified, they obviously would have been given high priority by respondents. It was, therefore, its traditional intergroup and "defense" activities rather than the field of community relations which the respondents ranked.⁶

Finally, the response warns that for the reasons discussed above "the survey findings should not be used as the basis of future decisions by the Jewish community as to its course of action." Yet nowhere in the survey questionnaire or report is such use suggested — although my letter of transmittal could be so misinterpreted, since it states:

I trust that (the report of the survey) meets the objectives of providing the Commission with reliable information on the basis of which it can fulfill its charge to assist the NCJCS in identifying, clarifying and taking appropriate action on major issues confronting the organized Jewish community.⁷

While it is hard to see how providing information to the Commission to fulfill its charge to assist NCJCS in policy matters cannot be distinguished from ad-

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10. I take this opportunity to note that apparently out of a superabundance of stylistic elegance and lack of research competence someone edited the report's original "reliable data" to read "concrete data" in order to avoid repeating "reliable" on p. 13.

vocating that survey findings be used as the basis of future decisions by the Jewish community as to its course of action, such confusion is evidently possible. However, since unwarranted use of research data and unsound professional advice is thereby attributed to me, I present below the public declaration to the contrary which I made at one of the plenary sessions on the report of the Commission at the last NCJCS annual meeting:

The findings of the survey and "open hearings" on which the report being discussed here today are based can be used to identify those policies of Jewish communal services (or "priorities" of the "organized Jewish community") which communal workers think should be reaffirmed or reassessed. However, they cannot in and of themselves be used to justify the priority of one particular policy over another much less one or another function. For their data are opinions, substantially divided on most issues, whose correspondence to the facts let alone soundness can neither be proved or disproved by recourse to these same data, even in those few instances where survey respondents and hearing participants approach unanimity. Indeed, the conclusion of the survey is that not objective conditions but ideology is the explanation of most of its findings. As such, despite the social scientific methodology, the survey, no less than the hearings and the overall report, is in the tradition of ideological discussion of what should be the objectives or values of Jewish communal service which has characterized the field since its earliest days — and which is still essentially a matter of unverifiable opinion to this very day. The title and focal concerns of the Commission on Structure, Function and Priorities of the Organized Jewish community notwithstanding, it was not charged with the responsibility to and did not directly study these aspects of Jewish communal service but only what communal

workers think they are and should be. Valuable as such informed opinion is, it can serve as a guide for sound communal policy only in combination with objective information on what the actual structure, functions and priorities of Jewish communal service are and have been historically.⁸

This then is the case the AJCRW response makes for "view(ing) the Survey as faulty in concept and method" and — an inevitable concomitant — viewing the one who conducted, analyzed and reported it as an incompetent researcher and irresponsible professional. The reader is now in a position to judge whether I or the framers of the response merit such characterization.

Hopefully, this rejoinder has not only precluded misinterpretation of the AJCOP response and resolved the false issues raised by the AJCRW response but clarified the value as well as limitations of the first survey of the NCJCS membership in its three-quarter century history. For, however comforting or disturbing the opinions of a substantial cross-section of its members may be, I believe even more now than at the time I concluded the report that "these findings concerning those who staff the institutions upon which its survival depends warrant the attention of all concerned with the future of the American Jewish community."

⁸ Alfred J. Kutzik, "Jewish Communal Service, Jewish Identity and Jewish Community: An Historical-Sociological Perspective," paper presented at the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, San Francisco, June 1, 1974. Ironically, the paper provides historical and sociological evidence of the existence and salience of community relations for the Jewish community, from talmudic times to the present.