



THE BLOGS

Antony Gordon

Fighting the wrong battle based on erroneous assumptions

The outrage displayed by Jewish Federations in America over the decision on June 25th to “moth ball” the so called *Kotel Agreement* – which called for an expanded egalitarian prayer space in the Robinson’s Arch area of the Western Wall – is a classic case of misplaced anger and an inappropriate utilization of the mandate of the Jewish Federations.

The self-defined charge of The Jewish Federations of [North America](#) is “*meeting the needs of the North American Jewish Community.*” While there is no question that the Jewish Federations are involved in many laudable and productive programs in several areas such as community centers, family service agencies, vocational training programs and the like, unfortunately, and sadly, the results of the most recent Pew Report (“*A Portrait of Jewish Americans*” – October, 2013), which represented the most definitive demographic study of American Jewry for over 10 years, clearly illustrated that the American Jewish Federations have failed in the core area of designing and/or funding programs that are accretive to [Jewish continuity](#) as well as having fallen short in increasing the level of their constituents’ Jewish commitment.

Ironically, it was only between the years 2010-2011, a couple of years before the publication of the Pew Report, that solidarity events for Women of the Wall became widespread in Reform and Conservative communities, and in the past few years have become institutionally tied to the Reform movement. By all accounts, the Reform movement embraced the so-called 'battle for the Kotel' at a time when the mandate and claims of the Reform movement in America as illustrated by the findings of the Pew Report were at best questionable. In fact, it is clearly apparent from citing some of the key findings of the Pew Report enumerated below that save for the Orthodox denomination, the approaches and philosophies of the Reform and Conservative movements in the USA have failed:

- 71% of non-Orthodox marriages from 2005-2013 were intermarriages;
- 62% of [American Jews](#) reported that being Jewish was primarily a matter of ancestry and culture;
- Only 17% of the children of intermarried couples were found to marry Jews themselves;
- The fertility levels for non-Orthodox Jews were found to be about 1.7 children, well below the national replacement level in America of 2.1 children.

In order to make the point at hand using a less emotionally charged example, would any reasonable person fault those who are concerned about the Israeli economy for not wishing to embrace a business concept that has not only failed to execute on its stated business plan in America, but to all intents and purposes, is bankrupt? It seems therefore to fly in the face of intellectual consistency not to appreciate the desire of the religious community in Israel from jealously guarding the only movement of Judaism that has not only survived, but has prospered and is growing exponentially both in America and

Israel rather than roll out the red carpet to welcome Jewish denominations that are rapidly disappearing in America.

Is there not perhaps a touch of hypocrisy or at least lack of consistency by virtue of the fact that many leading personalities in the American Reform and Conservative movements have been outspoken about the right of religious Muslims to jealously guard who enters the so-called Temple Mount out of respect for the customs and rules of Islam, and yet apparently have no tolerance for their fellow religious Jews who wish to maintain a certain decorum, dress code and/approach to prayer in one of the holiest and most meaningful locations in the world for religious Jews?

In short, maybe the Jewish Federations in America are fighting a battle which is not theirs to fight in trying to sell a product that has only increased assimilation and decreased loyalty to Israel and Jewish unity.

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