

Rabbi promotes Christmas

By JUDITH BERNE

An area rabbi is urging Jews to celebrate Christmas as well as their own winter festival of Hanukkah, which begins Thursday and lasts for eight days.

Rabbi Sherwin Wine of Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills has informed local Jews that he will be celebrating Christmas by observing that Jews join Christians in a secular celebration of Christmas.

At the same time, he tells Jews not to try to raise Hanukkah to the heights of Christmas. Hanukkah, the festival of lights, celebrates the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple by Judah Maccabee in 161 B.C.

Wine, who heads a breakaway temple devoted to Humanistic Judaism, is used to controversy.

During the '60s, he made nationwide headlines when he declared God.

His temple, now 13 years old, is composed of 3,000 families primarily from Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, West Bloomfield, Farmington Hills and Oak Ridge.

"A RATIONAL JEW accepts the fact that he celebrates Christmas," Wine recently wrote in "The Jewish Humanist," a publication of the Birmingham Temple.

"All Jews in America must celebrate Christmas in some fashion or other. Since our Jewish culture makes it difficult to do so, we must find a way to do so without losing our Jewish identity," Wine wrote in "The Jewish Humanist."

Wine maintains that Jews are best off celebrating Christmas as they should. He says that American Jews celebrate Christmas "because it is a secular holiday."

According to Wine, the fact is that Hanukkah is a religious holiday, not a secular one.

First, it is a Jewish holiday, and Jews should celebrate it as such. He says that American Jews celebrate Christmas "because it is a secular holiday."

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He tried to a shabby battle between two kinds of religious fanaticism, which has been elevated in America to the highest of ritual heights.

"Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, considered the highest Jewish holiday, pales before its current splendor. Passover, the festival commemorating the escape of Jews from Egypt, cannot touch its expenditures."

"As the Jewish answer to Christmas in a child-centered culture, it has wildly succeeded. It has become the annual badge of identity."

WINE BELIEVES "the Jewish hangup on Christmas is a function of Jewish guilt."

The modern Jew is ambivalent about assimilation and yet committed by his ambition to total integration, Wine says. "His aggressiveness for Hanukkah and against Christmas is an expression of self-delusion."

...cohort disagrees; urges Hanuka only

For Jews to celebrate Christmas along with Hanukkah, as proposed by Rabbi Sherwin Wine, is a "sell out" and a "betrayal," according to Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom of Adas Shalom Synagogue.

Rosenbloom, who heads the Conservative congregation located in Farmington Hills, is more than a mile away from Wine's Birmingham Temple. He has harsh words for Wine's idea that Jews in the United States already celebrate Christmas.

Rosenbloom and Rabbi Ernst Conrad of Temple Klal Ami in West Bloomfield, were quick to point out that Wine's views are accepted by only a small minority.

Wine's statements, seemingly justify Jews who have Christmas trees, charged Conrad, a Reform rabbi.

There are some secular ways of celebrating Christmas, that's true, he said, but Christmas can't have real meaning to a believing Jew.

Conrad said in a society where the majority of people are Christians, "we are tempted to make compromises. But it is not necessary to succumb when we have the freedom in this country to either accept or reject."

"I don't deny that Christmas is all pervasive and has a tremendous influence on our culture," Conrad added. "But Christmas belongs to the Christians and Hanukkah to the Jews."

"I HAVE A LOT of respect for Wine's judgment," Rosenbloom said. "We often see the same things happening through different eyes. Our reactions are where we differ."

Wine's is often to embrace what he sees in American society, Rosenbloom said. In this case, "our task is not to embrace it, but to desert it, to represent what we consider to be true Jewish values," he added.

Rosenbloom disputes Wine's claim that Jews already celebrate Christmas by leaving home from work Dec. 25.

"I'm not oversteering with his terminology," he said. "That's a value judgment and not accurate."

Never ever said that Jews didn't have to light to remain Jews, Rosenbloom said. "The hardest fight of all may be in these modern times."

McDonald's, Marines unite

Two Southfield McDonald's restaurants are helping the U.S. Marines in their 29th annual Toys for Tots program.

The centers at 2450 N. Telegraph and 2199 Telegraph are participating by collecting new toys from local scouting groups and giving them to the seven metropolitan drive-in centers at other McDonald's sites.

The toys are distributed by the Marines to needy children who otherwise might not have a Christmas. Each toy that is turned in will be accompanied with a coupon for a \$1.50 Mac.

Last year, the Marines from Selfridge Base collected 400 toys for more than 3,000 children. Nationally, more than five million were donated in the Toys for Tots program.

"It helps him sustain the fantasy that he has preserved the religious uniqueness he has long since abandoned. It makes him feel terribly Jewish without any real effort—and without any real insight."

He points to Japan where a Christmas festival has become a major holiday.

"The Japanese have made of the holiday what they wanted to make of it—to serve their needs without guilt or anguish."

WITH AN EYE TO "millions of non-Christian Christmas observers in Russia, Japan and western Europe," Wine proposes that Christians evolve into "an aesthetically charming holiday of international goodwill devoid of any serious theological implications."

A rational Jew, according to Wine's article, knows that as a universal holiday Christmas has no peer.

"It transcends all national boundaries and unites millions of Christians and non-Christians in a worldwide celebration of good will."

ROSENBLUM AGREES with Wine that Hanukkah historically is a minor holiday but sees no particular reason why it must remain so.

Jewish history is full of changes in emphasis, Rosenbloom said.

"Merely because it was not stressed in another period doesn't mean it must remain that way," he said. "There is an important message in Hanukkah—I can't see any objection to highlighting it."

According to Rosenbloom, in order to maintain our Jewish identity and distinctiveness, we have to expose these encroachments upon our identity.

There can't be any compromise, Conrad agreed. "We must insist on separation of church and state."

Conrad took exception to Wine's point that Japanese successfully celebrate a secular Christmas.

"The Shinto religion is not at all analogous," Conrad said. "In Judaism you can only go so far and no further."

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