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Yeshiva buck\$ tradition with its 3 gay clubs

FOR nearly a year, New York's Orthodox Jewish community has been embroiled in a fierce controversy over the funding of three gay clubs at its most prestigious institution, Yeshiva University.

The dispute is about to boil over. Some 24 rabbinical faculty members have sent Yeshiva's president, Rabbi Norman Lamm, a letter that amounts to an ultimatum: Ban the clubs or else.

"We wish it to be known that we deplore and condemn the continued existence of these gay-lesbian groups," said the protesting rabbis.

Privately, they indicated this was the first shot across the president's bow. If there is no action, problems with funding, donations and student-led protests could follow.

The issue first broke into the open at a graduation ceremony last year, when a Cardozo law student publicly hailed his male lover. Faculty members and students were stunned and outraged. They were even more incensed that Lamm sat through it without protest.

Binyamin Jolkovsky, a reporter, wrote about the incident and the existence of the gay clubs at Yeshiva and its divisions — the Einstein College of Medicine and the Benjamin Cardozo Law School — in a series of articles for the Jewish newspaper The Forward.

The issue has been on the boil ever since, spreading to the rest of the country and to Israel. How can the very citadel of Orthodox Jewry, which deems homosexuality an "abomination," reconcile accepting and funding homosexual clubs on its campuses?

Rabbi Lamm declines to discuss the controversy in public. Privately, he has said Yeshiva could jeopardize federal and state funding and its tax-exempt status if it banned the gay groups.

Dr. Howard Hurwitz, president of the Family Defense Council, and an Orthodox Jew who is among those leading the charge on Yeshiva's clubs, brusquely dismissed Lamm's claim yesterday as nonsense.

"All our legal inquiries tell us this is false," Hurwitz said. "Religious institutions are excluded. But even if it were true, money should be the last consideration. It is grossly immoral to place funding — or money — above moral issues like protecting and subsidizing homosexuality."

The amazing thing is that no one has expressed that view more plainly than Rabbi Lamm himself, in an article on Judaism and homosexuality in a 1974 yearbook.



Lamm wrote, "To assent to the organization of separate 'gay' groups under Jewish auspices makes no more sense, Jewishly, than to suffer the formation of synagogues that cater exclusively to idol worshippers, adulterers, gossipers, tax evaders or Sabbath violators. Indeed, it makes less sense because it provides, under religious auspices, a ready-made clientele from which the homosexual can more easily choose his partners."

The author of that unequivocal declaration has now done a 180-degree flip-flop. In doing so, he has, in Hurwitz's view, placed the greatest Jewish institution in the world at risk.

Hurwitz, a former school principal who has written 12 books on education, history and economics, concedes he is not a theologian. "I come to this from a focus on traditional family values," he said. "What concerns me is that society today is being ravaged by a degree of decadence unprecedented in the history of America."

That a religious center as Orthodox and crucial as Yeshiva should not stand against the tide shocks Hurwitz and other observant Jews.

"The very idea of having gay clubs at an Orthodox Jewish institution is so unthinkable that many people did not believe it at first," he said.

One Jewish source posed these questions: "Should an institution that takes millions of dollars from the Jewish community and that advertises itself in Jewish publications as being Jewish go against Jewish law?"

"If a Yeshiva University has to make concessions in the name of sexual preference and law, is there really a need for such a university?"

"If a Jewish institution has to sell out its religion to stay alive, then what is the purpose of it all?"

Exactly. Many religions are being forced to answer those questions in the age of PC.

Twenty-one years ago, Rabbi Lamm offered the following written observation: "In remaining true to the sources of Jewish tradition, Jews are commanded to avoid the madeness that seizes society at various times and in many forms."

Many Jews here and abroad think Rabbi Lamm, in this case, has ignored his own good advice, and they are not about to let him forget it.

Feds: Union bigs in mob's market

Five officials tied to a food-workers union were indicted yesterday on bribery and racketeering charges for allegedly shaking down supermarket owners and food wholesalers and sharing the booty with the mob.

The five, current and ex-officers of Local 174 of the United Food and Commercial Workers, were charged by the Manhattan U.S. attorney's office. Two Local 174 vice presidents, Jose Rodriguez and Heinz Ottmar, along with former President Robert Wilson, former Vice President James Coniglio and former business manager Phil Falcone, were charged.

The five "exploited employers" fear of physical and economic harm and labor unrest to collect up to \$9,000 a year, prosecutors said.

Some of the cash went to Genovese and Gambino crime family members who "supervised and protected" the activities, prosecutors said.

Coniglio and Rodriguez face a maximum of 50 years in jail and \$1 million in fines if convicted. Wilson, Falcone and Ottmar face up to 45 years in prison and \$750,000 in fines.

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