

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Statement in Response to Glenn Beck's Libel of Reform Rabbis

February 23, 2011

Yesterday, Glenn Beck of Fox News told his radio audience: "When you talk about rabbis, understand: Most people who are not Jewish don't understand that there are the Orthodox rabbis and then there are the Reformed [sic] rabbis. Reformed rabbis are generally political in nature. It's almost like Islam - radicalized Islam in a way - to where radicalized Islam is less about religion than it is about politics. When you look at Reformed Judaism it is more about politics. I'm not saying . . . It's not about terror or anything else; it's about politics. And so it becomes more about politics than it does about faith. Orthodox rabbis: That is about faith."

In his comments, Mr. Beck was referring to a list of Rabbis who signed a Wall Street Journal ad, "An open letter on the occasion of UN Holocaust Remembrance Day," respectfully calling on Rupert Murdoch to sanction Mr. Beck for his "completely unacceptable attacks on a survivor of the Holocaust." Mr. Beck displayed a total disregard for the truth when he said, "There's not a single Orthodox rabbi on this list. This is all Reformed [sic] rabbis that made this list." In fact, the first signatories were explicitly identified as leaders, not only of the Reform Movement, but of the Conservative and Reconstructionist streams of Judaism as well. A further examination of the ad reveals that there were indeed Orthodox Rabbis on the list, along with those from the Renewal Movement.

Yet beyond the blatant disregard for the facts and misrepresentation of his critics, Beck spoke volumes about his ignorance and predispositions. Prefacing his remarks with the statement, "most people who are not Jewish don't understand," he showed himself to be among those who either have no understanding or who do understand but choose to distort, in this case, the religious conviction of the nearly 2000 Reform Rabbis who are members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the world's largest organization of Jewish clergy.

Despite his "it's about politics" caveat, Mr. Beck's innuendo linking Reform Rabbis and Reform Judaism with radical Islam is insidious and outrageous. Beck's characterization

of Reform Rabbis is shocking and deeply offensive, not only to Rabbis of every movement in Judaism, but to over a million American Jews who identify themselves as Reform, and indeed to all Jews and all people of faith.

Reform Rabbis serve in synagogues and on college campuses, as chaplains in the U.S. Armed Forces and in hospitals and in nursing homes, in organizations and institutions spanning the spectrum of our vibrant American Jewish community. Reform Jews know their Rabbis to be deeply immersed in Jewish faith and tradition, bringing wisdom and comfort, and applying the timeless teachings of our spiritual and ethical heritage to life in the 21st Century. Reform Judaism and its Rabbis are no more and no less political than any other religions and their clergy persons across the religious spectrum who apply the moral values of their faith traditions to the pressing issues of the day, as is their sacred obligation.

Jews are heirs to a great tradition imparted to us by the prophets of ancient Israel, who challenged political leaders in their own day, standing up for the poor and disenfranchised, speaking truth to power, often bringing scorn and suffering upon themselves. Like our Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist colleagues, Reform Rabbis today bring the texts of our faith to bear on the pressing issues of modern society. Reform Rabbis were leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, and today's Reform Rabbis are no less committed to fighting injustice in our own day. Our faith demands that we fight injustice and falsehood, including Mr. Beck's contemptible libel upon our noble calling.

Rabbi Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus
President

Rabbi Steven A. Fox
Chief Executive