

Women of faith 4: Trude Weiss-Rosmarin and Eleanor Roosevelt

The Rhinebeck Reformed Church
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For millennia, since the time of the foundation of the first cities around 8,000 BCE, women have been relegated to a secondary position. Cities prioritized standing armies of men, male kings considered to be sons of gods, and an understanding of genealogical descent from fathers. Despite that clear bias, women from the biblical period until our time have emerged as the instruments of change, mandated not by society but from a power greater than society. This series will investigate examples of such women, from Miriam (the sister of Moses) to Eleanor Roosevelt.

Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, "Toward Jewish-Muslim Dialogue,"

The Jewish Spectator, September 1967

If the young State of Israel is to survive and prosper it must become integrated into the Arab world and accepted by its neighbors. The crucial challenge confronting Israel is how to conclude an alliance of peace with the Arab nations. We believe that with a complete reorientation, especially a muting of the insistent harping on the theme of "Israel is an outpost of Western civilization," the Arab nations would accept Israel on the basis of the kinship which unites Jews and Arabs. There are many cultural spokesmen in Israel today who dread the certain prospect that before long the "Oriental Jews" will form a sizeable majority of the country's population and that, with the preponderance of the Jews from the Arab countries, the Western character of Israel will be eclipsed.

I have no sympathy for this chauvinism propagated mainly by Israelis of German-Jewish origin. I believe it would be good if Israel were to become an "Oriental" country in the connotation of the term during the Middle Ages when the Arab-Jewish symbiosis was flowering. The true character of Israel can only come into its own as a product of its geography. It is under "Oriental" skies, after all, that the Hebrew became a nation and it is the "Oriental" world and

imagery which we meet in the Hebrew Bible. It was under the impact of the “Oriental” influence of Arabic science, philology and philosophy that a “Science of Judaism” was evolved which was distinctively creative in a manner that was never achieved by the modern “Science of Judaism.” Last but not least, while the so-called “Judeo-Christian civilization” is a contradiction in terms, since Christianity presses its authenticity on the claim of the abrogation of Judaism, “Judeo-Muslim civilization” has been a blessing to both components. There is an organic bond and a natural affinity and empathy between Jewish culture and Arab-Islamic culture,

The return of our people to its ancestral soil in the “Orient” offers a unique opportunity to start anew the cycle of Muslim Arab-Jewish symbiosis.

Israel will never be able to secure its frontiers by force of arms and with the aid of the United States and the United Nations. The road which will lead Israel to peace with its Arab neighbors is not the path of “coexistence,” but of a cultural symbiosis in which once again, as in the past, Jewish culture and Arab culture will blend and coalesce, while yet retaining their unique and distinct qualities. Once the spirit of understanding and symbiosis will have been initiated, there will also come about a change in attitude in the realm of politics.

Eleanor Roosevelt, “What Religion Means to Me,”

Forum 88 (December 1932): 322-24.

It is generally conceded that in a world where material values seem to be dropping out of sight further and further day by day, there is a growing realization that something else is needed. Some of us even feel that amidst the many evils and sorrows and injustices which are the fruit of what we call the depression, there may be emerging one thing which will be of permanent value to us all—namely, a new standard which will set above everything else certain spiritual values. In our mad haste for more and more money and more and

more luxury we had almost forgotten to count these as part of our heritage in this country.

And yet most of us who are in the forties and fifties today can look back to a childhood where religion and religious instruction were part of our everyday life, but we have come so far away from those days that in writing this article I even feel that I must begin by defining what I mean by religion. To me religion has nothing to do with any specific creed or dogma. It means that belief and that faith in the heart of a man which makes him try to live his life according to the highest standard which he is able to visualize. To those of us who were brought up as Christians that standard is the life of Christ, and it matters very little whether our creed is Catholic or Protestant.

To those of us who happen to have been born and brought up under other skies or in other creeds, the object to be attained goes by some other name, but in all cases the thing which counts is the striving of the human soul to achieve spiritually the best that it is capable of and to care unselfishly not only for personal good but for the good of all those who toil with them upon the earth.

The worst thing that has come to us from the depression is fear. Fear of an uncertain future, fear of not being able to meet our problems, fear of not being equipped to cope with life as we live it today. We need some of the old religious spirit which said, "I myself am weak but Thou art strong Oh Lord!" That was the spirit which brought people to this country, which settled it, which carried men and women through untold hardships, and which has given us our heritage of comparative ease and comfort.

After I left home and went to school I came under the influence of a very interesting woman who proclaimed that she had no religion and that the Christians, from her point of view, were rather to be looked down upon because they did right for gain. It might not be gain in this world but it was for gain in

the next, and therefore the only people of real virtue were those who believed that there was no future life, but who wished to help those around them to do what was right purely through an interest in their fellow human beings and a desire to see right triumph just because it was right. I was too young to come back then with the obvious retort that making those around you happy makes you happy yourself, and that therefore you are seeking a reward just as much as if you were asking for your reward in a future life, and that perhaps what we know as good in life and what we here think of as praise-worthy will not be counted at all as a spiritual achievement by some more understanding judge. That is why we all of us, whether we are willing to acknowledge it or not, do crave the belief in some power greater than ourselves and beyond our understanding-because we know in our hearts that deeds and outward things mean little and that only someone who can gauge what striving there has been can really judge of what a human soul has achieved.

Today I am an Episcopalian, as I was as a child, but I feel that this makes me neither better nor worse than those who belong to any other church. I believe in the habits of regular churchgoing and regular work for the church because there is help for us all in doing things in common and we care more for things that we give to, of our time, of our material wealth, and of our thought. But these are the outward symbols which should proclaim inner growth, and it is the inner growth which is important. If people can attain it without the help of what might be called religious routine, that is for them to decide. The fundamental, vital thing which must be alive in each human consciousness is the religious teaching that we cannot live for ourselves alone and that as long as we are here on this earth we are all of us brothers, regardless of race, creed, or color.

Bruce Chilton
Bard College