



Conference of European Rabbis Coverage Update 10th November 2017





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BOOKLOG

Keeping faith with tradition in Europe

Communitati et Orbi
By Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt
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▶ AFTER THE terror attack in Barcelona a few weeks ago, the city's Chief Rabbi urged European Jews to start packing their bags. It was the latest instance of a counsel of despair which has increasingly projected European Jewry as a lost cause.

Not ready to join the doomsayers quite yet is Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis since 2011. Well aware of the threats from Islamist extremism and the populist far-right, he argues that the difficulties facing Jews challenge the continent as a whole. But his response is to encourage Jews not to desert their homes or retreat behind synagogue walls but to play an active role speaking out for the democracy and pluralism that have safeguarded religious minorities.

The battle is not between Christianity and Islam but between Islam and anti-religious intolerance, as he contends in a collection of essays and addresses published to mark the CRE's 60th anniversary this year.

The Zurich-born Chief Rabbi of Moscow is an ambitious rabbinical statesman who clearly believes religion should have a voice in the public square. While expressing anxiety about the future of the kind of central Orthodox congregations he represents—squeezed by Charedim and Progressives—he continues to champion a socially engaged traditionalism.

He commends Jewish efforts to help refugees from Syria's civil war. Although defending Orthodox conversion policy, he nevertheless urges receptiveness towards converts. He offers a pragmatic acceptance of an egalitarian prayer space for the non-Orthodox near the Kotel as against the shrill outcry of the more religious right. He counsels rabbis to use social media to reach out to the unaffiliated young.

Topics range from the UK Chief Rabbinate to the principle of *dina malchuta dina* (respecting the law of the land), and from the first Orthodox rabbi ordained in Germany post-War, to Rabbi Motel Lifschitz, one of those who heroically kept Judaism alive in Russia during the dark days of Communism.

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