

MYTH #7

THE PRESENT CRISIS WAS PRECIPITATED BY THE ORTHODOX

Ground zero of the current controversy was a series of lawsuits promoted by the non-Orthodox movements, aimed at overturning the “religious status quo” regarding conversions in Israel. When the Israeli high court signaled that, in the absence of formal legislation codifying the “status quo”, it would be compelled to compromise or overturn the 50-year-old precedent, religious parties introduced precisely such legislation.

The legislation passed its first reading in the Knesset. It has been placed on hold, as has the underlying litigation, while a government committee, the Ne’eman Commission, seeks a solution acceptable to both sides. Should the Commission fail, Reform leaders have pledged to renew their pursuit of the matter in Israel’s courts, to which the religious parties will likely respond by advancing their legislation.

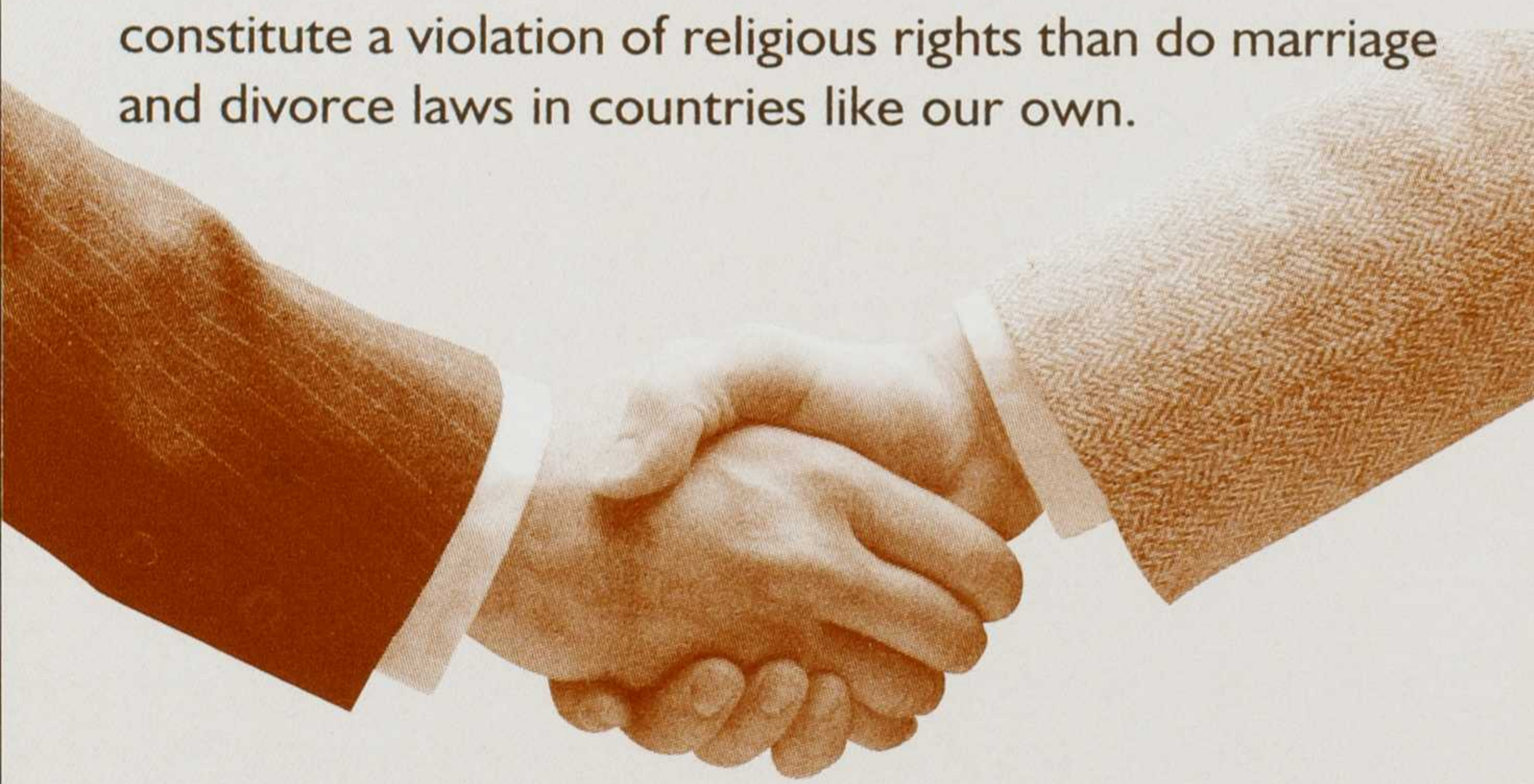
The Orthodox have instigated nothing; their efforts have been entirely reactive, not pro-active.

MYTH #8

THE ORTHODOX IN ISRAEL SEEK TO ABROGATE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Just as no Israeli is presently coerced to meet the requirements of *Halacha* in his or her daily life, ***none will be if the pending legislation becomes law.*** Nothing will prevent a Jew — as nothing does now — from violating the Sabbath, eating non-kosher food — or, for that matter, from attending a Reform temple.

Like every country, though, Israel has standards regarding personal status changes like marriage and divorce. And because it is a Jewish State it has a standard, too, for conversion. Those facts no more constitute a violation of religious rights than do marriage and divorce laws in countries like our own.



MORE LIGHT, LESS HEAT

There is nothing wrong with American Jews discussing the role of religion in Israel.

Let us do so, though, amid an atmosphere of rational discussion and unspun facts — not one of defamation or misrepresentation. If we can manage that, we may yet come to recognize that only respect for our common Jewish religious heritage can keep us one people.

And that realization will be the first giant step on the road leading to what some American Jewish leaders maintain cannot exist: ***true Jewish unity.***

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