



"Faithfully Yours"

reviewed by Ephraim Z. Buchwald

Faithfully Yours, the selected rabbinical correspondence of Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon, of blessed memory. Edited by Baruch J. Cohon. KTAV Publishing House 2008; \$29.50 postpaid from bernie@ktav.com

NOTE: Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, author of this review, is an Orthodox rabbi, founder and director of National Jewish Outreach in New York. Their programs, like Shabat Across America, Read Hebrew America/Canada, Crash Course in Basic Judaism, have brought many hundreds of Jews back to our heritage.

For this reviewer, "Faithfully Yours" is truly like a walk through history. In many instances, it felt as if I was actually listening in on the decision making process of some of the major issues that our community faced in the first half of the twentieth century. And what a collection of issues it was! Whether it concerned the partition of Palestine or the naming of a Reform Temple, revising the prayer service, or dealing with intermarriage, the issues were so real, that, very often, I was able to feel the virtual echoes of pain and struggle that were reflected in the decision making process.

The author's consistent perspicacious insights and eloquent voice, and his son the editor's personal observations, which added context to the letters, was rather remarkable. It was an exciting journey for me.

Faithfully Yours paints a lively and realistic portrait of Jewish life in general, but particularly of the Reform movement in the American Jewish community for the forty years that the letters cover. The writings provide a firsthand example of the challenges that Judaism faced during that time.

Samuel S. Cohon's wisdom and vast knowledge of both Jewish and general subjects stand out vividly on every page. The reverberations of the struggle between the traditionalists and the modernists in the Reform movement come through loud and clear. Whatever the issue, his voice rings out forcefully, but respectfully. The fact that he was consulted by so many people of so many different and disparate backgrounds and ages demonstrates the high regard and respect that Rabbi Cohon was accorded by his colleagues and by the community. The letters show Rabbi Samuel Cohon's abundant compassion and understanding for people and the great insights that he had in so many matters.

The book is well organized, making it possible to read different topics in different sittings, whether it be the rabbinate, anti-Semitism, Zionism, or family life. Rabbi Cohon's letters are crafted in an erudite manner, and are easy to read. Finally, the editorial comments at the conclusion of many of these letters do an excellent job of relating the wisdom of the past to the present, and show how the issues of 50 years ago are often still with us today.

Those who are wrestling with these very same issues and with other contemporary issues should read this book simply to learn how one great man approached and addressed the issues of his time. There is much one may learn from *Faithfully Yours*, the Rabbinical Correspondence of Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon.

by Ephraim Z. Buchwald