

Headlines



Halachic Debates of Current Events

BY DOVID LICHTENSTEIN

A Rabbi in a Church: Can an Orthodox Rabbi Attend a Presidential Convocation?

BACKGROUND

After Barack Obama's election as the 44th president of the United States in Fall 2008, preparations were underway for the inaugural festivities to be held in January 2009. An invitation was sent to a prominent Orthodox rabbi asking him to participate in the inaugural service, which was to be held in the National Sanctuary – an **Episcopalian Church**. The rabbi felt compelled to decline the invitation, noting the halachic prohibition that forbids Jews from entering a church. According to reports, the President-elect and his staff were both **startled and offended** by the refusal, but ultimately found another Orthodox rabbi who agreed to participate.

The second rabbi attended the ceremony and even recited verses from Tanach as part of the service. His participation drew criticism from certain segments of the Orthodox Jewish world, including the Rabbinical Council of America, of which he is a member. In response, the rabbi penned a letter explaining the halachic justification for his attending the service.

This packet will discuss the source and scope of the prohibition against entering a church, and examine the permissibility of this rabbi's attendance at the Presidential inauguration ceremony in the National Sanctuary.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What reasons can you think of to explain why a Rabbi may or may not be allowed to enter a church?

THE SOURCE OF THE PROHIBITION OF ENTERING A CHURCH

One source relevant to this question is the Gemara in Avodah Zarah:

Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 17a-17b

<p>Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Yonason were once walking together when they came across a fork in the road. One of the paths led past a house of idolatry, and the other past a brothel [a house where people go to visit prostitutes].</p> <p>“Let’s go past the house of idolatry, since it’s less enticing,” suggested one.</p> <p>The other responded, “Let’s go past the brothel, conquer our [stronger] yetzer hara, and thereby receive extra reward.”</p> <p>[They then followed the latter one’s advice, and passed by the brothel]...</p>	<p>ר' חנינא ור' יונתן הוו קאזלי באורחא, מסו להנהו תרי שבילי, חד פצי אפיתחא דעבודת כוכבים, וחד פצי אפיתחא דבי זונות.</p> <p>אמר ליה חד לחבריה: ניזיל אפיתחא דעבודת כוכבים דנכיס יצריה,</p> <p>א"ל אידך: ניזיל אפיתחא דבי זונות ונכפייה ליצרון, ונקבל אגרא. כי מסו התם חזינהו [לזונות], איתכנעו מקמייהו. א"ל: מנא לך הא? א"ל: מזימה תשמור עלך תבונה תנצרכה.</p>
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Tosfos, *ibid.*

The Baalei Tosfos (Approx. 1200)

One can infer from here [i.e. the fact that the rabbis chose to walk in front of a brothel rather than past a house of idolatry] that **it is proper to distance oneself from the entrance of a house of idol worship as much as possible**. This is based on the verse, “*Do not approach the entrance to its house*” (Mishlei 5:8), which is homiletically interpreted earlier in the Gemara as a prohibition against coming close to a place of idolatry...

ניזיל אפיתחא דבי זונות – מכאן יש ללמוד שדרך להרחיק מפתח עבודת כוכבים כל מה שיכול משום דכתיב “אל תקרב אל פתח ביתה” ומוקמי לעיל בעבודת כוכבים שהרי היה רוצה ללכת יותר אפיתחא דבי זוננו דנכיס יצריה...

In light of these sources and others, the Shulchan Aruch rules:

Shulchan Aruch: Yoreh Dei’ah: Hilchos Avodas Kochavim 150:1

Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575)

It is a mitzvah to distance oneself four cubits from a path leading to idolatry.

מצוה להתרחק מדרך עבודת כוכבים ד’ אמות.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- The Gemara based this prohibition on a *passuk* in Mishlei. Does that make approaching a house of idolatry a *d’oraisa* (Biblically-based) prohibition or a *d’rabanan* (rabbinically-based) prohibition?

IS THE PROHIBITION D’ORAISA OR D’RABANAN?

As the source for the Shulchan Aruch’s ruling, the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) in *Bei’ur HaGra* cites the aforementioned Gemara’s assumption (spelled out explicitly on 17b) that the verse, “*Keep your path distant from it, and do not approach the entrance to its house*” (Mishlei 5:8) is referring to the requirement to stay away from places of idolatry.

Since the Gemara establishes this prohibition **based on a verse from Mishlei**, it would appear that this prohibition should be accorded the status of *divrei kabbalah* (a law appearing in the *Nevi’im* or *Kesuvim*, but not in the *Chumash* itself), which are generally **equated with Torah law (*d’oraisa*)** with respect to their halachic application.

Indeed, the Shevilei David writes that **the prohibition against entering a house of pagan worship constitutes a Torah prohibition**, and, consequently, several halachic authorities maintain that with respect to this halachah, one must act stringently in situations of uncertainty, as is the case for all Biblically-based (*d’oraisa*) laws.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Can you think of any circumstances in which the prohibition against entering a house of idol worship might not apply? When might a Jew be allowed to enter a house of idol worship?

FOUR FACTORS TO POTENTIALLY PERMIT ENTERING A CHURCH

As we will soon see, there are four factors which may potentially create room to permit a Jew to enter a church:

- ***Karov lamalchus***
- ***Shalom malchus***
- **Manifestly-innocent intent**
- ***Shituf***

We will now discuss each of these factors in turn.

**FACTOR #1:
KAROV
LAMALCHUS**

In order to understand the potential exception of *karov lamalchus* in the case of entering a house of idolatry, we must first examine the parameters of a different halachic prohibition: The Torah prohibition against **dressing in the same manner as pagans, or observing pagan customs** (“*U’vichukosei hem lo seileichu* – Do not follow in their ways,” Vayikra 18:13).

In discussing these prohibitions, the Shulchan Aruch offers a fascinating leniency:

Shulchan Aruch: Yoreh Dei’ah: Hilchos Chukos Ha’Ovdei Kochavim 178:2

Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575)

If a person is ***karov lamalchus* (deals closely with the government)** and must dress in gentile clothing and resemble them [in order to advocate on behalf of the Jewish people] – **everything is permissible for him.**

מי שהוא קרוב למלכות וצריך ללבוש במלבושיהם ולדמות להם, מותר בכל.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What is the scope of this leniency? Which exactly is permitted for such public figures who are *karov lamalchus*? Can such a person do **anything** he wants, and violate **any** prohibition at all?

As mentioned, the Shulchan Aruch’s leniency for one who is *karov lamalchus* was issued in the context of the prohibition against Jews **adopting pagan customs or dressing like them**, and it is clear that this leniency of *karov lamalchus* applies in such cases.

At the same time, it is clear that **certain practices – such as actual idol worship – are forbidden no matter the context.**

The question thus becomes whether the Shulchan Aruch’s leniency here – in the context of dressing like pagans, and following their customs – may also be applied to waive other prohibitions as well, such as the prohibition against entering a house of idol worship. May a person who is *karov lamalchus* even enter a house of idol worship, since everything is permissible for him?

PROHIBITION	LENIENCIES
Do not dress like pagans or adopt their customs.	Permitted for anyone who is <i>karov lamalchus</i> .
Do not enter a house of idol worship.	QUESTION: Does the above leniency apply here, too?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What do you think? Should the leniency of *karov lamalchus* apply to the prohibition against entering a house of idol worship as well?

REASONS FOR THE LENIENCY

To answer this question, we must first ask: Why does the leniency of *karov lamalchus* exist to begin with?

The Beis Yosef offers two possible explanations for why one who is *karov lamalchus* is permitted to wear pagan clothing and follow pagan customs:

Beis Yosef: Yoreh Dei’ah 178

Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575)

One can ask: If [wearing pagan clothing and following pagan customs] are Torah prohibitions... how could the Rabbis come along and permit these behaviors for Jews who are *karov lamalchus* [prominent public advocates]?

(1) One answer to this question is that **the Rabbis have the power to permit Torah prohibitions for the sake of saving the lives of the Jewish people.** By ensuring that Jewish public advocates are respected by the gentiles, the Jewish advocates will be able to step up and stop persecutions and decrees aimed against the broader Jewish community. [We can see the power of such Jewish advocates who dressed like gentiles even in Talmudic times, in various stories in the Gemara...]

ואם תאמר כיון דמדאורייתא אסירי הנך מילי ומילקי נמי לקי עלייהו היאך היה כח ביד חכמים להתיר איסור תורה לקרובי המלכות?

ויש לומר דמשום הצלת ישראל יש כח בידם להתיר דכשיש ישראלים קרובים למלכות עומדים בפרץ לבטל הגזירות וכדאשכחן ברבי ראובן בן אצטרובלי במסכת מעילה (זו.) וכהוא גברא דאיתא בפירקא דחסידי (תענית כב.) והנהו ת' ילדים שהיו לדוד שהיו מספרי קומי ומגדלי בלורית הנך נמי משום הצלת ישראל שרו להו דהוו אזלו בראשי גייסות לבעותי האויבים.

(2) Alternatively, one could also answer this question in a different light: **The Torah does not explicitly spell out the prohibition** [against following pagan customs or wearing pagan clothing]. Instead, the Torah just writes the **vague** proscription, “*Do not follow their customs...*” (Vayikra 18:13). This essentially implies that **the Torah is handing over to the Rabbis the power to determine the scope of this particular prohibition** [and, though the prohibition applies to everyone, the Rabbis have the power to determine that it applies to different people in different ways].

ועוד יש לומר שהתורה לא פירשה דבר אלא סתמה וכתבה ובחוקותיהם לא תלכו ומסרה הדבר לחכמים והם אסרו דברים אלו לשאר בני אדם ולא ראו לאסרם לקרובים למלכות וקרא דובחוקותיהם לא תלכו יתקיים בקרובי מלכות בדברים שאינם מעלים ולא מורידים לענין קורבתם למלכות.

Why would the Torah prohibition of “*Do not follow their customs...*” be waived for one who works in the government? The Beis Yosef above offers two explanations:

- 1. The presence of Jews in high-ranking positions is necessary for the protection and basic safety of the Jewish people.** Adhering to the gentiles’ accepted protocol – even if this requires wearing forbidden attire – is allowed for such high-ranking Jewish governmental advocates.
- The Torah did not specify any precise parameters for this prohibition, and rather **left it to the Sages to determine exactly which gentile practices are prohibited, and under which circumstances.** The Sages are therefore authorized to make an exception for those who are involved in the government.

PROHIBITION	LENIENCIES
Do not dress like pagans or adopt their customs.	Permitted for anyone who is <i>karov lamalchus</i> , because: (1) His presence is necessary for the safety of the Jewish people. (2) The Rabbis can determine the scope of prohibition on their own, since the Torah did not specify the parameters of this prohibition.
Do not enter a house of idol worship.	QUESTION: Does the above leniency apply here, too?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Do either one of these two reasons for the Shulchan Aruch’s leniency apply to the prohibition of entering a church as well?

APPLYING THE FIRST LINE OF REASONING TO DEFEND THE RABBI WHO ENTERED THE CHURCH

Rabbi Michael Broyde (Hakirah 8, pg. 56), in the course of defending the aforementioned orthodox Rabbi’s attendance at President Obama’s inauguration, lays out his understanding of the Beis Yosef’s comments:

“Of course, **it is permissible to violate almost any area of halachah in order to save those in immediate, life-threatening danger.** This much we know. But halachah also recognizes that sometimes, the only way to save those in danger is through a long-term prophylactic strategy. For example, **one’s long-term involvement is necessary in certain types of politics to allow a person access and influence in a time of need.** In many of the most crucial areas of politics, if one is not close **all the time**, it will be impossible to become close when a need arises. Thus a Jew may join the government service, and wear – despite the Torah prohibition – gentile clothes every day, for decades, so that if a day comes when he can save G-d’s chosen people, he is already wearing the right clothes, and is in the right place, at the right time. This conduct is *mutar* [permitted].”

Rabbi Broyde understands the Beis Yosef to be applying the provision of *pikuach nefesh*, which allows even Biblically-based (*d’oraisa*) prohibitions to be violated for the sake of saving human lives. In the realm of politics, a *karov lamalchus* may violate a Torah law when it is necessary to ensure that Jews are given access to influential political figures, because **this access plays a crucial role in advocacy efforts that can affect matters of life and death for the Jewish community.** Rabbi Broyde speculates that it was on this basis that many Chief Rabbis of the British Commonwealth attended formal ceremonies in Westminster Abbey, and why Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (1915–2006) once instructed Rabbi Broyde himself to participate in an event at the behest of the Israeli government that required his attendance in a church during services.

QUESTIONING
THE DEFENSE

However, even if we accept the Beis Yosef's original contention that forbidden garb is permitted in the case of *karov lamalchus* (in the interest of saving lives), it is far from clear that this rule can be extended to **any** rabbi or Jewish figure who is offered an opportunity to have an audience with a powerful world leader.

As noted by Rabbi Kenneth Auman, the situation of *karov lamalchus* refers to people in leadership positions who would **frequently** visit and meet with members of royalty, and therefore had to maintain an ongoing relationship and rapport with the government. **This status would not necessarily be conferred upon any rabbi invited by the President, such that halachic prohibitions may be waived to permit his participation.**

FOCUSING ON
THE SECOND
LINE OF
REASONING

Furthermore – as we saw above – aside from the provision of *pikuach nefesh*, the Beis Yosef also provided a **second explanation** for why the prohibition of following pagan customs is waived for those who are *karov lamalchus* – one which is advocated by Rabbi Dovid Segal (1586–1667), the Taz.

According to this theory, the exception of *karov lamalchus* is **unique** to the prohibitions of following gentile customs and wearing their styles of clothing, since only there did the Torah empower the Rabbis to determine the scope of the prohibition. **There is no justification to extend this leniency to the independent prohibition against entering a place of pagan worship**, and it would seem that this approach would **forbid** entering a Church even for those who are *karov lamalchus*.

QUESTIONS TO
CONSIDER

- Can you think of any other reasons why entering a church may be permitted?

FACTOR #2:
SHALOM
HAMALCHUS

Aside from permitting entering a church or house of idolatry because of *karov lamalchus*, there are other exceptions to the prohibition against entering a house of idolatry which may be suggested. At first glance, one might suggest permitting attending the Presidential inauguration on the basis of a line appearing in the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza.

Talmud Bavli Gitin 55b-56a

Bar Kamtza reported to the Caesar, "The Jews are rebelling against you!"

The Caesar replied, "Who says? Can you prove it?"

"Sure. Send them an animal as a sacrifice, and see if they agree to offer it in their temple."

The Caesar agreed to the test, and sent Bar Kamtza back with a choice animal [lit. a third-born cow] to be brought up in the Beis HaMikdash. While on the journey, Bar Kamtza intentionally blemished the animal, in either its lip or its pupil, in a place where non-Jews would not consider it a blemish but Jews would indeed consider it a blemish [and would hence be prohibited from using it as a *korbon*].

When Bar Kamtza arrived in the Beis HaMikdash, **the Rabbis wanted to offer up the blemished *korbon* anyway for *shalom malchus* – in order to preserve the peace with the government...** [In the end, they decided against it out of a concern that it would lead people to think that blemished animals may be offered as sacrifices in general.]

אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים, דההוא גברא דרחמיה קמצא ובעל דבביה בר קמצא, עבד סעודתא, אמר ליה לשמעיה: זיל אייתי לי קמצא, אזל אייתי ליה בר קמצא. אתא אשכחיה דהוה יתיב, אמר ליה: מכדי ההוא גברא בעל דבבא דההוא גברא הוא, מאי בעית הכא? קום פוק! אמר ליה: הואיל ואתאי שבקן, ויהיבנא לך דמי מה דאכילנא ושתינא, [דף נו עמוד א] אמר ליה: לא. אמר ליה: יהיבנא לך דמי פלגא דסעודתיך! אמר ליה: לא. אמר ליה: יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתיך! א"ל: לא. נקטיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה. אמר: הואיל והווי יתבי רבנן ולא מחו ביה, ש"מ קא ניחא להו, איזיל איכול בהו קורצא בי מלכא. אזל אמר ליה לקיסר: מרדו בך יהודאי! א"ל: מי יימר? א"ל: שדר להו קורבנא, חזית אי מקרבין ליה. אזל שדר בידיה עגלא תלתא. בהדי דקאתי שדא ביה מומא בניב שפתים, ואמרי לה בדוקין שבעין, דוכתא דלדין הוה מומא ולדידהו לאו מומא הוא. סבור רבנן לקרוביה משום שלום מלכות, אמר להו רבי זכריה בן אבוקולס, יאמרו: בעלי מומין קריבין לגבי מזבח! סבור למיקטליה, דלא ליזיל ולימא, אמר להו רבי זכריה, יאמרו: מטיל מום בקדשים יהרג! אמר רבי יוחנן: ענוותנותו של רבי זכריה בן אבוקולס, החריבה את ביתנו, ושרפה את היכלנו, והגליתנו מארצנו.

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The Magen Avraham (Rabbi Avraham Gombiner, 1635–1682) notes that this Gemara’s discussion indicates that **even Torah-based (*d’oraisa*) prohibitions are waived in situations of *shalom hamalchus*** – when there is concern of upsetting the government authorities. If so, then entering a church could also be permitted under circumstances in which the Jews are afraid of arousing the resentment of government officials, even if we assume that entering a house of foreign worship is a *d’oraisa* prohibition.

However, Rav Elchanan Wasserman (Kovetz Shiurim, 1874–1941) is hesitant to rely on this ruling of the Magen Avraham. Other authorities rule explicitly that **Torah prohibitions are not waived for the purpose of avoiding *eivah*** (arousing the resentment of gentiles), and the Shevilei David (Rabbi Yungreis) writes explicitly that one may **not** enter a house of foreign worship even to avoid arousing resentment.

**FACTOR #3:
MANIFESTLY-
INNOCENT
INTENT**

Another possible factor to potentially permit entering a house of idolatry can be found in a fascinating passage in Gemara Shabbos, which tells of several sages who would visit a site called *Bei Avidan* to engage in theological disputations with gentiles.

Talmud Bavli Shabbos 116a

Rav would refuse to go to *Bei Avidan*, and all the more so to *Bei Nitzrifee*. Shmuel would go to *Bei Avidan*, but not to *Bei Nitzrifee*... Mar Bar Rav Yosef said, “I’m one of them [i.e. I can beat any of the gentiles’ theological debates] and I’m not scared of them!” One time, he went to [one of these places] and found himself subject to dangerous attack...

רב לא אזיל לבי אבידן, וכל שכן לבי נצרפי. שמואל, לבי נצרפי – לא אזיל, לבי אבידן – אזיל. אמרו ליה לרבא: מאי טעמא לא אתית לבי אבידן? אמר להו: דיקלא פלניא איכא באורחא, וקשי לי. – ניעקריה! – דוכתיה קשי לי. מר בר יוסף אמר: אנא מינייהו אנא, ולא מסתפינא מינייהו. זימנא חדא אזיל, בעו לסכוניה...

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**Rashi on Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 17b
(1041–1104)**

Bei Avidan is a meeting place where people would eat and drink to honor their idols... and take care of their idols’ needs.

לבי אבידן – בית שאוכלין ושותין לכבוד עבודת כוכבים ומזבלים זיבול לעבודת כוכבים ומפקחין על עסקיה לידע מה היא צריכה ומתנדבין.

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**Tosfos on Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 17a
The Baalei Tosfos (Approx. 1200)**

[In spite of the prohibition against entering a house of idolatry,] we find that many Talmudic figures **would** go to *Bei Avidan*... This was because they only went to engage the pagans in polemics and disputes, and **these places were not places of actual worship, but rather places of gathering and discussion**. The Talmudic people who did not attend such meetings did not do so out of fear that it was prohibited, but rather out of fear that the gentiles there may kill them [when angered by their arguments].

הרחק מעליה דרכך זו מינות – והא דאמרי' בפרק כל כתבי (שבת דף קטז.) דכמה אמוראי הוו אזלי לבי אבידן זהו להתוכח עמם ולא היה מקום מינות ממש אלא מקום ויכוח ומתקבצים שם חכמי עובדי כוכבים ונושאים ונותנים בדינים ומאן דלא הוה אזיל היינו מיראה שלא יהרגום וכן משמע דאמר רב נחמן אנא מינייהו ומסתפינא מינייהו ודלא כפ"ה שפירש בסמוך שהוא מקום עבודת כוכבים.

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Rashi identifies *Bei Avidan* as a place of idol worship. However, **Tosfos** disagrees with Rashi’s interpretation, noting that this cannot be the case. Visiting a site of idol worship would violate the prohibition against entering a house of idol worship, and it cannot be that the rabbis in the Talmud visited a place of idol worship. Tosfos therefore explain that *Bei Avidan* was not a place of idol worship, but rather a site designated for disputation, and it was thus entirely permissible for Jews to enter the building.

It appears that Rashi maintained that it was **permissible** for the Sages to enter this site of pagan worship, perhaps **because it was clear from their behavior that they did not intend to worship the idols**, but rather the opposite – to defend Judaism against foreign beliefs.

If so, then Rashi and Tosfos dispute the scope of the prohibition of distancing oneself from idol worship; **Rashi allows** entering sites of foreign worship in situations of manifestly-innocent intent, whereas **Tosfos forbids** entry, even under such circumstances.

Since no clear-cut ruling on this matter appears in the Shulchan Aruch, there is perhaps room to rely on Rashi's lenient position when necessary. Hence, in the case of a presidential invitation, where refusal could result in animosity and ill-will toward Jews, **a rabbi may be allowed to participate in the ceremony on the basis of Rashi's lenient ruling.**

(It should be noted, however, that in his commentary to Maseches Shabbos, Rashi follows the view of Tosfos, identifying *Bei Avidan* as a disputation center – rather than a place of worship – and thus Rashi's actual view on this subject is not entirely clear.)

**FACTOR #4:
SHITUF (JOINING)**

Another possible basis for permitting entry into a church is a fascinating ruling of the Rema, in which he distinguishes between Christianity and full-blown idolatry:

Rema's glosses on the Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim 156:1
Rabbi Moshe Isserlis (1520–1572)

Some rule leniently and allow Jews to make partnerships with gentiles in our times, because the gentiles in our times do not swear by a foreign deity. That is to say, **although they mention a foreign deity, their intent is for the Maker of heaven and earth [God], and they merely join another entity along with Him...** the gentiles are not prohibited from believing in *shituf* [perceiving other entities as partners of God and worshiping them together], so it is not a problem for us to cause the gentiles to do so [by making them swear].

הגה: ויש מקילין בעשיית שותפות עם הכותים בזמה"ז, משום שאין הכותים בזמן הזה נשבעים בע"א, ואף על גב דמוכירין הע"ז, מ"מ כוונתם לעושה שמים וארץ אלא שמשתפים שם שמים וד"א, ולא מצינו שיש בזה משום: ולפני עור לא תתן מכשול (ויקרא יט, יד) דהרי אינם מוזהרין על השתוף.

According to the Rema, Christians believe in a monotheistic conception of God, although they include the worship of other “beings” in their religious system (based on the concept of the Trinity). Although the belief in *shituf* (combining the worship of God with the worship of other beings) is prohibited for Jews, **it is not prohibited for gentiles.** The Rema therefore rules that there would be no prohibition against making a business partnership with a Christian, even though this partnership could result in proceedings that require the gentile to make an oath by his God(s).

Seemingly, since the Rema **excludes Christianity from the category of outright *avodah zarah***, we might be justified in invoking his ruling as a basis upon which to **permit** accepting a President's invitation to enter a church, which, according to the Rema, **would not qualify as a site of pagan worship.** Similarly, the Mateh Levi writes that one may rely on the Rema's ruling to permit contributing toward the construction of a church, as it does not, according to the Rema, have the status of a place of idolatry.

**QUESTIONING
THE LENIENCY
OF SHITUF**

In truth, however, such an argument is very difficult to sustain. Even if we acknowledge that Christian worship qualifies as *shituf* and is therefore not forbidden for gentiles, all authorities agree that ***shituf* is considered idolatry for Jews, and forbidden for Jews.** As such, even according to the Rema, it would be **forbidden for Jews to enter a church**, where *shituf* is practiced. This is reflected in a responsum of the Binyan Tziyon (Rabbi Yaakov Aharon Ettlinger, 1798–1891) where he discusses the permissibility of purchasing a church for use as a synagogue. The Binyan Tziyon writes that since *shituf* is forbidden for Jews, **a church must be regarded as a site of pagan worship, despite the fact that the worship practiced there is permissible for the gentiles themselves.** Even if we accept the Rema's ruling concerning the status of Christians themselves as non-idol-worshippers, it stands to reason that their houses of worship (churches) must nevertheless be halachically regarded as sites of *avodah zarah*.

Indeed, Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that **it is forbidden to enter a church to view the artwork**, making no mention of any basis for leniency in light of the Rema's classification of Christianity as *shituf*.

CONCLUSION

While it is clearly forbidden, as a rule, to enter a church, four factors could potentially allow a rabbi to participate in the Presidential inauguration in the National Sanctuary:

- **Karov lamalchus** – if we follow the first explanation offered by the Beis Yosef, that maintaining relations with the gentile government is permitted due to *pikuach nefesh*, and we assume that a rabbi's acceptance of a **one-time** Presidential invitation is included within this category.
- **Shalom hamalchus** – if we follow the Magen Avraham's view, that Torah prohibitions may be waived in the interest of avoiding tensions with the gentile government.
- **Manifestly innocent intent** – if we follow what may be Rashi's view in Gemara Avodah Zarah, that entering a house of idolatry is permissible when it is clear that there is no intent to worship.
- **Shituf** – if we follow the ruling of the Mateh Levi, that a church does not have the status of a place of idol worship, in light of the Rema's classification of Christianity as mere *shituf*.

As discussed, however, each of these arguments is questionable, and subject to extensive debate amongst the *poskim*.

DISCLAIMER:

The views and opinions presented in this sourcesheet should not be taken as *halachah l'maaseh*. Before applying these halachos to real-life situations, one must consult with a competent halachic authority.