A NY study of ‘orthodox Judaism’ treads several minefields. Until well into the nineteenth century there was no such thing: the adjective ‘orthodox’ was adopted and applied to distinguish the Judaism practised (or at least professed) by the majority of European Jews from that professed (or at least practised) by adherents of various ideologies now often referred to as ‘Progressive’ Judaism. Many did not understand the underlying theological meaning of ‘orthodox’. Although we may agree that in this context ‘orthodox’ means ‘traditional’, we need at the same time to acknowledge that there is not, and never has been, a universally accepted body of dogma and deeds which might for the sake of convenience be called ‘orthodox’ Judaism: in truth, that Judaism is a very broad church.

I make these points not simply because they need to be made, but because neither of the authors whose works are here considered has in fact seen fit to make them — or indeed seen fit to provide us with a discrete holistic definition of the ‘orthodoxy’ with which they deal. However, Dr. Freud-Kandel has at least attempted to do so, although her Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913 is not in fact a study of orthodox Judaism in Britain, but rather of the theological trials and tribulations of three Chief Rabbis: Joseph Hertz, Israel Brodie, and Immanuel Jakobovits.

Her examination is undertaken in the context of a particular thesis, namely (to quote from the author’s back-cover summary) that Hertz
sought to nurture a ‘strong and confident orthodoxy’ which championed ‘interaction in the host society’, but that under Brodie this approach was crucially abandoned, and that under Jakobovits the clock was turned back. This in turn aided and abetted the religious polarisation of the Jewish communities in Great Britain, and facilitated the adoption of ‘a theology which seemed to call on Anglo-Jewry to forsake its ideology of meaningful interaction’ in order to secure ‘its religious identity’.

Dr. Freud-Kandel is at her best in delineating for us the precise nature of Hertz’s ‘progressive conservatism’, which bravely sought a reconciliation between the need to engage with the modern world and the imperative to disengage — at least to some extent — from it. This imperative, a hallmark of the orthodoxy practised in eastern Europe as opposed to that practised in the west, was underpinned in 1935 through the appointment to the United Synagogue’s Beth Din of the Russian refugee and Talmudic genius, Rabbi Yehezkel Abramsky.

I have argued elsewhere\(^1\) that Abramsky’s appointment was insisted upon by Hertz, who feared the mischief he might otherwise do were he not to be incorporated, somehow, into the body politic of the United Synagogue. Dr. Freud-Kandel, basing herself in part on the recollections of Rabbi Abramsky’s son (Professor Chimen Abramsky) offers an intriguingly different perspective: that it was Robert Waley Cohen, Vice-President of the United Synagogue, who pushed Abramsky’s candidature for the Beth Din, hoping thereby to introduce a counterweight to the influence of Dr. Hertz.

If this was indeed Waley Cohen’s plan, it completely misfired (as Dr. Freud-Kandel admits). Joseph Hertz and Yehezkel Abramsky became good friends. Hertz’s daughter, Judith, married Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld, son of Dr. Victor Schonfeld, the first rabbi (appointed 1909) of the North London Beth Hamedrash, forerunner of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. This did not mean that Hertz himself had been ‘captured’ (so to speak) by the ultra-orthodox camp, though it is clear that as his life neared its end (he died in 1946) he inclined more closely towards its world-outlook. But of course that outlook was in turn stained indelibly by the reality of the Holocaust.

The near-destruction of the Jewries of the European mainland had a profound effect on the way in which Jewish orthodoxy viewed the modern world. Dr. Freud-Kandel’s analysis of this effect is the best I have ever read. Before (say) 1933, modernity had something to offer the Jew: equality before the law; the opportunity to benefit from a secular education and to advance into the professions; and freedom of worship. After 1945, for many of the Jewish survivors, modernity had little if any attraction. Emancipation had promised much, but had instead delivered destruction and death on a massive scale.

Only a Chief Rabbi of great wisdom and learning could have sought a new accommodation between the multiple orthodoxies which the Jewish
world now presented. Israel Brodie was neither. An intellectual light-
weight with no claim whatever to Talmudic scholarship, Brodie owed
his appointment to his Oxford education and his thoroughly English
manners. That is not to imply that he was not sincere in his wish to
rebuild the bridges between the various forms of orthodoxy over which
he now reigned (but did not rule). He was. But he was simply not up
to the job. And in his comprehensive mishandling of the ‘Jacobs
Affair’ he poured fat onto the fire rather than oil on troubled waters.

The man who did have the intellect, and the claim to Talmudic
scholarship, was Brodie’s successor, Immanuel Jakobovits. His tenure
of the office of Chief Rabbi (1967–1991) is dealt with in an ‘Epilogue’
which sits uneasily at the end of Dr. Freud-Kandel’s work, following its
‘Conclusion’. A definitive account of the life and times of Immanuel
Jakobovits, the first Chief Rabbi to be raised to the peerage, remains
to be written. In default, the best account we have is still that
penned by the late Chaim Bermant and published in 1990 — a work
all the more remarkable because it was an ‘authorised’ biography.
Nonetheless, Mr. Bermant did not pull his punches: ‘His [Jakobovits’s]
failures as a bridge-builder . . . arise not so much from his abhorrence of
progressive doctrines as his conviction that the Orthodox have every-
thing to teach and nothing to learn. Dr. Freud-Kandel has been
unable to improve upon this analysis.

I turn now to Mr. Derek Taylor’s book. We are told that Mr. Taylor
has a Bachelor’s degree in history from Cambridge University, and has
written a number of histories of hotels. He has now written a collection
of biographical accounts of the 22 men who have served as Hakhamim of
the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of London and as Chief Rabbis
of the United Synagogue of London and its predecessors.

Such a compendium might have a limited use, either as a coffee-table
volume or as a work of reference. But his British Chief Rabbis can serve
neither purpose. To begin with, the referencing is quite inadequate.
Scholarly references are few and far between, and where they do
exist they fail to meet a minimum acceptable standard, lacking for
the most part any page numbers. For example, he gives (at pages
Basil Blackwell, 1988’, but he does not give any page number; on
page 331 there is also no page number to his reference to the Religious
Review of Reviews, Vol. 2, No. 8, 1891; while at page 164 he cites only
‘Jewish Chronicle, 1874’. What 1874 issue? The Jewish Chronicle was
(and is) a weekly publication and presumably there were 52 issues in
1874. Are interested readers expected to go through all of them to
discover on which page that particular reference is to be found?
These are not isolated cases, perhaps resulting from faulty proof-
reading; a list of such incomplete references in this book could alone
fill several pages.
Even more inadequate are the historical errors. The Damascus Affair of 1840 is wrongly located in Smyrna (p. 196). On p. 235 we are told that in 1970 the Board of Deputies of British Jews changed its constitution which, until then, mandated that ‘in spiritual matters, the diktat of the Chief Rabbi should always apply’. I can assure Mr. Taylor that no such 'diktat' has ever appeared in the Board’s constitution and that if it had, the Sephardim would have immediately left the Board.

Elsewhere there are also other errors — some minor but others seriously misleading. A minor error, for example, is the statement on p. 424 that Chief Rabbi Dr. Sacks obtained ‘a PhD at Oxford’, Dr. Sacks has no such Oxford degree, and if he did have an Oxford doctorate it would have been a DPhil, not a PhD. A serious error occurs in Mr. Taylor’s examination of Dr. Sacks’s decision in 1996 not to attend the funeral of the Progressive (Reform) Rabbi Hugo Gryn, an Auschwitz survivor and media personality. Mr. Taylor does not mention the fact that Dr. Sacks later did agree to address a memorial meeting, at which he spoke eloquently of Rabbi Gryn and his work. The fury of the ultra-orthodox knew no bounds. There had been much criticism (in both the Jewish and non-Jewish press) of the decision by Dr. Sacks not to attend Hugo Gryn’s funeral. Rabbi Gryn had many admirers in mainstream British society and often appeared on radio and television, charming his audiences with his wit and wisdom. However, the ultra-orthodox clergy, steadfast in their determination to denigrate Progressive Judaism, could not be appeased. Mr. Taylor comments (on p. 429) that in order to attempt an appeasement Dr. Sacks had ‘unwisely... responded in writing to one of their eminent rabbis [the late Dayan Chenoch Padwa], assuring him that he equally recognized the danger the Progressive movement posed to Orthodoxy’.

In fact, in his letter (an expurgated version of which was published in the *Jewish Chronicle* of 14 March 1997) Dr. Sacks attacked Rabbi Gryn, in the most censorious and categorical terms. I have translated and published the most important passages of the letter which were omitted by the *Jewish Chronicle*, but Mr. Taylor was probably unaware of my analysis of that episode.²

*British Chief Rabbis* will disappoint readers who expected that they would be enlightened by a work of historical scholarship. On the other hand, Dr. Freud-Kandel offers us a readable, interesting, and well-researched analysis, while her handling of the material is impressive and the conclusions she draws are thought-provoking.

NOTES
