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Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
10425 OLD OLIVE STREET ROAD, SUITE 205, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63141 (314) 997-7566 FAX #: (314) 997-4041

MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

February 6, 1991

(1) Thank you letter
(2) cc: of Lit letter to
RBB
MM

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

Thanks for your good letter of January 24. I have waited a bit to respond because I wanted to speak again with Rabbi Bob Barr of Beth Adam in Cincinnati before I got back to you.

As you know, since you wrote to me at the end of January Beth Adam has gone ahead (at their own expense) and professionally published and distributed close to 2000 copies if the Mihaly Responsum. I have a feeling that they did not feel comfortable allocating addition allocating the funds to also distribute Dr. Meyer's letter to Dr. Mihaly!

The bottom line is that (as I suspected) there is <u>not</u> going to be an application in the near future. As I mentioned to you in a previous letter, Bob Chaiken and I met with the board in early December and had a very candid and spirited discussion. We focused on a number of different questions, and it became very clear at the meeting (and I have mentioned this to you before) that they sought membership in the UAHC in order to increase their visibility in the community as well as their credibility as a congregation. It also came out at the meeting that they very much want to be part of the successful and prestigious Reform Community High School, which is currently open only to students from congregations that belong to the UAHC.

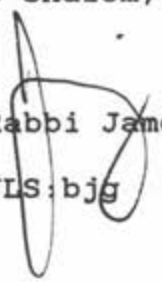
We left the meeting with the understanding that when they were ready to file an application they would let me know and then Bob and I would outline a formal and detailed process that would permit anyone who wanted to to participate in a full and meaningful manner. Bob and I have agreed that we want to do everything in accordance with your requests as well as handling this is a sensitive and a constructive manner. The other day Rabbi Barr confirmed to me that there is no application that is forthcoming and we may not see and application for another four to six months. He also indicated to me that the purpose of publishing the Mihaly Responsum was to try to raise the consciousness level of an issue that they think is a very important issue. I am not sure I agree with that, but in some ways it may not be so bad that this Responsum is being distributed.

That is where everything is now. I cannot or will not do anything more until I receive a formal application. When I do receive one I will let you know immediately and Bob Chaiken and I will consult with you as to our ideas as to how the process should unfold.

If you have any questions or need additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to seeing you next month when I come into town for the Budget hearings. Naturally, if you would like to put in a good word for the important work that we are doing here in the Midwest Council I will not object to this form of favoritism! I am sure you could do this featly!

B'shalom,



Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

August 3, 1994
26 Av 5754

Mr. Joseph Lane
3020 Burnet Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45219

Dear Mr. Lane:

Your letter of July 1 reached my office but, as you were told by my associate, while I was out of the country, and in consequence it came to my attention only now.

Your thoughtful note deserves something more than a cursory answer.

First of all, in regard to the greater traditionalism of the current crop of rabbinic students. While I myself do not respond to all of these more traditional ritual and liturgical practices, I do believe that they are a response to the felt need of many of our congregants, especially the younger generation. You see, there has been a change in the spirit of our times and Reform has been compelled by the principle of change inherent in it to respond to this changing zeitgeist. Early Reform was hyper-rational in its approach but the experience of the last century, what with two World Wars in one generation and their fearsome aftermaths of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, has dethroned reason as the saving grace of humankind. An ever increasing number of people have come to realize that the future of humankind cannot be entrusted to the mindscape of a scientific rationality, that as the spirit within us withers so does everything we build about us. A greater appreciation of the non-rational and the emotive in worship patterns is the inevitable result of that change.

What divides Reform from Orthodoxy is not a question of ritual quantity but one of principle and that principle is the willingness to change when changing needs demand a different approach. This is why we call ourselves Reform and not reformed, the latter suggests a task that is completed; the former reflects that dynamism for which we stand.

Insofar as Beth Adam is concerned, the vote at our Board meeting was quite overwhelming. Of the nearly 200 Board members attending, only 13 voted for admission.

The reasons for this vote are clear: the quest for God, the wrestling with God, defines us as a people. It is our mission, our historic calling.

Yes, God is a symbol, a vessel, if you will, into which we can pour divergent theological conceptions but when that vessel is not there, such a pouring is foreclosed. Whoever has a symbol has thereby the beginning of a spiritual idea, absent a symbol spiritual ideas are stifled and die aborning; symbol and reality together alone furnish the whole.

Most of our members and I, too, were particularly troubled by the deletion of the Shema and the Kaddish from the liturgy of Beth Adam for we consider these erasures not just a severing of our ideological roots but also of our historic roots as a people. If Judaism has any over-arching affirmation of faith it is the Shema, the assertion of God's unity. It certainly was the one prayer which was central to Reform Judaism's liturgy from its very beginnings and this is why I strongly suspect that Rabbis Heller, Wohl, Phillipson and Reichert far from "turning over in their graves," would undoubtedly have joined the present generation of Cincinnati's Reform rabbis who were unanimous in their rejection of Beth Adam.

All of this does not mean that the members of this congregation are not fine people and that their quest for spirituality is not valid. It manifestly is most meaningful. I regard its members highly and I embrace them as my fellow Jews, but I do believe that our movement had no other choice in the final analysis. Reform Judaism is not a religion where anything goes.

I know that my words will not persuade you but at least we can agree to disagree agreeably.

With every good wish for the coming New Year, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

JOSEPH LANE, INC.
3020 BURNET AVENUE
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45219

Last copy & my commentary

July 1, 1994

President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Dear Sir:

I am taking advantage of your franked envelope to express my concern and disappointment with the UAHC. I feel your current decisions are leading to the demise of Reform Judiasm as we have known it in Cincinnati for the past seventy to eighty years. The HUCJIR is now teaching or allowing ritual to be practiced that is getting closer to Conservative ritual and liturgy every day. Many of the students wear Yarmulkas and observe the dietary laws while at the College. Their orientation is toward more Hebrew in the service, carrying the Torah around the congregation and other such actions. They then go out into the various communities and promulgate these rituals. As a matter of fact two recent graduates of HUCJIR have now taken positions as Rabbi in two Conservative Congregations in Cincinnati. I am sure Rabbi Heller, Wohl, Phillipson, and Reichert are turning over in their graves.

The ultimate disappointment came when I read that the Humanistic Congregation of Rabbi Barr, Beth Adam, was rejected for membership in the Union. In these days of intermarriages, antiSemitism and general decline in membership to turn away a vital and intelligent group of people, many of whom are the leaders of the Cincinnati community, because their liturgy is not to your liking is a travesty. These people fit into Rabbi Reines's definition of Reform Jews (see Polydoxy) and are no further away from the Reform Movement than the graduates of HUCJIR. UAHC is a mere simulacrum of Reform Jewish leadership and at this juncture they do not have my philosophical or financial support.

Yours truly,

Joseph A. Lane, M. D.

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
10425 OLD OLIVE STREET ROAD, SUITE 205, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63141 (314) 997-7566 FAX #: (314) 997-4041

MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

November 21, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

I am faxing this to you today not so much because of the urgency of the letter but I did want to make sure that I send this to you while my memory is still fresh from my recent trip in Cincinnati. It is my hope that we will have a few minutes in Rye to talk about this so you can give me your advice and counsel as to how we should continue to proceed.

I wanted to give you a brief update on the situation with Beth Adam in Cincinnati and indicate to you that while the process is moving along you should know that the situation is beginning to heat up considerably and I anticipate that this application may engender much more controversy than previously imagined.

To briefly review, we have been in contact off and on with this congregation for close to two and one-half years. Following your advice, we had an informal discussion about the general issue of a Humanistic congregation at our Spring 1990 Board Meeting and I felt it was a very candid and fruitful preliminary discussion. Obviously, no decision was reached because we have not received any application. During the spring and the summer of 1990, Bob Chaiken and I have been in touch with Rabbi Bob Barr and other leaders of the congregation and have continued our discussions on an informal basis. At the same time as a matter of courtesy we have informed the Rabbis and the Presidents of the four Cincinnati Reform congregations that we area involved in this process of discussion.

Last Monday, November 19 Bob Chaiken and I met with the board of Beth Adam and had a most intense and lively discussion which lasted over two hours. It is clear that they are going to pursue this application and they feel very strongly about the fact that they wish to be a part of the UAHC. It is also clear that in the private discussions that Bob Chaiken and I have had with Rabbis in Cincinnati

Attend the Midwest Council Regional Biennial
Indianapolis, Indiana • November 9-11, 1990

that there is strong sentiment against the idea that Beth Adam would become part of the UAHC. I am sure that once we receive the formal application and invite the four congregations of Cincinnati to comment on the application that we will most likely receive from at least three of the boards very strong letters which indicate the fact that they do not believe that Beth Adam should be part of the UAHC. There are many, many reasons as to this opposition and I do not want to try to guess at what they are now but rather would want the congregations to speak for themselves in the future. There might be a few things I could share with you privately when I see you.

I also wanted you to know that they were very much concerned with respect to the Responsum authored by Rabbi Plaut and the committee and they will probably want to write some type of a formal response that would then be sent along to all members of our board along with the Responsum and other materials. I have indicated to them that I will make sure that all relevant materials are made available to the entire Midwest Council Regional Board and in all likelihood we will invite representatives of Beth Adam to come and speak to the board at the next meeting to be held in Colorado in April. We will also set aside sufficient time so as to have a full and meaningful discussion on this very sensitive and important issue.

One final note. Unlike other congregations that wish to join the UAHC, there are a few interesting wrinkles in this situation that go beyond the very fascinating ideological issues. First, you should know that even though Beth Adam has been in existence for well over a decade, they see that membership in the UAHC will help to validate their identity and their credibility within the context of the Cincinnati Reform community. They were very candid in indicating that it is their hope to secure the services of a Rabbinic intern from Hebrew Union College, and it is also their hope that once they are a member of the UAHC that they will be permitted to be part of the successful and growing Reform Jewish Community High School which is currently a joint effort of the four Reform synagogues. While it is true that they are desirous of utilizing some of the services and benefits of the UAHC, it is equally clear that they have very little interest in most of what we produce and they clearly have no interest whatsoever in any of our materials which pertain to Jewish education and the like. Finally, you should know that a few of their members sit on the Board of Overseers of Hebrew Union College and that Dr. Gottschalk has indicated to the leaders of the congregation that it might be nice if the congregation is part of the UAHC so that those overseers and Beth Adam itself could continue to make contributions to institutions of the Reform movement. (Obviously the majority of those contributions would not come to us!)

At any rate this is where we are right now. It is my feeling that an application will arrive in our office within the next month or so and then we will begin to compile a packet of materials which will be mailed out to all of the board members of our Region. It is our hope to include not only materials pertaining to Beth Adam but copies of

the CCAR Responsum as well as some of the other letters that have been accumulated from other Rabbis throughout the country. I will probably put together some type of cover memo as well.

I am very much interested in some of your thoughts and ideas as to how we should proceed during the next few months . . .

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

April 5, 1994
24 Nisan 5754

Professor Eugene Borowitz
19 Reid Avenue
Port Washington, NY 11050

Dear Gene:

Thank you for your note. I found it extremely helpful. I certainly expect to use it or have one of our speakers use it. The name Isaac Mayer Wise still carries great weight and persuasive power for many of our older Board members and they are the one who are most inclined to consider our religious community as all inclusive and in no way exclusive.

I still have not come up with a rabbi who will be passionate enough and is free to speak, for many have B'nai Mitzvot on a Shabbat morning.

If you have any more thoughts, send them along. I am profoundly grateful for this.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem

BROOKDALE CENTER
ONE WEST 4th STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10012-1186
(212) 674-5300

19 Reid Ave
Port Washington, NY 11050
March 28, 1994

Dear Alan,

It occurred to me that, while not wanting to commit you to a Bork-like legal position, it might be useful to ask about whatever ambiguities there are in the UAHC charter: what was the intent of the authors? Is it conceivable that they wanted to welcome atheists + agnostic congregations in their Union?

For Isaac Mayer Wise the issue is quite clear. The enclosed, under the Maccabees impression, rules out anything other than a pro-God position.

I was unable to check out at home another thought. In 1899 Louis Ginzberg came to the US in response to an invitation to teach at HUC which was then withdrawn. So much is fact, as per the E.J. What I could not check was whether the widely retold reason for that withdrawal is substantiated by some data, namely, that his views on God were unacceptable. Silberman in the HUC centennial history says, in passing that it was his views on biblical criticism. Wise believed the Bible to have been revealed + since Ginzberg taught at the Seminary later, where Torah criticism was not taught until recently, the matter remains unclear. Perhaps Eli Ginzberg's

* 1897 acc. to Low.

biography of his father has some better data. But there may -- if this version is correct -- be data that as late as the end of the century Wise was firmly against any hint of atheism or agnosticism.

For what it is worth -.

Have a joyous Pesach —

Sara

TEMPLE
KOL AMI

Rabbi Janet B. Liss
Cantor Seymour Schwartzman

Rabbi Sheldon J. Harr

Martzi, Wolkove, Administrator
Tirza Arad, Educator

May 28, 1992

Mr. Stanley Loeb
Chairperson, New Congregations Committee
c/o Spears, Lubersky, Campbell & Bledsoe
800 Pacific Building
Portland, Oregon 97204

Dear Mr. Loeb,

Ever since the UAHC Convention in Baltimore, at which time I was introduced to the concept of membership in the UAHC for a "Humanist" Congregation, I have given this subject much thought. I can tell you that when I initially heard of their interest in joining the Union, I was unalterably opposed to it. But I felt it was important to listen to discussions, engage in some research, talk to my own congregants, and develop a more thoughtful response. I have done so, and have come to the same conclusion: I am unalterably opposed to the Humanist Congregation being a member of the UAHC.

I am not in disagreement with the very clear and plain theological fact of life that God-concepts can and do vary widely within our movement. Of course, we know that historically, ideas about God (communally and individually) have always reflected a wide range within Judaism. This has lead to a non-dogmatic approach to Judaism, which is one of the great appealing factors (and, indeed, even a unifying factor) within a variegated Jewish community. Nonetheless, there are some expressions, the proponents of which may wish to call Jewish, that seem to me not to be within any reasonable stream of Jewish theology.

What are these expressions to which I am referring and how can we identify them? In truth, these expressions are difficult to pre-define and pre-identify. But there is a "subjective knowing" to which practically all would subscribe, as a community, given exposure to the issue. That is to say, as one of the Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States ruled regarding pornography, that though he could not define it, he sure recognized it when he saw it! Similarly, though I am hard-pressed to define the outer limits of acceptability in contemporary Jewish life, I (and most others) "subjectively know" when those limits have been breached. This "subjective knowing" is based on some objective reality, and not simply on a "feeling" of impropriety.

One such example would be a person who accepts the divinity of Jesus, still claiming himself/herself to be a "good and fulfilled Jew." While halachah may, in fact, dictate that this person is indeed a Jew (if he/she were born of a Jewish mother), the reality of Jewish life (historically and contemporaneously) is that this person would not considered to be "Jewish" any longer. That person's theology has gone beyond the bounds of acceptability. And, to be sure, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations would not (I trust) welcome the membership of that person's "Jews for Jesus" 'Temple.'

In a parallel manner, the abrogation of the possibility of "God" (no matter one's God conceptualization, definition, or idealization) within a organized and recognized congregation flies in the face of the manner in which Jewish life throughout the ages has tried to deal with the challenges of our very being, as humans and as Jews. While Judaism has always had an important ethnic, cultural, social, and celebratory aspect to it, often unrelated to theology or philosophy, Judaism taken as a whole has always had an important theological element to it that has made Judaism more than an "ethical cultural" idea, or an ethnic/cultural heritage. To attend a Jewish worship Service, without the permissibility of reciting the "Shema" or the "Kaddish" smacks of an orthodoxy which is contrary to the spirit of Reform Judaism, and a theology which is contrary to the spirit of a Jewish spiritual quest, no matter what the 'denomination' or movement within Jewish life.

In a time when many of our leaders are calling for "guidelines, boundaries, and limitations," it is implausible to me that we would welcome a Congregation whose very "guidelines, boundaries and limitations" would be drawn in such a manner that is historically and contemporaneously contrary to Judaism and Jewish life and exclusionary in a manner which does not create or engender community within the Family of Reform Judaism or the wider Community of Israel.

Please understand that I am not talking about excluding individual Jews from our ranks. That is an entirely separate issue, used only to obfuscate the institutional/communal issue herein addressed. But I am talking about our Reform Jewish community beginning to have a greater recognition that, liberal though we are and pluralistic as we try to be, we are not and can not be all things to all people. If we stand for everything, we stand for nothing.

I am not advocating a classical theism (to which I personally do not subscribe). But I am advocating a stance, to be taken by our Reform Jewish community, which recognizes that there is a spiritual element that helps make us human (and, but little lower than the angels) and in our quest for a spirituality, and in our quest for making meaning in our lives (for, "making meaning" places us above the other animals of this world), excluding some concept of God as a possibility in the "meaning making process" is contrary to any Jewish understanding of our world, past or present. Individually, we can find that meaning in a variety of places and through a variety of means. Institutionally, there are strictures which must be in place to both maintain and create "community." While it is admittedly difficult to know what strictures (guidelines, boundaries and limitations) should be in place [and it is infinitely more difficult for us to agree on those strictures!], some things, I believe, we instinctively know to be the outside of our circle of Jewish communal acceptability. That is why I would oppose the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, under the circumstances that I understand to be in place, accepting the "Humanist Congregation" as part of our Reform Jewish community.

Very sincerely yours,

Rabbi Sheldon J. Harr

Rabbi Sheldon J. Harr

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler
Rabbi Frank Sundheim
Mr. Arthur Grant
Mrs. Jan Epstein
Mr. Samuel Steen

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

November 27, 1990
10 Kislev 5751

Dr. Eugene Mihaly
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

Be assured that I did not address a formal question to the CCAR Responsa Committee with the purpose of receiving the answer which I indeed anticipated. I sent my inquiry to Plaut ad personam and its subsequent enlargement into a formal inquiry occured by "happenstance."

I have no intention of acknowledging the final authority of the CCAR Responsa Committee as far as policies of the Union are concerned. This issue will be determined by duly constituted committees, which will be widely representative to be sure.

I wrote to Gunther more recently concerning the procedures he employs in his committees. I enclose a copy of his answer to me as well as my response to that answer. I do so confidentally and see this as an opportunity of taking the first step toward that synod idea which we discussed. If a dramatic improvement of the Responsa process is called for, then why delay in asking for it? What do you think?

By all means, write the Responsum on the Cincinnati congregation itself and advance your reasons for its admission. I assure you that it will be widely circulated, even as your original letter concerning the congregation was given to the leadership of our Midwest Council.

I do understand from Jim Simons, though, that the leaders of the other Cincinnati congregations are very firm in their opposition to the admission of this particular congregation.

For your information, the admission of a congregation to the Union is first discussed on a regional level, then brought to the national New Members Committee, and finally to the Board of the Union as a whole. I told Jim Simon not to limit his new congregation to its usual composition but to enlarge it considerably to allow for a greater geographic as well as ideological divergence.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

בס"ד

EUGENE B. MIHALY

Nov. 24, 1990

אל ידי הר' הן השופלק בעזרה ובאהבה, בתודעה
ומצוה שאות, ובידיעה ה' מהוה, ר' זלקסנדר שלו"א

Your letter and copy of Gunther Plaut's answer re the "humanistic congregation" reached me here in San Francisco where I am spending the Thanksgiving holiday with my children. I hope to be back in Cincinnati on Dec. 3.

Plaut's response (sent to me several weeks ago) certainly comes as no surprise. I could have predicted it, and I imagine that you anticipated it as well. One would hardly expect of Gunther to resist the appeal of יראה – with its overtones of "es ist streng verboten," especially if he is the acknowledged authority to set the limits. (And that is the heart of the issue — not whether there are limits, but who is to define them.)

I confess that I was surprised to learn that you addressed a formal שאלה to the CCAR Responsa Committee, thereby implicitly acknowledging their authority to decide HUAHC policy, and to define whether a group does or does not qualify for membership – or so it can or will be interpreted. Unless, of course, you wanted a negative response to balance my informal, confidential reply to your inquiry last February, which I wrote for your personal information and consideration. In any case, since there is now an official ruling on the subject, the matter is now an "issue." I am confident, however, that you will handle it with your usual diplomatic skill.

(over)

In the interim, Rabbi Barr addressed a formal question to me on this subject, in the name of Cong. Beth Adam. I am enclosing a copy of his letter for your confidential information. Since the matter is now a public issue, and the question involves, in my view, principles central to Reform Judaism and its future direction, I have decided to write an extensive responsum on the subject. As soon as I have completed it (hopefully next week) I shall send you a copy.

I am more than ever convinced, as I wrote you last February, that Beth Adam qualifies for membership in the Union and that there is no objective basis for rejecting their application. I base my conclusion on significant, traditional halakhic principles, the essential nature of Reform Judaism and UAHC, its constitution and by-laws. The details are fully discussed in my forthcoming responsum. I hope that you will agree with my conclusions.

כ"ו חשון תשל"ג

Glen

I can be reached all of this week (until Dec. 2) at 415-453-2733

Beth Adam
The Cincinnati Congregation
for Humanistic Judaism

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

November 8, 1990

Dr. Eugene Mihaly
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220

Dear Dr. Mihaly,

I am writing to you on behalf of myself and Beth Adam, the congregation I have served as rabbi for approximately ten years. I turn to you because of your scholarship and knowledge of Reform Judaism. You have interpreted and helped to clarify the values and philosophy of Reform Judaism as a member of the faculty of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, your involvement with the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and your numerous committee appointments and publications.

As you know, I was ordained from the College-Institute in 1981 and upon ordination accepted a position with a newly organized congregation. The congregation and I were committed to exploring and creating an environment in which we could celebrate our Jewish identity with intellectual honesty and theological openness. I held and expressed these same values and attitudes while a student at the College-Institute. Though not all on the faculty were comfortable with my ideas and the services I conducted, I was ordained and continue to be involved with the College-Institute. Most recently, I served as adjunct faculty teaching a practical workshop to second year students. It should be noted as well, that upon ordination I was accepted for membership into the CCAR and remain a member in good standing.

Since its inception, Congregation Beth Adam has identified itself as a humanistic congregation. Though never affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism or any other congregational association, it is our belief that the term "humanistic" best reflects our approach to liturgy, theology, and the Jewish experience. In

1720 Section Road, Suite 107, Cincinnati, Ohio 45237
(513) 396-7730

translating our philosophic precepts into action our services do not contain traditional prayers. It is our belief that liturgy should clearly articulate the values and philosophy of our congregation. Drawing upon the rich traditions of our people, contemporary sources, and the writings of our own members, we create a liturgy which enriches our lives by giving expression to our Jewish identity. Our services attempt to capture, in a manner consistent with our philosophy, our deepest religious aspirations and beliefs.

Within the last two years, the fact that Beth Adam is unaffiliated with any national religious association has become a matter of concern for the congregation's Board of Trustees. Many in the congregation, myself included, feel it important that Beth Adam become associated with a larger body. Following much investigation and lengthy conversations, it was thought that this association would be most logically made with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. This realization arose from the congregation's sense of its Jewish identity, historic and current ties to the institutions of Reform Judaism which I have and which exist amongst the membership, and my understanding of the nature and philosophy of Reform Judaism. It is our belief that the philosophy and practices of Beth Adam fall within the broad spectrum of Reform Judaism.

In light of the above information and official publications of the congregation which are available to you we pose for your consideration the following question:

In light of the purposes and goals of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, as stated in its constitution and by-laws, does Congregation Beth Adam qualify for membership?

Thank you for considering this question.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Barr
Rabbi

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 212-249-[illegible]

July 14, 1992
13 Tammuz 5752

Mr. Allan B. Goldman
347 Conway
Los Angeles, CA 90024-2603

Dear Allan:

Thanks for your memo in response to mine regarding Beth Adam.

I usually follow your good counsel but in this instance I disagree with you. This application and the issues which it raises deserves more than a routing consideration. It deserves a blue ribbon jury, with several sessions and hearings, and not just the kind of attention which can be given when it is but one item of a larger agenda and must be dealt with in an hour or two before the Board meeting itself. The matter is too weighty for that!

This is precisely what happened in the case of the gay and lesbian congregation -- albeit, then the "expansion" took place on the regional level. The S.P. New Congregations Committee was enlarged to make it more widely representative, hearings were held, several meetings were scheduled -- and because everyone had a voice in the decision making process, the acceptance of this recommendation was given greater weight because of this more careful inquiry.

Granted, this was not the approach that we used in the case of the Pennsylvania Prison congregation, but just maybe, if we had, the result would have been different and as you and I would have wished ... (remember the vote? ... handled routinely, the New Congregations Committee approved, the Board went along, with something of a yawn, as I recall it, and only the headtable -- you and I and Al Vospan and Danny voted NO).

Why don't we discuss this come Executive Committee time. The region won't have finished its processes before then. In any event, we will have plenty of time to make a determination how we should proceed on a national level.

Hope you and yours are faring well ... it's mighty hot hereabouts.

Sincerely,

cc: Recipient

Alexander N. Schindler

#13

MEMORANDUM

From Allan B. Goldman Date 6/22/92

To Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

Copies Melvin Merians, Stanley Loeb, Rabbi Daniel B. Syme, Rabbi Allen Kaplan

Subject Temple Beth Adam - Schindler Memo of 6/18/92

Although you and I discussed this general subject before you sent your June 18, 1992 memo, there is one item contained in your memo that was new to me and which in my humble opinion is a mistake.

At the top of page two of your Memo you state, "We will undoubtedly enlarge the National New Congregations Committee to consider the Beth Adam application, since it is scarcely routine. It will be up to Mel to select this Committee, but I would imagine that he will include some leaders of the CCAR, perhaps from its Response Committee [how could that be after that Committee has already voted on the subject?], and some members of the College Faculty, etc. In other words, it should be a kind of Blue Ribbon jury whose decision will be reflective of a movement-wide consensus."

I strongly recommend that there be no such "expansion" of the National New Congregations Committee. I doubt that the UAHC engaged in such expansion when it considered the application from the first congregation with special outreach to the gay and lesbian community, and I know that there was no such expansion when it considered the application from Graterford State Prison in Pennsylvania.

The New Congregations Committee can call witnesses to testify, but to change the composition of the Committee could violate all kinds of potential rights. I assume that you, and Mel and Stanley and Allen have no idea how the present Committee members feel about this issue, and that is the way it should be. Why subject the UAHC to the charge (by either side) that it "stacked the deck"?

Moreover, as you point out (or as you point out that I pointed out), it is the UAHC Board of Trustees that ultimately decides this question, you are not going to change its composition, and all that goes before is commentary.

Another constitutional point: I assume that the Chairman of the UAHC Board of Trustees, the Chair of the Midwest Region, and the Chairs of both the Regional New Congregations Committee and the National New Congregations Committee have not expressed publicly their views on the substance (i.e. should Beth Adam be admitted or

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not). To the extent that any of these people may already have done so or subsequently do express an opinion, I recommend that each such Chair turn over the presiding during consideration of the issue to a Vice Chair (or Vice President, as the case may be) who has not expressed herself or himself on the issue.

I leave it to your judgment whether to pass these thoughts and recommendations along to Bob Chaiken and Rabbi Pinsky.

The congregational office at 1720 Section Road in Roselawn serves as the hub of its activities. It houses the rabbi's study, the Congregational Library, general office facilities, and a chapel which accommodates up to 80 people. Included among the activities held there are Bar/Bat Mitzvah classes, Committee and Board Meetings, Mid-Week Adult Education classes, and informal services. Larger facilities are rented for special occasions.

Beth Adam's Religious School is currently housed at the Doherty School in East Walnut Hills. The school's extensive facilities allow for a tremendous amount of flexibility in classroom assignments.

RABBI

Rabbi Robert B. Barr was ordained in 1981 from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. Following his ordination, he assumed full responsibilities as rabbi of Beth Adam, having worked with the congregation since its inception.

Rabbi Barr's activities within the Jewish community include serving on the boards of Jewish Family Service, Jewish Community Relations Council, Jewish National Fund, and the Principal's Council of the Bureau of Jewish Education. Rabbi Barr is a member of the Cincinnati Board of Rabbis, Association of Humanistic Rabbis and a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Rabbi Barr was in Class XII of Leadership Cincinnati and serves on its steering committee. He has been a delegate at the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati (MARCC), a member of the Interreligious Roundtable, and a member of the Ohio Advisory Board of People for the American Way.

He has published many professional articles and has spoken extensively in Cincinnati and nationally. Rabbi Barr is a graduate of Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan where he majored in philosophy and psychology. He earned his Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters from the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion in 1980.

HISTORY

In the fall of 1979, a small nucleus of people gathered to discuss their views of Judaism in the modern world and their desire to give expression to their ideas. Their awareness of Humanistic Judaism led them to Robert B. Barr, who was then a rabbinic student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religions. Following a series of discussions, they decided to organize a religious school for their children and to conduct High Holiday services.

The response from the community to the first high holiday services was much greater than anticipated, and many of those who attended expressed a desire to become actively involved in the group's future. As the size of the congregation increased, so did the activities, programs, services and publications.

The congregation was formally incorporated in 1980, and shortly thereafter elected its first Board of Trustees. In the spring of 1981, Robert Barr was ordained form the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and was elected Beth Adam's first rabbi.

In May of 1984,,Beth Adam received, on permanent loan, a 140-year-old Czechoslovakian Torah Scroll - one of the many seized by the Nazis. Members of the congregation designed and created four Torah covers and a wimple which expressed both the humanistic tradition and the Torah's Czechoslovakian origin. The Torah and its covers were presented at an emotion filled Shabbat Service shared with the entire Cincinnati Jewish community.

As the congregation continues to grow, so does its involvement in the Greater Cincinnati community. Beth Adam and its rabbi continue to be involved in a variety of interreligious and Jewish concerns, both locally, nationally and internationally.

Beth Adam serves those who can best express their Jewish identity within the humanistic framework.

Beth Adam

The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

1720 Section Road
Suite 107
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45237
(513) 396-7730
Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

PHILOSOPHY

Beth Adam is dedicated to creating a community in which people of diverse ages, backgrounds, and lifestyles can affirm, share and celebrate their Jewish identity in an environment of mutual respect and support.

The philosophy of the congregation affirms the values of human dignity, creativity, integrity and reason. It is through these qualities and ideals that we can fashion a strong and healthy Jewish present and future. These values are articulated and taught through our liturgical and educational materials.

By employing the best of Jewish wisdom and thought in the expression of our modern Jewish identity, we affirm our relationship with the continuing Jewish experience.

The philosophy of Beth Adam also affirms and is dedicated to the belief that each individual has the right and responsibility to determine the purpose and course of his/her own life.

SERVICES

Beth Adam's services are unique and varied, combining the ancient and modern in prose and poetry, song and silence, lessons and legends, all to create a religious experience that both teaches and challenges.

Beth Adam has both formal and informal services which often focus on a specific theme and include a lively and informative discussion led by Rabbi Barr.

Specially designed services for our children play an important role in our congregational life. These services provide the opportunity for both young and old to share and celebrate together.

Please consult the congregational calendar for dates and times.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

We, the members of Beth Adam are committed to a religious philosophy that affirms our Jewish identity and the right to determine the purpose and course of our lives. It is because of our philosophy that we are dedicated to the learning process through which one learns more about oneself as an individual, as a member of the world and more specifically the Jewish community. In an effort to achieve our ideals we design the Beth Adam Educational Program with the following goals in mind.

Our first goal is the personal growth of each student. The student is an unique individual entitled to be educated in an atmosphere where self-respect is enhanced. In this environment, the student will have the support needed to become an autonomous individual.

Our second goal is to help the student develop an accurate and wholesome Jewish identity. We hope to encourage our students to understand their relationship to, and continuing role in the Jewish experience.

The third goal is to help the student develop a personal religious philosophy based on the human experience in particular. This philosophy and system of ethics will prepare the student to live in an ever-changing world.

Our fourth goal is to foster within our students a feeling of responsibility to the human community, and particularly a strong commitment to the Jewish people.

In keeping with our philosophy and goals, our students are urged to examine, question and re-examine, and make their own decisions based on reason and study. With this type of approach, the courses will be taught in an atmosphere of intellectual honesty and open inquiry.

PROGRAMS

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL - For Children and Adults. This program is unique because it is designed for all members of the congregation (ages 3 through adult). A systematic curriculum has been designed to span the entire age range which allows for age-appropriate instruction covering a wide range of subject matter. An atmosphere of intellectual, honest and open inquiry is fostered. (See Religious School Handbook for further information.)

BAR/BAT MITZVAH PROGRAM - This program is available to children of members who wish to celebrate this important life-cycle event. The two year course of study includes six months of independent research culminating in an original paper to be presented during the student's Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. An adult course leading to bar/bat mitzvah is also taught. (See Bar/Bat Mitzvah Handbook for a complete description of the program and its requirements.)

YOUTH GROUP - This group promotes social, charitable, and intellectual activities for students under the guidelines of a team of youth group advisors. The group is involved in intra-congregational events locally.

ADULT EDUCATION - Mid-Week Evening Adult Education is a component of Beth Adam's Educational Programs. During the congregational year, Rabbi Barr generally teaches two six-week classes. The topics in past years have included, *Concepts of God, Introduction to Torah, Secular Humanism: Why All the Fuss?, and Yiddish Literature.*

Rabbi Barr also teaches *Jewish Customs and Cuisine*, one night seminars designed to examine a specific Jewish holiday's origins and practices. The goal of the seminar is to enable participants to celebrate and enjoy the holiday more fully.

EVENING WITH THE RABBI - *Evening with the Rabbi* is for those individuals interested in learning more about the philosophy and practices of Beth Adam. In this informal setting, Rabbi Barr has the opportunity to address a wide range of topics, while also answering specific questions raised by those present.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES - Social Activities which allow the members of the congregation to relax and enjoy one another's company are an important facet of Beth Adam. Each year the Social Committee schedules a variety of activities, some specifically for the adults and others for adults and children together. All the Social Activities promote fun, friendship and food.

FACILITIES - Recognizing the changing nature of a growing congregation as well as its fiscal realities, Beth Adam has chosen to maintain an office, while reserving the flexibility of holding selected activities in various locations throughout greater Cincinnati.

For more information please contact

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A Concept of God

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A CONCEPT OF GOD

Jews throughout the ages have tried to understand God and God's relationship with their world. These questions are addressed in the Bible and Talmud, and have been contemplated by many great Jewish thinkers, including Philo, Maimonides, Spinoza, and Kaplan. Thus, we as Humanistic Jews are carrying on a tradition that was begun many centuries ago.

The concept of God has undergone constant modification in Judaism. The God of the Prophets is different from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; certainly the God of Maimonides is different from them both. It is impossible to examine here the myriad of concepts for the term God, for that would take volumes. Every Jewish thinker has suggested an understanding of the term, redefining how God interacts and participates in the affairs of this world. Many feminist theologians are trying to reconcile traditional male interpretations of God and modern feminist thought. There has always been and continues to be great diversity in the Jewish understanding of God.

Changes in theological concepts have never been readily accepted. Spinoza, whose theology was considered a heresy in his day, is today proclaimed by many as one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of all times. Over the years, ideas that were regarded as radical or heretical have come to be accepted by the community. Consequently, the entire spectrum of Jewish theology today is diverse and at times contradictory.

To be a Jew has never meant that one must accept some predefined concept of God. Each Jew has always had the right to understand the term as he/she determines. This is evidenced by the fact that the classic definition for the term Jew--one who is born of a Jewish mother or who converts according to traditional law--does not mention belief. It is clear from this definition that belief is not the primary factor in determining who is or is not a Jew. Lacking any definition of what one must believe to be a Jew, a Jew can accept any theological stand and still remain a Jew.

Humanistic Judaism's approach to theology is a source of confusion for many. Because our services do not incorporate prayers, many falsely assume that humanism is atheistic. As stated in Article IV (Purpose) of our constitution and reaffirmed in our educational philosophy, Humanistic Jews affirm our right and responsibility to control our own destiny based upon ethics and morals arising out of the human condition. This definition of Humanistic Judaism does not preclude one's having a concept of God. In fact, there are many views of God that are compatible with Humanistic Judaism. The basic criteria for determining if a view of God is compatible with Humanistic Judaism are whether it allows for the belief that the ultimate authority for what a person does rests with that individual, and the belief that the events in our world are the product of human action and natural law. Humanistic Jews also affirm that ethics/morals are the product of human thought and experience.

There are in fact many Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God, but not a God that intervenes or manipulates the events of this world. Such a God does not hand down, dictate, or decree, and does not regulate or direct the actions of human beings. Neither would this God act in a way that would contradict or be inconsonant with natural law and scientific truth. Prayer, which presupposes a God who intervenes in and manipulates the affairs of the world, is contrary to this world view; thus, the use of prayer in services would be incompatible with such a theological system. Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God affirm their Jewish identities in services which focus upon human beings, strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears, pasts and futures. They recognize that prayer is not essential for declaring one's membership with the Jewish people and that a service can affirm both their world view and their Jewish identity.

Of course, there are those Humanistic Jews who do not accept a concept of God at all; the term God does not reflect their views or attitudes about the world. However, they affirm their Jewish identities and their right and responsibility to control their own destiny based upon ethics and morals arising out of the human experience. Their desire to participate as Jews in a service which reflects their views is possible only in a Humanistic Jewish setting.

Whether or not a Humanistic Jew has a concept of God is not the central issue. What is central to Humanistic Judaism is agreement upon a philosophic system which is based upon human reason and experience. One's Jewish identity is a function of one's commitment to the Jewish people. Through public acts or statements individuals declare their membership in the Jewish community.

The liturgy which has been formulated by humanistic congregations reflects this philosophic system. Upon hearing these liturgical changes for the first time, many immediately find them to be an articulation of their own long-held world views, and find their clarity refreshing. Others who are comfortable with and understand the philosophic nature of Humanistic Judaism nevertheless are uncomfortable with the unfamiliar liturgy. Yet with time the humanistic liturgy becomes a natural expression of their philosophic beliefs.

The removal of God from the liturgy does not preclude examination and discussion of concepts of God in other congregational settings. The fact is that in many humanistic congregations, the issue of God is addressed often and in depth. Once the concept of God becomes open to question and discussion, people feel free to express and examine their ideas.

At Beth Adam, no one is judged based upon his/her theological system. Consequently, God is discussed, examined, questioned, and explored with an open and inquiring mind. Some may find this endeavor uncomfortable. They may prefer not to open the concept of God and God's role to discussion. But for Humanistic Jews, the ongoing search for truth and understanding is paramount. There is no issue too sacred to be discussed.

The goal of Beth Adam is to enable people to work within our philosophic system to struggle and search for an understanding of the world in which they live, while affirming their Jewish identities.

Beth Adam
The Cincinnati Congregation
for Humanistic Judaism

Rosh Hashanah Evening Service

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

This is the opening of a new gate,
and the closing of another
This is the beginning of a new season,
and the closing of another.

תכלה שנה וקללותיה
Tichle shanah vekilelotehah.
The closing of a year and its troubles.

תחל שנה וברכותיה
Tacheil shanah uvirkotehah.
The beginning of a year and its joys.

As our ancestors have done for thousands of years at this season, we now enter into a period of self-reflection. The Jewish people set this interval apart from and above the routine of everyday life. So that this celebration would serve as an intense period of self-scrutiny, every aspect of one's life was considered. Given momentum by the power of this tradition, we are propelled to do no less.

This is the opening of a new path,
and the closing of another.
This is the beginning of a new life,
and the closing of another.

תכלה שנה וקללותיה
תחל שנה וברכותיה

Comparing our past actions to our ideals cannot be a comfortable nor painless effort. When we look at what we have done over the past year, we are at times heartened, at times humbled. Looking within we may feel alone, and then looking up and seeing others, we realize we are not. The path of self examination we each take throughout the High Holy Days is necessarily a private one, but not a solitary one. We can absorb strength from walking it, as we do tonight, in the company of friends.

This is the opening of a new journey,
and the closing of another.
This is the beginning of a new year,
and the closing of another.

תכלה שנה וקללותיה
תחל שנה וברכותיה

Each of us comes here tonight from our own prompting. Some of us are here out of habit, the habit established for us by our parents and grandparents, to adhere to the tradition of Jews gathering to celebrate the New Year.

Some of us are here out of reverence, a reverence for the tradition of our ancestors who found joy and meaning in this celebration.

Some of us are here out of duty, a sense that we owe to others a respect for tradition.

Some of us are here to find meaning for our lives. We find enrichment, renewed energy and purpose from these services.

It is for all these purposes that a community is formed. Our gathering together assures us of a place among the peoplehood of Israel, assures us of continuity. It allows us to reach beyond the mundane, to view the universe with a sense of wonder, to transcend the ordinary, to appreciate the mystery of life.

We come here as individuals, but the moments spent here transform us, bring us together, lifting us beyond ourselves. It is the assurance of community that offers us security, meaning, continuity. Without the community, our lives as Jews - as humans - would be impoverished.

Like a garden which offers shelter from the heat of day, a place of beauty and calm, so a congregation offers a place for spiritual refreshment and renewal.

הלל אומר, אל-תפרוש מן-הצבור.

Hillel taught: Do not separate yourself from the community. And thus we ask ourselves:

Am I proud to call myself a member of the Jewish community?

Or do I shrink from identity, preferring anonymity?

Do I let myself feel a part of the community?

Or do I hold myself aloof, protecting against engagement?

Am I willing to make a commitment to my community?

Or do I take from it with no thought of return?

Am I willing to take action as a member of my community?

Or do I sit passively, allowing others to act in my stead?

Have I been less than I can be?

At this time of self reflection, I stand in judgment.

How good and how pleasant it is
that people sit together.
It is like fine oil on the head
running down onto the beard,
the beard of Aaron,
that comes down over the collar of his robe;
Like the dew of Hermon
that falls upon the mountains of Zion. Psalm 133

הנה מה טוב ומה נעים שבת אחים גם יחד.

Hi-nay ma tov u-ma-na-yim she-vet a-cheem gam ya-chad.

We live our life as travelers in a journey, choosing among the many paths which lie before us. For some, it appears planned, the paths carefully marked, well defined, often by others. For some, the journey flies in haphazard directions, starting, halting, changing directions, out of control. And for others, it is a challenge, beckoning toward growth, prodding our intellect, promising adventure.

The way we make for ourselves is not easy. We have no reliable map and our guides can be uncertain. Our lives are often filled with confusion and anxiety, difficult decisions and regrettable mistakes. But still we must chart our own way.

Each year on Rosh Hashanah we pause to assess our life's journey. We study the route we have chosen and challenge ourselves to continue to explore life's greater possibilities.

We are here to review our past, to examine the paths we have taken.

We are ready, for today is Rosh Hashanah.
We must honestly evaluate our actions.

We are here to ask ourselves essential questions about the nature of our lives.

We are ready, for today is Rosh Hashanah.
It is a time to reflect on the values we hold.

We are here to seek out new directions that promote greater dignity and self respect.

We are ready, for today marks the New Year.
Rosh Hashanah means an opportunity for change.

We are here to begin a new path, one that enriches and strengthens the integrity of our lives.

We are ready, for today is the beginning of a new year.
Rosh Hashanah signifies the possibilities of our lives.

silent reflection

He doesn't know the world at all
Who stays in his nest and doesn't go out.
He doesn't know what birds know best
Nor what I want to sing about,
That the world is full of loveliness.

When dewdrops sparkle in the grass
And earth's aflood with morning light,
A blackbird sings upon a bush
To greet the dawning after night.
Then I know how fine it is to live.

Hey, try to open up your heart
To beauty; go to the woods someday
And weave a wreath of memory there.
Then if the tears obscure your way
You'll know how wonderful it is
To be alive.

Anonymous
Terezin Concentration Camp 1941

CANDLE LIGHTING

A candle's flame is a wondrous and mysterious event. Though frail and easily extinguished, it has the power to light the darkness. A small candle can cast light where none has existed before, and its penetration is greatest where the darkness is most deep. Yet all the while, that flame is fragile and transient. A slight breeze will extinguish the light. A drop of dew will bring back the darkness. We value the candle's flame for its fragility as well as its power to ignite other flames.

Similar to the candle's flame, each human life is minute compared to the world around us. We know well the limitations and transience of our physical selves. Yet a single act of compassion is like aflame's ray. It basks our surroundings in light and warmth, having its greatest effect just where indifference was the deepest. A single person has the power to push back the darkness, to bring clarity and understanding where none has existed before. Just as the candle's flame brings light to other candles and erases the darkness, so too each of us can be inspired by others and together our actions will illuminate our world.

As we light these candles, may we use this light to reflect upon our lives and the year just ending.

ברוך האור בעולם.
Baruch ha-or ba-olam.
Blessed is the light within the world.

ברוך האור באדם.
Baruch ha-or ba-adam.
Blessed is the light within each person.

ברוך האור ביום טוב.
Baruch ha-or ba-yom tov.
Blessed is the light of this season.

It is Rosh Hashanah, a time to sit up, take notice, pass judgment on ourselves. We need this time, before moving into the new year, to reflect on who we are, what we have accomplished, what we have left undone. We should not, like a bird fluttering into the night, fly onward, heedless of the past. We must not cut ourselves off from the past, flinging ourselves thoughtlessly into the future. It is at this time that we subject ourselves to an inner search, measuring our deeds against our ideals, our accomplishments against our hopes, our realities against our dreams. We consider the hours we have spent in boredom, in dullness, in unsatisfying routine. We remember the cutting remarks, the coldness, the unconcern we have offered others. We reflect on our moments of fear -- afraid to meet the challenges of life, clinging to repetition, the safety of the known.

This is a time for truth -- a time to respond to difficult questions.

Have I accepted the challenge of new ideas, or do I cling blindly to the old?

I want to hide in the familiar warmth of what I already know. New ideas make me feel less protected.

Have I responded to others honestly?

Honesty often means personal sacrifice, calling for engagement and commitment, yet it leaves me whole.

Have I put off important decisions?

I am too agreeable to going along with the flow of events before I decide.

Have I burrowed in the narrow rut of comfortable routine?

I usually feel safe and secure, but somehow untested and dulled.

Have I grown too sophisticated to be amazed by the universe?

Sometimes I have to stop what I am doing out of habit and experience it anew.

Has my imagination become stale?

Mundane daily thoughts sustain me, yet limit me, leaving little time for carefree flights of fantasy.

At this time of self reflection, I stand in judgement.

We use this time, this Rosh Hashanah, to reflect upon our past. It can remind us of the many moments we have fallen short of our potential, have failed even to attempt a reach. We do this not to sink into despair, but to climb toward a brighter future. Our honest reflection prods us, challenges us, directs us. It allows us to become more than we have been, to create new paths, to truly live in the coming year.

Sing with joy a new beginning.

רבי אימר, איזו היא דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם
כל-שהיא תפארת לעשה ותפארת לו מן האדם.

Rabbi Yehuda Ha Nasi taught: What is the right path that a person should choose? That which is an honor to the one who does it and which also brings honor to humankind. And thus we affirm:

We acknowledge that we are not perfect, but perfection is not our goal.

We know that we are not omnipotent, but we do not strive to rule the universe.

We accept the fact that we are finite; we do not ask for more.

We recognize that, as human beings, we must assume responsibility for our lives. Acknowledging our imperfections does not mean adopting mediocrity. Knowing we are not omnipotent does not mean we fail to strive for understanding and mastery. Accepting our finite nature does not limit our quest.

Because everything we do changes the nature of things, even in very small ways...

Because we are all here, together on this planet, sharing a common fate...

Because our every act radiates and has meaning throughout our community and beyond...

We do have an obligation and a personal interest in creating a better world. We cannot rely upon a moral authority to enforce righteous values. We are accountable only to ourselves.

Each of us leaves a legacy. Our legacy must be that we cared and that we made a difference...That our moment in history was significant...That we took responsibility for the world we left our children.

It is incumbent upon us to feed the hungry and to lighten a poor person's burden. We are duty bound to clean the rivers and clear the air. We are obliged to lessen the pain and suffering and to add to the compassion in our world.

Our humanistic values instruct us to not be content with our inheritance. The world's problems do not belong to others;

We cannot isolate ourselves in a society in which we depend so much one another. To open our hearts to the world and its plight is to raise the spirit of our own lives.

הוא היה אומר, לא עליך המלאכה לגמור
ולא-אתה בן-חורין להבטל ממנה.

Rabbi Tarfon taught: It is not up to you to complete the task, but you are not free to desist from it. And thus we ask:

Have I worked for the betterment of our world?

Like so many others my excuse is that I am just too busy to give of myself.

Have I opened my heart to those less fortunate?

Sometimes I forget the luck of my circumstances and remain indifferent to the fate of others.

Have I indulged in a feeling of superiority towards those I view as less able?

Ranking myself against others is my pleasure and my pain.

Is my courage spent?

Often, I must reach deeply to find my confidence, my faith in myself.

Have I been less than I can be?

At this time of self reflection, I stand in judgment.

In our silence we can hear
the cry of hungry children,
the weeping of the living for the dead.

In the silence we can hear
the pain of human suffering,
the anguish of human degradation.

Let us listen to the silence--

In the silence we can hear
the misery of the downtrodden,
the struggle of those who are weary.

In the silence we can hear
the agony of wasted lives,
the suffering of those forgotten.

Let us listen to the silence--

In the silence we can hear
the hate of prejudice,
the violence of mistrust.

In the silence we can hear
the absence of human concern,
the curse of human indifference.

Let us listen to the silence--

In the silence we can hear
the hope for our future,
the cure to the pain.

In the silence we can hear
the compassion of the human heart,
the comfort of the human touch.

Let us listen to the silence--

In the silence we can hear
the strength of the human soul,
the durability of the human spirit.

In the silence we can hear
the laughter of children,
the dawning of a new day.

Let us listen to the silence.

As has been done for thousands of years at this precise time of year, we compare our present reality with our ideals, our actions with our aspirations. The cyclic arrival of the New Year reminds us that while the movement of time through the universe is without boundaries, the limitations of the human mind leads us to see divisions: an hour, a day, a year. Sitting here and once more celebrating Rosh Hashanah, we are aware of the bounds of our lifetime, now shortened by the sudden arrival of another year. Shocked by the face of our own death, our opening eyes glisten to re-view life. For this one moment we are overwhelmed with gratitude. In this one moment our loves are deepened. Out of this one moment our courage becomes more firm.

The old year is finished. What is part of the past can never be changed. The gifts of our ancestors, given across the barriers of the years, are ours to savor. The gifts we offer the future are the choices we make today.

אין בידי המות הכח
לעקר מה שטמון
בלב

Death cannot take
that which is locked
in our hearts.

With our tears
In our sorrow
We remember.

With our courage
And our strength
We do not forget.

Acts of kindness
Deeds of courage
Will remain.

Beauty created
Wisdom shared
Is not lost.

With our tears
In our sorrow
We remember.

עם דמעות בעינינו
בעת אבלנו
נשמור על זכר אהוביגו

With our tears
In our sorrow
We remember.

May the memory of good people bless our days.
זכר צדיק לברכה.
Zeicher tzadik live'rachah.

Upon Israel and upon the rabbis
and upon the disciples and upon all the disciples of their disciples
and upon all who study the Torah in this place and in every place,

to them and to you
peace;

upon Israel and upon all who meet with unfriendly glances,
sticks and stones and names--

on posters, in newspapers, or in books to last,
chalked on asphalt or in acid on glass,
shouted from a thousand thousand windows by radio;
who are pushed out of class-rooms and rushing trains,
whom the hundred hands of a mob strike,
and whom jailers strike with bunches of keys, with
revolver butts;

to them and to you
in this place and in every place
safety;

upon Israel and upon all who live
as the sparrows of the streets
under the cornices of the houses of others,
and as rabbits
in the fields of strangers
on the grace of the seasons
and what the gleaners leave in the corners;
you children of the wind--
birds
that feed on the tree of knowledge
in this place and in every place,

to them and to you
a living;

upon Israel
and upon their children and upon all their children of their children
in this place and in every place
to them and to you
life.

As we come to the end of this Rosh Hashanah evening service, we realize that we have completed but the beginning of our travels. For this service marks the starting point of our journey throughout the High Holy Days, an ancient marker that signifies both the ending of the old and the beginning of a new year. We have before us a path to ascend, one that brings us to further scrutiny, self awareness, serenity. It is a time set aside for us, as Jews, to become more aware, alert, and alive to the possibilities that life affords.

We have recalled the past, remembering the happy and sad moments, the good and bad times. We have sung together and been silent together; we have dreamed of the future and what it can be; we are thankful for this time we have shared.

During the remaining High Holy Day Services, may we examine the paths we have walked, so that we can plan a course for the coming year. The many roads we have taken lie behind us and we are at a new moment of possibility. We resolve to make this year's journey one we travel with integrity, self respect, and dignity. This year we will try to choose our paths wisely, responding to the challenge and adventure of life, seeing its possibilities for growth, for friendship, for hope.

May we know blessings those who are near,
May we know blessings those who are far,
May the New Year bring its goodness
To everyone soon, wherever they are.

May we know blessings through the day,
May we know blessings through the night,
May health be for our children
And all things soon be right.

May we know blessings in our comings,
May we know blessings when we depart,
May we begin this New year
With peace and wisdom in each heart.

Let it be. כן יהי

Ken yehi.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Upon Israel - Charles Reznikoff
Lyrics to - This is the opening
by Bonia Shur and Robert Barr
Original Music by Bonia Shur - "This is the Opening"
"Sing With Joy"
"May the Memory"
"Ken Yehi"
Original Music by Jay Gilbert - "Baruch Ha-or"

This service was written by
The Ritual/Life Cycle Events Committee
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The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

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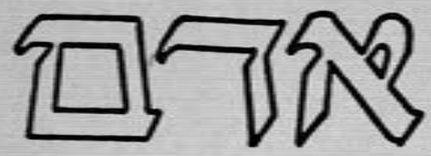
PASSOVER HAGGADAH



Beth Adam
The Cincinnati Congregation
for Humanistic Judaism

WELCOME

We invite you to join us in using this Haggadah to celebrate Passover, one of the most important celebrations of the Jewish calendar. The Seder provides a setting of warmth and unity in which all Jews can rededicate themselves to the ideal of human freedom.

The Seder means "order, a sequence", and the ritual of this holiday requires the use of symbolic foods.

MATZAH	unleavened bread
MAROR	bitter herb (horseradish may be used)
PESAKH	roasted lamb bone
CHAROSET	condiment of apples, wine, cinnamon, nuts
KARPAS	parsley
BAYTZAH	hard-boiled egg
YAYIN	wine

These symbolic foods are displayed on a special Passover plate and set before the leader of the Seder. All foods (except the lamb bone) are both displayed and eaten. Other elements of the Seder include:

holiday candles
a bowl of salt water
a plate with three matzos on it

CUP OF ELIJAH A large cup of wine in honor of Elijah the Prophet

Passover is a time to relax, leisurely retell the story of the Exodus, and enjoy the good food, the wine, and the companionship of those who share the Seder. We welcome you to enjoy this Passover celebration with us.

Written by
The Ritual/Life Cycle Events Committee
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The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

CANDLE LIGHTING

On this night, our companionship and friendship fill the room with warmth, shutting out the chill of loneliness and isolation. The bright flames of the candles will cast a welcoming glow, inviting us to celebrate the Passover festival together.

We rejoice in the celebration of this holiday with family and friends. As we light these candles, we pledge ourselves anew to work for peace and freedom.

(Light candles)

Blessed is the light within the world. בָּרוּךְ הָאוֹר בָּעוֹלָם.
Baruch ha-or ba-olam.

Blessed is the light within each person. בָּרוּךְ הָאוֹר בָּאָדָם.
Baruch ha-or ba-adam.

Blessed is the light of Passover. בָּרוּךְ הָאוֹר בַּפֶּסַח.
Baruch ha-or ba-pe-sach.

The candles' glow dispels the shadows and fills the room with brightness. In the same way, we hope that freedom's light will triumph over the darkness of slavery and oppression. The Seder teaches us that just as we protect these fragile flames to preserve their flickering light, so must we protect the spirit of liberty throughout the world.

How good and how pleasant it is
when people live together as one.

הִנֵּה מַה טּוֹב וּמַה נָּעִים
שֶׁבֶת אַחִים גַּם יָחַד.

Hi-nay ma tov u-ma-na-yim
she-vet a-chim gam ya-chad.

INTRODUCTION

The long history of our people is one of contrasts -- freedom and slavery, pain and joy, power and helplessness. Passover reflects these contrasts. Tonight as we celebrate our freedom, we remember the slavery of our ancestors and realize that many of our people are not yet free.

Each generation changes -- our ideas, our needs, our dreams, even our celebrations. So has Passover changed over many centuries into our present holiday. Our nomadic ancestors gathered for a Spring celebration when the sheep gave birth to their lambs. Theirs was a celebration of the continuation of life. Later, when our ancestors became farmers, they celebrated the arrival of Spring in their own fashion. Eventually, these ancient Spring festivals, together with the Exodus from Egypt, became a new celebration of life and freedom. As each generation gathered around the table to retell the old stories, the symbols took on new meanings. New stories of slavery and liberation, oppression and triumph were added, taking their place next to the old. Tonight we add our own special chapter as we recall our people's past and dream of the future.

(Reader lifts matzah and reads)

הָא לַחְמָא עַנְיָא דִּי אֲכָלוּ
אַבְהָתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְמִצְרָיִם.
כָּל דִכְפִין יֵיתֵי וְיֵכֹל.
כָּל דִצְרִיךְ יֵיתֵי וְיִפְסַח
הָשַׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה
בְּאַרְעָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל. הָשַׁתָּא
עַבְדֵי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה
בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

This is the bread of affliction,
the bread which our ancestors ate in Egypt.
All who are hungry - come and eat.
All who are needy - come share our Passover
dream, a dream which only we can create.

Ha lach-ma an-yah di-a-cha-lu
a-ha-va-ta-nah b'ar-ah d'mitz-ra-yim.
Kol dich-fin yei-tei v'yei-chul,
kol ditz-rich yei-tei v'yif-sach

Ha-sha-tah ha-cha l'sha-nah ha-ba-ah
b'ar-ah d'yis'ra-eil, ha-sha-tah
av-dei, l'sha-nah ha-ba-ah
b'nei chor-rin.

FIRST CUP OF WINE

Beginning our Seder, we drink the first cup of wine to celebrate the bounties of nature, the many joys of life. Wine brings warmth, pleasure, and happiness to our lives.

עוּרִי צָפוֹן וּבוֹאִי תֵימָן
הָפִיחִי גַנִּי יִזְּלוּ בְשָׂמָיו
יָבֹא דוֹדִי לְגַנּוֹ
וְיֹאכַל פְּרִי מִגְדָּנָיו׃

Awake, O North wind,
Come, O South wind.
Blow upon my garden,
that its spices may flow out.
Let my beloved come into the garden,
And eat its delicious fruit.

U-ri tza-fon u-vo-i tei-men
ha-fi-chi ga-ni yi-z'lu v'sa-mav
ya-vo do-di l'ga-no
v'yo-chal p'ri m'ga-dav.

Song of Songs 4:16

As we lift this cup of wine, let us affirm the wonder and beauty of nature, the promise of spring.

בְּרוּכִים הַחַיִּים בָּעוֹלָם

Blessed is the life within the world.
Baruchim ha-cha-yim ba-olam.

בְּרוּכִים הַחַיִּים בָּאָדָם

Blessed is the life within us.
Baruchim ha-cha-yim ba-adam.

KARPAS

Once again life springs forth from the earth. The season of gray silence has ended. Blossoms burst forth in a brilliant array of colors. The songs of birds fill the air. The world is reborn with new strength and hope.

כִּי הִנֵּה הַסְּתָו עָבָר
הַגֶּשֶׁם חָלַף הָלַךְ לוֹ:
הַנְּצָנִים נִרְאוּ בָאָרֶץ
עֵת הַזָּמִיר הִגִּיעַ.

Lo, the winter has passed,
The rain has ended.
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time for singing has come.

Ki hi-nei has-tav a-var
ha-ge-shem cha-laf ha-lach lo.
Ha-nitza-nim ni-ru va-aretz,
eit ha-zamir hig-gi-a

Song of Songs 2:11-12

This Karpas is a symbol of rebirth, of new life. It reminds us of a world at peace, a world we can create.

As we dip the Karpas into the salt water - the tears of our ancestors - let us not forget their struggle. For it is by remembering our past that we gain wisdom to create our future.

(Dip greens into salt water and eat.)

FOUR QUESTIONS

(Youngest at table asks the following questions)

מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלֵּילוֹת?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חָמֵץ וּמַצָּה. הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כֻּלּוֹ מַצָּה:

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׁאָר יְרָקוֹת. הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מָרוֹר:

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מַטְבִּילִין אֲפִילוּ פַּעַם אֶחָת.
הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְעָמִים:

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבִין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין.
הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כֻּלָּנוּ מְסֻבִּין:

Why is this night different from all other nights?

On all other nights, we eat leavened bread or matzah. Why, on this night, do we eat only matzah?

On all other nights, we eat vegetables of all kinds. Why, on this night, do we eat bitter herbs?

On all other nights, we do not dip herbs at all. Why, on this night, do we dip twice?

On all other nights, we eat an ordinary meal. Why, on this night, do we hold a Seder, lingering at the table with stories and songs?

Ma nish-ta-nah ha-lai-lah ha-zeh mi-kol ha-lay-lot?

She-b'chol ha-lay-lot a-nu och-lin cho-meitz u-matzah, ha-lai-lah ha-zeh ku-lo ma-tzah?

She-b'chol ha-lay-lot a-nu och-lin sh'ar y'ra-kot, ha-lai-lah ha-zeh ma-ror?

She-b'chol ha-lay-lot ein a-nu mat-bi-lin a-fi-lu pa-am e-chat, ha-lai-lah ha-zeh sh'tay f'a-min?

She-b'chol ha-lay-lot a-nu och-lin bayn yosh-vin u-vayn m'su-bin, ha-lai-lah ha-zeh ku-la-nu m'su-bin?

THE STORY OF PASSOVER

עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרָיִם. *WE WERE SLAVES OF PHARAOH IN EGYPT.*

Deuteronomy 6:21

Avadim ha-yinu l'faro b'mitz-ra-yim.

So begins the tale of our people's quest for freedom. Legend, myth, and history woven together, create for every generation a memory not to be forgotten.

עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרָיִם. *WE WERE SLAVES OF PHARAOH IN EGYPT.*

The Torah relates a familiar tale of oppression in which a leader with absolute power fears those he does not understand. A new Pharaoh arose "who knew not Joseph" and his services to Egypt. He feared that Joseph's people "were too numerous." This Pharaoh enslaved them and set taskmasters over them, embittering their lives with forced labor.

A young Hebrew boy, though raised by Pharaoh's daughter and spared the taskmaster's whip, could not help but feel the pain of his people's suffering. He was to become their leader, and go before Pharaoh and demand "let my people go." But Pharaoh's heart was unmoved by the pleas, and legend teaches that Ten Plagues were visited upon Pharaoh and his people.

As we recite these plagues, custom teaches that we diminish our wine, the symbol of joy, as we too are diminished by the suffering of others. For even the pain of our enemies lessens each of us. In our struggle for freedom, we risk becoming like the enemy we fight. The drops of wine reminds us that in our anger we must not sacrifice our humanity.

Blood polluted the River Nile, Oh Pharaoh...
Yet you did not let our People Go!

Frog infested your field, Oh Pharaoh...
Yet you did not let our People Go!

Lice brought filth and infection upon your subjects, Oh Pharaoh...
Yet you did not let our People Go!

Gnats and flies swarmed upon your cities, Oh Pharaoh...
Yet you did not let our People Go!

Disease destroyed your herds, Oh Pharaoh...
Yet you did not let our People Go!

Boils and wounds that would not heal weakened your subjects, Oh Pharaoh...
Yet you did not let our People Go!

Hail rained cold upon your lands, Oh Pharaoh...
Yet you did not let our People Go!

Locusts devoured your crops, Oh Pharaoh...
Yet you did not let our People Go!

Darkness brought despair upon your kingdom, Oh Pharaoh...
Yet you did not let our People Go!

Yet Pharaoh didn't listen. The Jews then marked their doorposts and death "passed over" their homes, taking only the children of the people of Pharaoh. Only then did Pharaoh let the people go, and thus Moses led the Children of Israel out of the House of Bondage. But the hostile desert proved stronger than their resolve to be free.

Those who had known only the security of slavery now longed to return to Egypt. They

had forgotten the sting of the whip and the humiliation of slavery. They only remembered the fish, cucumbers, and melons they had eaten and the huts in which they had lived (Numbers 11:4-6). Some turned against Moses, willing to return to slavery rather than face the challenges of freedom.

Consequently, the rabbis explained, the Children of Israel were forced to wander in the desert for forty years until a new generation had arisen. This new generation was reared on challenge and strengthened by freedom. Only then were our people ready to enter a new land and begin a new life.

We carry within us the memories of that ancient event. We are the descendants of that new generation.

Once we were slaves. עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ
Today we are free. עַתָּה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

A-va-dim ha-yi-nu,
atah b'nei chor-rin.

SECOND CUP OF WINE

In every generation all of us בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם
must look upon ourselves as if לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ
we personally had come out of Egypt. הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם.

B'chol dor va-dor cha-yav
a-dam lirot et atzmo
k'ilu hu ya-tza m'mitz-ra-yim.

Pesachim 10:5

We remember the pain of slavery
Our world must not know it again.

We remember the cruelties of injustice
Our world must not know it again.

We remember the hatred and anger of prejudice
Our world must not know it again.

We remember
And we will act.

We will create a world
in which no person
will know the pain of slavery
the cruelties of injustice
the hatred and anger of prejudice.

We remember and we will act.

(Lift cup)

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruninghooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
nor ever again shall they train for war.

וְכִתְּתוּ חַרְבוֹתָם לְאִתִּים
וְחַנִיתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמַזְמֵרוֹת
לֹא יִשָּׂא גוֹי אֶל גוֹי חֶרֶב
וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמוֹת׃

V'chit-tu char-vo-tam l'itim
va-cha-ni-to-tei-hem l'maz-me-rot
Lo yisa goi el goi cherev
lo yil-me-du od mil-cha-ma. Isaiah 2:4

MATZAH

What is the meaning of Matzah?

Matzah is both a reminder of our past and a symbol of our future. It was first used to celebrate the spring festival as our farming ancestors threw out their sour dough and baked unleavened bread to usher in the New Year.

Later, the Matzah became associated with the Exodus from Egypt. As the Torah says, "And they baked unleavened bread from the dough which they brought out of Egypt. There was not sufficient time to allow it to rise, for they were fleeing Egypt and could not wait." In this way, Matzah recalls the slavery of our ancestors, their struggle to be free, their triumph over tyranny.

In our own generation, Matzah has become a symbol of hope, urging us to speak for those who do not yet know freedom. We who are free to celebrate Passover set aside a portion of this Matzah and commit ourselves to the continuing struggle against oppression. We who know freedom must become the voices for those locked within dark prison cells, for

those exiled from their homes, their families, their communities. We who know freedom must give voice to their struggle, become the guardians of their ideas.

Matzah, while reminding us of our ancestors, compels us to pursue the goal of freedom for all people.

(Eat Matzah)

CHAROSET

What is the meaning of Charoset?

The Charoset, like many Passover symbols, is rich with meaning. This mixture of apples, nuts, and wine is a reminder of the bricks and mortar which the Israelites made when they were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. Yet its taste recalls the sweetness of freedom when our ancestors left Egypt as well as the freedom we enjoy as we celebrate this Seder.

(Eat Charoset)

MAROR

What is the meaning of Maror?

Maror is the bitter herb which we taste to help us recall our ancestors' pain. It suggests the bitterness that was so often a part of their lives. We remember not only those who were slaves of the Pharaohs, but Jews throughout the ages who have suffered.

The intensity of suffering cannot be measured in numbers of people. We become numb to the pain of the masses.

As we taste the Maror, we understand that the pain of one soul is as bitter as the pain of many.

(Eat Maror)

HILLEL'S SANDWICH

Eating the bitter herbs and Matzah together follows the practice of Hillel. He made a sandwich of bitter herbs and Matzah to fulfill the Biblical verse that reads, "with Matzah and bitter herbs they shall eat." Numbers 9:11

Another custom teaches that a second "sandwich" was made, combining three symbols of Passover - Matzah, Maror, and Charoset. We eat these together as our ancestors did so many centuries ago.

(Eat Matzah, Maror and Charoset together)

PESACH

What is the meaning of Pesach?

Pesach refers to the shankbone of a lamb. Many years ago, our ancestors were shepherds who depended upon sheep for their survival. In the springtime, when the sheep gave birth to lambs, the shepherds held a special feast to celebrate, for it meant they would not starve. The shankbone is a symbol of that feast.

Even though we live in cities and the changes of seasons have become less significant, we still rejoice upon the arrival of Spring. It is the season when nature is released from the harsh grip of winter and life is renewed.

BAYTZAH

What is the meaning of the Egg?

The Egg is the symbol of life. Just as spring is a time of rebirth in nature, so does Passover commemorate the resurgence of the Jewish people from the winter of slavery into a new life of freedom. The Egg also reminds us of the wholeness of the earth, and of Spring's promise of a universal reawakening.

If we only have our freedom. אִם יֵשׁ לָנוּ חֵרוּתֵנוּ.
Die-yay-nu. דַּיֵּנוּ.

If we only have our Seder. אִם יֵשׁ לָנוּ סִדּוּרֵנוּ.
Die-yay-nu. דַּיֵּנוּ.

If we only have our hope. אִם יֵשׁ לָנוּ תִּקְוָתֵנוּ.
Die-yay-nu. דַּיֵּנוּ.

Eem yash la-nu hay-roo-tay-nu.
Dei-yay-nu.
Eem yash la-nu sim-ha-tay-nu.
Dei-yay-nu.
Eem yash la-nu tik-va-tay-nu.
Dei-yay-nu!

FOUR CHILDREN

The retelling of any story can, over time, cease to have significance. Repetition will transform a vital celebration into an empty ritual. But when the desire to learn and willingness to question is present, the story links us to our past and provides insights for the present.

We have already heard one set of questions from the youngest at our table. But the asking does not end there. For the rabbis have taught that there are four types of personalities, all of whom ask about the Seder in their own way. And to each of them, it is necessary to give an answer.

One child asks, "What is the meaning of the traditions and customs which we share this night? What is the meaning of our celebration?"

To the inquiring mind, we must answer the questions with completeness and honesty. We must relate how our festival has evolved and changed over time and how we remain a vital link in its continuity. We must teach that freedom is not only an historic remembrance, but a challenge for all generations.

Another asks, "What is the meaning of this celebration to you? "

By saying "to you" and not "to me," it is clear that this child feels distant and separate from the community. To this one we must teach the value of community, and why our sages taught, "Al tifrosh min ha- tzibur - do not separate yourself from the community."

For a third child who is unsure of what to ask:

We briefly retell the story of the Exodus. Long ago the Jewish people were slaves in Egypt. A leader named Moses led our people out of Egypt, away from slavery, to live a life of freedom. Tonight Jews all over the world have a Seder meal to tell that story and to think about the importance of being free.

(This is an appropriate place for adults to make sure that the children understand the story and significance of our celebration.)

The fourth child asks, "What is the importance of these rituals? How will our Seder help people who are not free?

To this one we say, "You are right! Our Seder will be of little importance if we only taste the foods, drink the wine, and forget what we have learned. But, when we allow the message of freedom to touch our souls we will not be content until all people live with dignity. Thus our rabbis have taught, 'Study leads to action.' Our Seder has meaning because it leaves us dissatisfied with what is and striving for what can be."

THIRD CUP OF WINE

During the Seder we recall the slavery of our ancestors, those in the Passover story who were released from Egyptian bondage, and those who have been oppressed throughout the ages.

What about ourselves, citizens of a free land, who become victims of our own enslavement? We enslave our minds through bigotry, through ignorance, through intolerance, through laziness, through boredom. Too often we oppress ourselves by our own fears, by our blindness to opportunity, by the narrowness of our vision. We allow inertia to claim us, becoming trapped in the narrow confines of our self-made prisons.

As we lift this cup of wine, let us determine to throw off our individual yokes of oppression.

Let us seek life.
Let us value freedom.

YACHATZ - BREAKING THE MIDDLE MATZAH

In one more way, this night is different "from all other nights." At other festivals we serve two loaves of bread; at the Seder we serve three, substituting Matzah for bread. We break the middle Matzah, replacing the smaller piece between the other two. This reminds us of the poor who must always set food aside to ensure that there will be another meal.

The larger piece of Matzah, the Afikomen, is often hidden. The meal cannot be concluded until it has been found and tasted.

Tradition tells us that it is the larger piece which is hidden, because in life, much is left to be discovered. As we look for answers and understanding within ourselves and within our world, we are profoundly aware that in spite of all we have learned, there is so much more to be uncovered.

••••••• MEAL •••••••

THE NUMBERS GAME

Who knows one?

I know one: One is all the Universe!

Who knows two?

I know two: Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

Who knows three?

I know three: Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

Who knows four?

I know four: Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

Who knows five?

I know five: Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

Who knows six?

I know six: Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

Who knows seven?

I know seven: Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books in the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

Who knows eight?

I know eight: Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

Who knows nine?

I know nine: Nine Festivals. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows ten?

I know ten: Ten Commandments. Nine festivals. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

*Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Simchat Torah, Sukkot, Chanukah, Purim and Shabbat.

Who knows eleven?

I know eleven: Eleven stars in Jacob's dream. Ten Commandments. Nine festivals. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

Who knows twelve?

I know twelve: Twelve tribes of Israel. Eleven stars in Jacob's dream. Ten Commandments. Nine festivals. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

Who knows thirteen?

I know thirteen: Thirteen years to Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Twelve tribes of Israel. Eleven stars in Jacob's dream. Ten Commandments. Nine festivals. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!

ELIJAH'S CUP

Elijah's cup stands at the center of our table. We remember him as the prophet who denounced oppression, challenged injustice, and reached out to those in need. Legend teaches that Elijah never died, and that he will return to usher in a time of peace and freedom. We welcome him by opening our doors in the hope that his vision will soon be realized.

We are hopeful that the door to freedom and human dignity will always be wide open, but we do not forget the many doors which were once closed to our people. Where the door remains shut, let us find the courage to force it open. As we welcome Elijah, we commit ourselves to his dream.

Elijah the prophet.
Elijah of Tishbi.
Elijah of Gilead.

אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא.
אֵלִיָּהוּ הַתִּשְׁבִּי.
אֵלִיָּהוּ הַגִּלְעָדִי.

Ay-li-ya-hu ha-na-vi.
Ay-li-ya-hu ha-tish-bi.
Ay-li-ya-hu ha-gil-a-di.

AFIKOMEN

We conclude our Seder with the sharing of the Afikomen. The "breaking of bread" together forms a bond of fellowship. Sharing this Afikomen is a sign of our friendship with those at this table and our connection with Jews the world over. Just as children traditionally search for the hidden Matzah, so must we continue our search for truth, justice, and freedom for all people.

(Share Afikomen)

FOURTH CUP OF WINE

Lingering after our meal to sing another song, we sip the last glass of wine together. The candles burn low, the evening fades, but we stay on to complete our task, recounting the tale of the Exodus of our ancestors.

Our special moment is ending, leaving us relaxed and at peace. We lift the fourth and final cup of wine in toast to this Seder, anticipating the ones to come.

This year many people of different lands do not know freedom. Next year may all people of every land be free.

הַשְׁתָּא עַבְדֵי.
לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה
בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

Ha-sha-ta av-dey.
L'shana ha-bah
b'ney chor-rin.

CONCLUSION

Passover is the Festival of Life.

Passover is the Festival of Freedom.

Passover is the Festival of Hope.

L'shana Ha-ba, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה

In the year to come --

May Jerusalem know peace.

L'shana Ha-ba. לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה

In the year to come --

May the world know peace.

L'shana Ha-ba. לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה

In the year to come --

May all people know freedom.

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© Contents copyright. Republication only by previous arrangement.
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By Caren Benjamin
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The final vote, 115 against admittance, 13 for and 4 abstentions, did not come as much of a surprise to Rabbi Eric Yoffie, vice president of the 860-congregation UAHC.

Yoffie had expected the vote to be closer, but he also thought the congregation would "make a better case, show greater flexibility to their approach."

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'A Fundamental Rejection Of God'

Rather than questioning the nature of God, congregation members "systematically reject" all notions of God and "then said you could question it," Yoffie said.

The clincher for him was a story presented by the congregation in which a 13-year-old girl wanted to say the Shema -- Judaism's touchstone prayer of God's oneness -- at her bat mitzvah and was talked out of it after discussion with the rabbi. "Their starting point is not a questioning but a fundamental rejection of God," Yoffie said.

Speaking in favor of the application, Beth Adam's Rabbi Robert Barr said that "Beth Adam does not seek to stifle its members in their religious quest. Rather, we seek to provide support and encouragement for their religious growth."

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Reform Judaism traditionally has accepted

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"People's search for God has always been welcome in Reform Judaism," said Merians. "As a result, many Reform Jews feel very strongly about their own different interpretation of God. But the fact that Judaism, and Reform Judaism has always been God-centered has been reaffirmed by this debate."

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Still, he expressed some discomfort with the idea of opening the movement up to a congregation that "says we will not say the Shema when Jews have died for the right to say it."

No one in the debate, however, "questioned whether they (Beth Adam members) were Jews or a part of the Jewish community," Yoffie said. Rather, the focus was on the role of congregations as opposed to individuals.

"An institution like a congregation has to allow for the search for God in its liturgy," Merians said. "There has to be a chance for congregants to reach for God through prayer together with the rest of the members of the congregation."

The end result, Yoffie said, "was an affirmation by our leadership that God is fundamental to who we are and that belief in God is the foundation in which our movement exists and must be built.

"Institutions have to begin with a commitment of faith. Individuals can accept it or not, but the institutions do not have that freedom," said Yoffie.

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UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

May 25, 1994

Ms. Sybil Schwartz
3662 Forbes Trail Drive
Murrysville, PA 15668

Dear Ms. Schwartz:

Thank you very much for your very thoughtful letter and essay concerning the issue of the Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. I appreciate your thoughts and concerns and I am distributing your letter to several of the officers of the Union.

Sincerely yours,

Melvin Merians

Melvin Merians

MM:da

cc: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
Rabbi Daniel B. Syme
Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

Sybil Schwartz

3662 Forbes Trail Drive

Murrysville, PA. 15668

(412)327-3715

Dear Mr. Merians:

Two years ago when the issue of a congregation with a humanistic perspective indicated their interest in becoming associated with the Reform Movement, I was mystified as to reasons their group was seeking affiliation with the UAHC. This bewilderment prompted me to visit their congregation in Ohio during a business trip, meet with their Rabbi and delve into their philosophy and liturgy.

I found the people of Beth Adam and the Rabbi to be warm, caring individuals, whose philosophic system reflect their empathy for the Jewish people, and their commitment to service and a strong moral and ethical code.

However, I continued to be perplexed, and continue to be so, as to the rationale for why this congregation covets an affiliation with the UAHC, as it was my understanding that UAHC's roots are implanted in a religious and spiritual foundation. Consequently, two years ago I wrote a letter-essay to the UAHC Board, discussing, as it seemed to me, the greater issues that are confronting the Reform Movement.

This letter was never mailed, as the issue became dormant. However, recently I was informed that Beth Adam was indeed seeking affiliation with the UAHC; this prompted me to search through my computer disks to rediscover the enclosed essay.

In this paper, I attempted to solidify my thoughts regarding the significance of the application by the Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism to become affiliated with the Reform Movement. I realize my paper lacks scholarly credentials, however, it does speak from the heart of one who is affiliated with a Reform Congregation, Temple David in Monroeville, Pennsylvania. The essence of this paper strives to underscore that- *separating the Reform Movement from its spiritual nucleus is akin to disconnecting the human heart from a portion of its blood vessels-the heart may beat temporarily of its own accord, but it can't nourish and sustain life.*

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Sybil Schwartz

Sybil Schwartz

Today, the Reform Movement confronts a challenge to its Jewish identity as never before, " How shall we respond to the application of a Humanistic Congregation seeking membership in the Reform Movement? Shall the Reform Movement continue to define itself as a Jewish movement rooted in a religious foundation?"

TO ATTEMPT TO EVEN RESPOND TO THIS QUERY, I FOUND MYSELF ASKING THREE QUESTIONS:

How can an ant can carry a load far too heavy for its tiny body?

How the human being can become so in awe of his or her own powers that they can come to believe they can carry the whole load alone?

How Judaism can continue to respond to the call "Where art thou?", if the men and women hide from God behind the shrouds of human reason and experience?

Human reason and experience were Plato's and Aristotle's responses to the theological dimension of mortal existence. When Plato called for an answer to "What is man?", he responded in 'search of himself every moment of his existence'". In this context, there is no need to respond to the cry to "Where art thou?" For one is in a vacuum, alone!

Today, you the members of the UAHC's Board of Trustees are responding to the ageless Jewish query, "Where art thou?". Will you stand on the brim, look down and contend the world is void of meaning except as defined by man, or will you stand on the precipice and look forward to answer "Here I am-I am Your Partner."

From the beginning our leaders have sought to keep Judaism a strong vibrant force with in each of our lives, and with in the world. These founding mothers and fathers have been visionaries, responding with devotion to a people and flexibility to a rapidly changing tumultuous world. Accordingly, our movement has adapted, accommodated and accorded to the needs of its people.

Our Movement has propagated the concept that Jewish obligation sprouts from the informed will of its participants. Accordingly, we have fostered diversity, openness, questions and modifications. We have been on the forefront of issues that enable our people to be at home in their religion and in the greater society.

But our changes have always been in the realm of fostering the commitment of our people to a more just society, to assuming greater personal and communal accountability, to good deeds, to each other, to our mutual survival and to God. Our platforms, Pittsburgh, Columbus, and the Centenary Perspective have always affirmed that our foundation as Reform Jews is one that is forever bonded with the people Israel, Torah and God.

This God we speak of, can never truly been described, for we have acknowledged that each person in their own hour and place can chose to grapple with the eternal mystery of spirituality and holiness. We have acknowledged that prayer is also a significant component of our relationship with God. Prayer has allowed us the opportunity to monitor our arrogance, nurture our humanity, embrace our humility, and recognize that a greater force than ourselves, or any man or woman, is in some way responsible for the world in which we reside.

The humanistic congregation that approaches our movement for membership is no doubt comprised of people whose hearts embellish the Jewish commitment to deeds, ethics, continuity, and peace. They probably crave matzo balls, chicken soup and kugel. But their foundation is man centered, rather than implying a "partnership or relationship" exists between man and God.

Within their frame of reference, "prayer is not essential for declaring one's membership with the Jewish people". Their liturgy omits the Kiddush, Shema, Ve'ahavita or Aleinu. Their brochure entitled, "A Concept of God and A Statement on Liturgy " asserts that membership and identity in the Jewish community is attained "through public acts or statements of declaring commitment to the Jewish people. One's Jewish identity, rights and responsibilities arise out of the human experience".

As the largest religious Jewish organization in the world, the question of how we define our ourselves for today and tomorrow, is paramount. Will we as a Community of Jewish people don a new coat, one that accords man center stage and abdicates a relationship between the Jewish people and God, or will we continue to grapple with the mystery of God and our own spirituality?

Your wise counsel and judgment can affirm the dynamic partnership that dawned at Sinai; that each one of us through commitment to Torah can elevate ourselves through study and worthy deeds toward a relationship with God, thereby becoming living sustainers of the Covenant in our time. By affirming the centrality of God and prayer, we can respond to the question of an ancient sage, " Why, of all the body's parts, the ear was selected to bear the sign of permanent bondage that alone establishes full slavery? The ear which has heard at the foot of Mount Sinai the words: "For the children of Israel are mine servants and not the servants of servants."

Each generation is always challenged with free choices of either being the servant of God, and truly free to exercise our free will, or the servant of man and a slave. The Reform Movement, from its conception, has empowered men and women to wrestle with their conscience, spirituality and choices.

Even as the Movement continually asserted its autonomy and re-examined age old Jewish traditions, the roots of its existence remained firmly planted in cultivating a partnership that links a people to its God. Today, each who has been entrusted by a position of leadership on the UAHC's Board of Trustees must chose whether their legacy to future generations will continue to nurture, sustain and uphold that the "Torah results from the relationship between God and the Jewish people".

How will each of you respond to the three questions. Like so many, will you just wonder in amazement at the heavy load the ant most carry through the ages? Will you view in bewilderment how any man or woman can believe he or she can carry the load alone? Finally, will you respond with affirmation on the brink of the 21st century to the question "Where art thou?" with the answer "Here I am-I am Your Partner Who Will Help Carry Our Load".

Sybil Roslyn Schwartz
May, 94

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA
PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
DORAL EXECUTIVE OFFICE PARK
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SOUTHEAST COUNCIL
Rabbi Frank N. Sundheim
Regional Director

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

June 1, 1992

Rabbi Sheldon Harr
Temple Kol Ami
8200 Peters Road
Plantation, Florida 33324-3201

Dear Shelly:

In the interest of continuing the dialogue that you started in your letter to Stanley Loeb, I would like to make some very personal comments to you. These are not the "official" words of a regional director, although I would be the first to admit that sometimes the line between my own thinking and the interests of the UAHC can become blurred. However, as you know from my participation in the dialogue with David Hachen at SEACCAR, I do have some strong opinions, also, I provided there a copy of some correspondence that I had been having for several years on the matter.

As a regional director, one of my main duties is new congregational development. Therefore, I may have a tendency to wish to include when possible. Given that possibility, let me just summarize a few points that I made at SEACCAR with which I personally continue to associate my thinking.

1) Every congregation seeking UAHC membership must state unequivocally that it will follow the constitution of the UAHC. As we know, that constitution does refer to God, even though the wording "benign providence" is, I believe we would both agree, verbal overkill. It is up to the congregation to state whether or not the constitution of the UAHC is acceptable. I would, however, further note, that this part of the preamble which is more Haggadah than Halacha. Nonetheless, I would take that statement seriously.

2) You are absolutely correct that we all interpret God in different ways. Many of us would flunk the test of "benign providence" if it were applied literally. Openness in these interpretations is an absolute for Reform Judaism.

3) I am still trying to get a copy of the constitution of the Cincinnati congregation. At SEACCAR we were told that they have put into their constitution the idea that the term God may not be utilized in prayer. This would seem to exclude any person who might wish to be a member and who had a different type of belief concerning God. Potentially, I see this to be the most important factor concerning their possible eligibility for membership. To give an analogy, we do not have any gay and lesbian congregations. Rather we have UAHC congregations with an outreach to the gay and lesbian community. If a "straight" wishes to join one of these congregations that person is welcome.

4) I could, therefore, accept a congregation that does not include the idea of God in its own constitution. I could not accept constitutional exclusion of God. To me, the two main criteria for membership would be:

a) Does the congregation state that it accepts the UAHC Constitution (however it chooses to interpret it) and

b) Does the constitution of the congregation exclude either from membership or from the possibility of a prayer service mention of God? Please note that if a congregation chooses to utilize a service without the mention of God, I have no problem. It is the constitutional exclusions that concern me.

If the items mentioned in this last paragraph (#4) were handled satisfaaactorily, I personally would not wish to exclude this congregation from the UAHC.

A final thought: we are preparing our biennial program and tentatively we have scheduled as part of our Saturday afternoon program, a "town meeting" or "debate" or whatever you want to call it on the subject of humanistic congregations. I would like to use this letter to invite you officially to take the position of opposition to the inclusion of the congregation during this session. Please let me know if you can accept.

Shelly, what a joy it is to share thoughts by correspondence on matters of Jewish content and ideology. It certainly is a change from most of the correspondence I engage in. I suspect that we have not heard the last from each other on the subject.

B'shalom,

Frank

Frank Sundheim

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler
Jan Epstein
Sam Steen
Arthur Grant
Rabbi Allen Kaplan
Stanley Loeb

BETH ADAM
JUDAISM WITH A
HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

March 17, 1992

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021-7064

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

Thank you for meeting with Jim Cummins and me to discuss Congregation Beth Adam's application to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. While I found your assessment of Beth Adam's chances for acceptance rather sobering, I appreciated your candor. I hope our conversation provided you with further insights into the philosophy of the congregation and our reason for making an application. I believe that many individuals do not understand the nature of Beth Adam and reject it not for what it is, but rather for what they think it is.

As you requested, I have enclosed a variety of materials created and published by Congregation Beth Adam. The materials include liturgical pieces, statements of philosophy, by-laws (which will be further amended at our next annual meeting), our Strategic Plan, and a copy of my Erev Rosh Hashanah sermon in which I addressed my reasons for seeking affiliation. I believe these materials will provide you even greater insight into the nature of our congregation. If I can provide you with other materials, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I also want to thank you for treating Jim and me to lunch. I look forward to speaking with you again.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Barr
Rabbi

RBB/mc

Will — why not make our appointment with them a Friendship upon the Board meeting. How would you & Jim agree? It's just a good idea. Bob

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

1720 Section Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45237
(513) 396-7730

Established 1980

MEMORANDUM

COPY

February 10, **1994**

FROM: **Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler**

TO: **Rabbi Daniel B. Syme**

BCC: MELVIN MERIANS

I have your memo of February 7th in which you relay Bob Chaiken's and Nelson Cohen's request that "the Board must know that Beth Adam was rejected several times by the local and regional bodies." I don't think it is appropriate that their letter be included in the packet which we send out for Mel. Don't forget that the regional negative recommendation is to be considered by the National New Congregations Committee on Friday before our discussion and such a letter from the regions might be seen as preempting the work of the National Committee. I think that we ought to send out the items which you suggest in your February 7th memo, that is to say, the Plaut Responsum, the Mihaly Responsum and the covering letter from Mel which will frame the issue, and in this letter, of course, Mel can mention the fact that this matter has been considered by the Local Committee, by the Regional Committee and is now being considered by the National Committee which will bring its report to us. Including a letter from the Region at this point would be seen as preempting the work of the National New Congregations Committee.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations
SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Rabbi Daniel B. Syme DATE: February 7, 1994

TO: Mr. Melvin Merians, Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

I spoke with Bob Chaiken and Nelson Cohen regarding the Beth Adam debate in June.

They feel very strongly that the Board must know that Beth Adam was rejected several times by the local and regional bodies.

We discussed circulation of a letter from the region, providing a chronology of events leading up to the meeting. I recommend that such a letter be included in the Board packet, along with:

1. Plaut Responsum
2. Mihaly Responsum
3. Cover Letter Framing The Issue

I don't think we need Cronin's letter from region. Mel's letter can refer to it in action, in case of

RABBI DAVID POLISH
BETH EMET THE FREE SYNAGOGUE

2025 SHERMAN AVENUE
APT. #303
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS
60201

Rabbi Alexander Shindler
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Shalom, Alex,

The late Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia once said, "When I make a mistake, it's a beaut."

My earlier support for the "secular" Cincinnati Congregation's efforts for admission to the UAHC was such a "beaut." It contradicts everything in Jewish life that I stand for.

The Congregation would wish to assert its claim to its integrity by simultaneously undermining the integrity of the Reform Movement at a time when American Jewry is in danger of unraveling.

I relent. I repent. I recant.

All the best.

Shalom,

RABBI DAVID POLISH

DP:kt

MEMORANDUM

February 5, 1993

FROM: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO: Rabbi Alan D. Bregman - Great Lks Council

Thanks for sending me a copy of the letter you received from the 7th grade class of Temple Israel in Minneapolis. It is exceedingly instructive.

From the looks of it, they are getting the right kind of education.

I hope that all is well with you.

Fondly.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations
SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

cc: MELVIN MERIANS

Temple Israel

2324 Emerson Avenue South • Minneapolis • Minnesota • 55405 • (612) 377-8680

January 8, 1993

Dear Rabbi Bregman,

The following are responses by the 7th grade "Haskalah" class of Temple Israel, in Minneapolis, to the question of inclusion or exclusion of the humanist congregation to the U.A.H.C. We held a mini-debate on this issue and asked the kids to make a decision.

Statements For Inclusion

Dear UAHC,

1. We are 7th graders from Temple Israel in Minneapolis, MN. We believe that the Humanist Congregation should be admitted to the UAHC. We don't think that belief in God is required for being a reform Jew. This congregation studies Hebrew, seeks Jewish learning, celebrates holidays, and prays. The fact that they don't believe in God is irrelevant. If Reform Judaism believes in change, why don't we accept this congregations position which has new ideas in place of the traditional belief in God.

---

2. They do the rituals, but don't believe in God. Many Reform Jews already don't believe in God.
You can't say you can't play.
The Humanists are helping to expand the Reform Movement.
Community and time is the most important part of preserving Judaism.

Statements Against Inclusion

Dear UAHC,

1. We believe that the congregation that doesn't believe in God should not be admitted to the UAHC. If they don't believe in God, how can they be Jewish? The basis of Judaism is believing in God and praising God. Without believing in God, what would the Torah mean? If they just believe in the values of the Torah, they might as well be a different religion. The definition of a religion is believing in a god, so this congregation is not a religion and therefor, should not be admitted to the UAHC.

---

2. We are against the synagogue because we don't understand what they are going to pray for besides God. We also don't understand how they can be Jewish and not have someone or something to believe in.

---

3. We feel that this synagogue in Cincinnati, that doesn't believe in God, should not be given membership in the UAHC because:
   a. You can't be a Reform Jew if you don't believe in God.
   b. It would split the Reform Movement.
   c. You couldn't pray, who would you pray to?

---

4. Reform Judaism believes in God, humanists don't.

   Reform Judaism and Humanist Judaism are different things and shouldn't be allowed to be mixed.

   If we allow the humanists, they will change things too much.

   The humanists are Jews, but not Reform Jews.

   Our tradition is fundamentally based on a belief in God. What would Jewish history be without God.

   Judaism is based on one God. When Abraham became Jewish, he made a covenant with God.

---

5. We are not for the synagogue, but we think that a place for Jewish people to gather is good, because there are other things that make up Judaism besides God, like mitzvot. But we <u>don't</u> think a sanctuary is necessary.

We hope these statements can be used either by you or the Union. In either case, we would really appreciate a written response, which we will share with our students.

Thank you,

Tom Dikel
7th Grade Haskalah Coordinator for the 7th Grade Haskalah Staff

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA
PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
100 WEST MONROE STREET, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60603-1902 (312) 782-1477 FAX# (312) 782-1642

GREAT LAKES REGION
Rabbi Alan D. Bregman
Director

Gerard W. Kaye
Director of Camping & Youth Activities
Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute

Mimi Dunitz
Assistant Regional Director

February 1, 1993

7th Grade Haskalah Class
c/o Tom Dikel
Temple Israel
2324 Emerson Ave. South
Minneapolis, Minn. 55405

Dear Class Members,

Thank you very much for your letter with regard to the membership of a humanist congregation in the UAHC. Let me first say how impressed I am with your concern and clarity of thought. Sometimes people act in a very emotional way. That is not particularly helpful. You have taken the time to think out a position based on Jewish religious values and theology.

Both of your statements, pro and con, reflect the larger debate going on in the Movement right now. In some ways, the debate is between competing positive, Jewish values. This is what makes it so difficult.

With your assumed permission, I am sending your letter on to Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the UAHC. I know that he will be interested in your contribution and more importantly, refer it to the appropriate committees dealing with this issue.

If you will permit me a personal reaction. There is room for Jews who define themselves as humanist Jews. What they have to say can and should be taken seriously. However, there is a danger to a Movement or organization trying to be all things to all people. Sometimes, we end up being very little to a few people. My own personal view finds me to be more sympathetic with those who are against. But it is by no means a clear cut issue.

Again, thank you for the time and concern. This only bodes well for our future.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Alan Bregman

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

November 25, 1992
29 Heshvan 5753

James A. Salinger
James Salinger & Associates
2601 Section Road
Cincinnati, OH 45222

Dear Mr. Salinger:

I hope you will forgive me if I avoid a direct answer to the question which you pose. It is not that I am in a "tenuous" position regarding the matter of Beth Adam's application for membership in the Union. I have never been one to avoid taking a stance and can show many a lump for the brick bats thrown at me because of it.

In this instance, I actually encouraged the debate which, from the point of view of our nationwide religious community, I consider something more than just a "squabble." Allow me to refer you to the pertinent paragraphs on pages 8 and 9 of my Baltimore Biennial address in which I state my reasons for encouraging this debate. In other words, I want this debate. I deem it important for our inner wellbeing. But herein is also my perplexity, for I have learned that when I state my own views too soon, the debate is usually foreclosed.

I made this quite clear to Rabbi Barr and Jim Cummings when I met with them now nearly a half year ago. I told them that, in a sense, I was "exploiting" them in urging them to make their application; that I certainly could not guarantee its acceptance; that I even deemed this acceptance unlikely.

Since that time, the issue has been discussed in two arenas and I was very much impressed by the level of discussion which ensued which fully fulfilled my hopes on that score. Indeed, the vote in the second meeting, that is to say, at the more recent Midwest Biennial, was much closer than I had intuitively surmised.

Obviously, I will participate in the debate when it reaches the national Board, but even here, not at the very beginning, but rather toward the end of the debate.

And so I really don't know how to counsel you in your effort to counsel the congregation. My own feeling is that this debate, no matter what its result, will not dishonor Beth Adam in any sense of the term. Quite the contrary! Thus far, at least, those who have heard the presentations and arguments, so well conceived and articulated, have learned to understand the approach of your congregation, and in consequence respect its integrity all the more.

With every good wish, I am

Cordially,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Rabbi Barr

JAMES SALINGER & ASSOCIATES

Financial Service

REGISTERED INVESTMENT ADVISER

2601 SECTION ROAD
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45222
(513) 531-3106

November 16, 1992

Dear, Rabbi Schindler,

As a former lay leader of Rockdale Temple and now as an enthusiastic member of Beth Adam, I am very pleased that you came to the U.A.H.C. regional meeting to hear the discussion regarding Beth Adam's application for membership in the Union.

I believe that Beth Adam is aiming to create a better future for our children and our community. If our Reform leaders recognize that the mission of Beth Adam in all respects conforms to Reform history and principle, I would support our continuing quest for U.A.H.C. membership. Otherwise, I would urge our Rabbi and members to move on to more fruitful pursuits.

In these times when issues such as bigotry, fundamentalism, choice, economic hardship and Israel---to name some of our Jewish concerns---, wouldn't our valuable time and efforts be better used to focus on these problems than on an internal squabble about whether or not Beth Adam qualifies for Union membership?

I have attended services regularly during the last thirty five years. More than any others, those at Beth Adam have provided me with more spiritual enrichment, inspiration and a better understanding of Torah, Jewish tradition and history.

Be assured that I realize the tenuous position on this matter in which you find yourself. However if you are opposed to our membership in the Union, I hope that you will express yourself as we would indeed be grateful for your forthrightness.

With best wishes,

James A. Salinger

James A. Salinger

cc: Rabbi Barr

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MELANIE S. CORWIN

TELEPHONE (513) 381-2121
TELECOPIER (513) 381-2125

*RETIRED

FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL COVERSHEET

DATE: November 4, 1992

NO. OF PAGES (Including Coversheet): 3

TO: RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

COMPANY:

FAX NO.: 212-570-0895

FROM: JIM CUMMINS

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Jim
Nice move
from his end.
Do Barb + wee
Cade Bob
he'll Call
You

NOTE: IF THERE ARE ANY QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS WITH THIS TRANSMISSION, NOTIFY US AT (513) 381-2121.

BETH ADAM
JUDAISM WITH A
HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

November 2, 1992

Mr. Robert Chaiken
Aronowitz, Chaiken & Hardesty
312 Walnut Street
P. O. Box 5367
Cincinnati, Ohio 45201-5367

Dear Bob,

Jim Cummins has relayed the substance of your discussion of October 29, 1992 regarding the meeting of the UAHC Regional Board on Friday, November 13, 1992. We are grateful for your efforts in providing our Congregation with an opportunity to present its points of view on Congregation Beth Adam's application to join the UAHC.

We have been told that one or more of the local Cincinnati congregations have suggested Dr. Michael Meyer as a resource to your Board, to speak during the 30 minutes allocated to the point of view in opposition to our application as previously expressed by Rabbi Kamrass.

We would request that you invite Rabbi Gary Zola as an additional resource to your Board to explain a point of view favorable to our Congregation's application. To that extent we will yield part of the 30 minutes otherwise allotted to our presentation so that your Board can hear from Rabbi Zola.

We would appreciate it if you would send a letter of invitation to Rabbi Zola at HUC indicating the time when he should be prepared to make his presentation.

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

1720 Section Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45237
(513) 396-7730

Thank you for your continued efforts. If you have any questions, or need any further information please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Pat Rosenberg
President

PR/dg

ALLAN B. GOLDMAN

347 Conway Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90024
(310) 788-4520

August 27, 1992

Melvin S. Merians, Chairman
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
NYC, NY 10021

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
NYC, NY 10021

Re: Application of Beth Adam Congregation

Dear Mel and Alex:

I received the July 26, 1992 Transcript of Hearing yesterday and read it last night.

I think that you should authorize Bob Chaiken to give a copy to Beth Adam and a copy to Rabbi Kamrass. They can distribute it as they see fit, since I don't think you should place any strictures on its distribution.

I have the following comments for your eyes only:

1. At Page 74 Bob Chaiken promised Beth Adam that he would make available the essence of Rabbi Kamrass' remarks.

2. It was ill-advised of Nelson Cohen and especially of Rabbi Pinsky to make comments to the Cincinnati Reform group about the presentation that Beth Adam made, considering that the Cincinnati Reform group did not want Beth Adam present when they spoke. I refer particularly to Page 119, where Nelson said, "I listened to them and I found that it was just as incredible that they wanted to shift that God problem under the table" and where Rabbi Pinsky said, "It was almost a certain degree of **arrogance** that said, well, you people are not really qualified to debate theology with our principles." Those were remarks that could be made in Executive Session of the Committee. Ironically, neither Nelson nor Pinsky asked the right questions of the Beth Adam group, so that they did not develop the issues as they should. I hope that Rabbi Pinsky has proven better as a Regional Director than he shows up in this Transcript and that my strong feelings that he should not have been named a Regional Director were "misguided."

3. At Page 120 Rabbi Kamrass says that the UAHC constitution is a "poorly written document" and Nelson Cohen says

that it contains "terrible language." In the words of our modern sages: **NOT**. Although I have previously memorialized to you areas where I think it can be improved when the time is ripe, I believe it is a well-written document. In 1946 the creators of the document purposely referred in the preamble to "benign Providence" rather than to "God", because we are dealing with "congregations . . . attached to Judaism and their adherence to its liberal interpretation." The Day Special Committee on UAHC Constitution, By-laws and Structure, during its deliberations from 1975 to 1979 saw no reason to change this Preamble (and we had HUC-JIR representatives on that Committee).

4. As you know I have vacillated back and forth on whether Beth Adam should be admitted. My mind remains open on that issue. However, I must say that the sophistry and patent weakness of Rabbi Kamrass' theological argument does not serve the cause of those who oppose admission. He and apparently his Cincinnati Reform rabbinic colleagues are attempting to define Beth Adam as a congregation that limits freedom by **prohibiting** the use of the word "God" and the recital of the S'hma. I did not read the Beth Adam representatives as saying that there were such prohibitions. This points up what I think was a structural mistake in the hearing: Kamrass et al should have been present when Barr et al spoke and should have been permitted to ask questions then, and Barr et al should have been present when Kamrass et al spoke and should have been permitted to ask questions then. Beth Adam could have been confronted with the question: do you or do you not announce and/or enforce such prohibitions? As it stands now, the argument that Kamrass stated as the major one may fall very easily, if Beth Adam responds, "nonsense, we have no such prohibitions, and in fact individuals do speak the name of God in our sanctuary and do recite the S'hma."

5. If Beth Adam concedes that there are such prohibitions, then I think it becomes an easy decision: they should not be admitted. On the other hand, if there are no such prohibitions **and** the name of God is used by "individuals", how can we,protectees of "benign Providence", exclude the congregation from our midst?

6. Therefore, I suggest that you recommend to Bob Chaiken and Rabbi Pinsky that they seek a written statement from Beth Adam regarding (1) Whether the name of God and the S'hma are prohibited from mention or recital in their services, (2) Whether there are any members of the congregation who do mention the name of God and/or recite the S'hma during services, (3) the name and phone number of such members so that Midwest Council Board members can call and question them, etc. If Allan Goldman is a member, and he is called to the Bima, can he vocally recite the S'hma or say

"Praise be to God?" If Mel Merians, Chairman of the UAHC, is invited to speak to the Congregation, can he do these things as part of his address? If the answer to these questions is "Yes", is it the policy of the congregation to **discourage** these activities?

7. I also think that the Midwest Council should make it clear to Beth Adam, in writing, that even if at the end of this process the UAHC Board of Trustees votes to admit Beth Adam to the UAHC, the UAHC cannot require the Cincinnati Reform congregations to include Beth Adam or its youth in the Reform High School. I would seek a written commitment from Beth Adam that it has applied for UAHC membership knowing that if admitted it still may not become part of that High School but nevertheless membership in the UAHC is more important to it than obtaining any such rights. This will diffuse the issue of whether the "only" reason for this UAHC membership application is to gain admittance to the high school. In addition, it will avoid a later claim that the UAHC permitted the application to proceed under false pretenses (a later claim that the UAHC "should have known" that the high school rights were most important to Beth Adam and that Beth Adam thought at all times that the UAHC could "order" the Cincinnati congregations to include Beth Adam in the high school after it was admitted to the UAHC). Again, because neither side was present when the other side spoke, the high school issue was not discussed with the Beth Adam representatives.

Answered by phone

Aronowitz, Chaiken & Hardesty *Certified Public Accountants*

312 Walnut Street, P.O. Box 5367, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201-5367 • (513) 621-8300 • Fax (513) 621-8345

July 23, 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

RE: Beth Adam Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

Dear Alex:

We had an executive committee meeting yesterday here in Cincinnati, and Jimmy Simon advised us that his most recent conversation with Rabbi Robert Barr indicated that the Congregation will probably be making formal application for membership in the UAHC.

All of those in the attendance at the executive committee meeting felt it would be very appropriate to follow your suggestion of my appointing a task force to deal with the very sensitive theological issue of Beth Adam's admission to the UAHC.

In that regard, I would welcome from you any thoughts and comments that you might have, including recommendation for an appropriate person to chair such a task force, as well as your thoughts on the composition, size, qualifications for participation on such a task force.

I recall your suggestion in our most recent conversation about this matter that the discussion and debate be as broad-based as possible. However, I am wondering whether such a recommendation can be implemented in dealing with a task force to discuss the very deep and emotional issues that will arise.

I thank you for your help in this matter.

Kindest, personal regards.

Sincerely,

ARONOWITZ, CHAIKEN & HARDESTY

Bob

Robert Chaiken

/kk

cc: Rabbi James L. Simon

Beth Adam
The Cincinnati Congregation
for Humanistic Judaism

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

Dear Colleagues, Board Members, Friends, and Concerned Others:

It is with a great deal of pleasure that Congregation Beth Adam has published and distributes the enclosed responsum by Professor Eugene Mihaly. We believe that this responsum is important for all who are interested in Reform Judaism. Dr. Mihaly examines issues which are central to the direction of the Reform Movement and in doing so addresses Congregation Beth Adam's membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Congregation Beth Adam's inquiries to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations have also resulted in a responsum being written by the Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut - Chair. Dr. Mihaly in his work refers to and discusses this document. Rabbi Plaut's responsum is available from the office of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Though this document is being distributed by Congregation Beth Adam, it should be noted that individuals not affiliated with the congregation have contributed their financial support to this project. Those supporting this publication believe that it is important to wrestle with the essential question of what Reform Judaism will become as we enter the new millennium. It is my hope, and that of all those associated with this publication, that this responsum will be one more step in the strengthening of Reform Judaism.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Barr
Rabbi

RBB/jr
Enclosure

1720 Section Road, Suite 107, Cincinnati, Ohio 45237
(513) 396-7730

קהילה קדושה רודף שלום
Congregation Rodeph Shalom
96 Fredmir Boulevard • Dollard des Ormeaux, Québec H9A 2R3 • Telephone 626-2173
Rabbi Larry Kaplan

re: Humanist file

May 14, 1991

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst St.
Toronto, Ontario
M5P 3K9

Dear Gunther:

I pray all is well with you and yours. I've been reading in the National Jewish Post and Opinion reference the possible application for membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations of the Cincinnati Jewish Humanist Congregation, Beth Adam. I read with interest the reports as found in the periodical of your response to a question(s) posed by the leadership of the Union to you as Chair of Responsa Committee of the CCAR.

I have significant problems with your response as reported. I'm not unaware of the delicate path we tread between the Scylla of Authority and Charybdis of Hefkerut. May I ask a question? Do we have member Congregations of the Union that could be classed as Reconstructionist? Don't we, in fact, accept such congregations as bona fide Jewish congregations? And, don't they, in fact, hold to 'sectarian' views on Judaism? The question then becomes for me, whether we are aiming for a more inclusive frame for the Union or one which is of a more limited nature.

Let me pursue this just a bit further. If we are going to use the criteria you were reported to offer reference a congregation applying for membership in the Union, then what about application for membership in the C.C.A.R., and what about accepting as students to the College-Institute those who hold a humanist, atheist or agnostic theological position upon application to HUC-JIR or who choose it while a student in our Rabbinic School?

My suspicion is that the term 'Humanist' is the source of the difficulty. I further suspect if they had called themselves a 'Polydox' Jewish congregation, it would not have elicited the same response. A lack of enthusiasm perchance, but not a suggested rejection (as reported).

In order that my position be 'clear', I see myself as a theist. While my understanding of what that means has changed through the years, "God" remains a central belief of my Judaism. I also acknowledge that my beliefs are personal to me using the God language of the Faith of Israel. Therefore, anyone who uses the Faith language of Israel, can, for me, be properly called Jewish. I'm not into genetic Judaism. Karl Marx for me was a Christian as was Heine. I believe it is imperative that we accept the choices people make to leave Judaism as we accept people who choose Judaism.

The question then is it appropriate to include the 'God-Talk' of Jewish Humanist Congregations within the parameters of Jewish God-Talk. I believe there is enough evidence in the Midrash, which for me is the area where we can explore the possibilities of Jewish God-Talk not the Halacha, to justify our inclusion of such congregations within the parameter of Judaism.

I have the sense that another element in this discussion is a covert agenda item, to wit: What will the Conservative and Orthodox think and believe about Reform and how will this impact the complex of interactions within the American/Canadian Jewish community and the world Jewish community? I concluded a long time ago that one cannot satisfy the unsatisfiable, and I make no attempt to do so. I have chosen for myself the frame of "What is appropriate" to this (or whatever) set of circumstances as my guiding principle. This may include the considerations others have, without permitting them to be determinative. I refuse to be a hostage to anyone. It would be, for me, a very sad day should our movement permit itself to become a hostage to our acceptance by anyone. Somewhere in this discussion Dr. Eugene Mihaly presented, as found in the 'Post and Opinion', is the question of "the" necessary definition of God as one who intervenes in history. As you well know, Maimonides offered that positive definitions are limiting therefore he developed a negative theology.

I suggest that this exercise will have a stultifying effect. I only see negative value accruing from the responsum given the details as reported in the Post and Opinion.

With warmest regards from House to House, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Larry Kaplan

c.c.: Dr. Eugene Mihaly
Rabbi Alexander Schindler

COPY

MEMORANDUM

May 21, 1991

FROM: Edith J. Miller

TO: Rabbi James L. Simon

The packet of materials on Beth Adam just arrived. I know Alex will be delighted that you were able to put together this collection of publications and services from Beth Adam. Since he is on the West Coast, I am writing to convey heartfelt appreciation.

Fondest regards to you and your harem.

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE–JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

10425 OLD OLIVE STREET ROAD, SUITE 205, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63141-5923 (314) 997-7566 FAX #: (314) 997-4041

MIDWEST COUNCIL

Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

May 15, 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

Now that I have finally had the chance to climb out of a mountain of things that accumulated on my desk during my various and sundry travels, I am sending to you this packet which Edie Miller indicated you might want to have for reference use.

To the best of my knowledge, I think that I have managed to compile all of the various and sundry publications of Beth Adam. You will find on the right hand side of the packet seven pieces of liturgical material and on the left hand side of the packet you will find some philosophical materials that have also been published.

If I receive any new or additional materials I will pass them on under separate cover. As of this date nothing additional has occurred. Bob Chaiken and I have spoken a few times and it is our hope that at one of our meetings during the summer that we will begin to put together the nucleus of a special committee that will be asked to study this question and make recommendations to our Regional board. Bob and I both agree that the committee will not go into operation until such time as an application has been received.

Please keep in touch if I can be of any additional assistance. I send all best wishes for a happy and festive Shavout . . .

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

enclosure

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

COPY

March 26, 1991
11 Nisan 5751

Rabbi David Polish
Beth Emet The Free Synagogue
2025 Sherman Avenue, Apt. #303
Evanston, IL 60201

Dear David:

Thank you so very much for your letter of March 18th in which you set forth your views concerning the Humanistic congregation.

I assume you do not mind if I share this letter with the others who will be called upon to make a decision.

As you probably know, the process of accepting a congregation into the Union begins on a regional level. Usually this is a pro forma matter involving a small committee of people. In this instance, however, I asked the Regional Director, Jim Simon, to set up a special committee to consider this matter - a committee which will be broadly representative of all of the elements in our constituency as well as of the ideological divergences that obtain among us.

A decision is not imminent by any manner or means. The congregation hasn't even formally applied to the UAHC. When it does, we will begin the process of "a reasoning together" in which your words of advice will play their roles.

To tell you the truth, I myself have not resolved this issue in my own mind. I have been moving to and fro in my position after various opinions arrive on my desk. Our colleagues have a way of being persuasive!

Be that as it may, I thank you once again for your care. Our religious community would not be as strong as it is were it not for your manifold contributions.

With all good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

copies of this ltr sent to: MMS. J. Simon AGG

RABBI DAVID POLISH
BETH EMET THE FREE SYNAGOGUE

2025 SHERMAN AVENUE
APT. #303
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS
60201

March 18, 1991
3 Nisan 5751

Rabbi Alexander Schindler
Union of American Hebrew Congregation
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Shalom, Alex,

It may appear strange to you that, as one who was less than enthusiastic about the Reform position on patrilineality, and on homosexual rabbis, I stand opposed to any possible efforts to exclude a Humanistic congregation from our movement.

Last August I spent virtually an entire evening discussing this problem with Gunther Plaut, and I urged caution in pressing the issue.

At the outset, I recognize that the Union has a right to deny membership to applicant congregations, something that Eugene Mihaly does not seem to take into account. But this is only a technicality, while my argument is of a different character. First, the applying congregation does not profess atheism. It professes no credal position about God, a position that vast numbers of Reform Jews share. By denying this congregation membership, we would separate ourselves from many of the same fellow Jews whom we harbor and cherish, knowing their position full well. Even more, we preclude the very great possibility that the congregation could undergo a spiritual evolution which we would stifle by closing our doors to them. At a time when the House of Israel is confronted by the direst of threats, are we prepared to share in yet another schism? If a supreme Mitzvah today is the preservation of the Jewish People, which is the sole depository of Judaism, does God really want us to reject those who are not yet sure about Him?

When I was a child, I moved in almost exclusively secular Jewish circles, although my father was an unconventional believer. Today, children and grandchildren of that Socialist-Zionist milieu who could easily have been excluded from the Union, God forbid, are leaders and rabbis in our movement.

It is to the credit of the HUC that in the late twenties, Humanism, which swept the student body, gave way to profound belief among the vast adherents of Humanism in their formative years.

I am currently engaged in a study of 200 Haggadot of kibbutzim from the thirties to the present. Some of them were outright,

and even flagrantly, secular, but see the Haggadah of the Kibbutz Hameuchad today! It's so traditional you have to look twice.

I agree that there must be limits, but to exclude a society of Jews from Jewish spiritual fellowship would be to shatter the limits we wish to defend. To admit other categories and to deny these?

The Halachah could win hands down on this issue, but would Jewish existence?

Would we be taking risks by admitting this congregation? You bet we would, but which risk would be greater--to admit or to exclude? Better to risk the possibility that the applying congregation may not change, in which case we would have to examine our religious positions much more profoundly.

Shalom,

RABBI DAVID POLISH

DP:kt

P.S. In my student days I introduced Clarence Darrow to the student body in these words, "We welcome a famous atheist, and God knows what an atheist he is."

Also, the enclosed should be of interest.

The "needy" are the pressured, the spiritually confused, the psychologically perplexed, the lonely, the aged—all those who have fallen beneath the wheels of our increasingly demanding and abrasive society. At the Seder we offer them an opportunity to share our redemptive experience so that they can take control of their daily lives once again. All of us need food for the body and food for the spirit; the Seder abundantly provides both.

The contrast between the hungry and the needy is masterfully and lovingly described in Shmuel Yosef Agnon's short story "The Passover Celebrants" (*Passover Anthology,* Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1966). Here is the bitterly poor *shammes* trudging home after evening services to an empty room, to a "Seder" made up only of the bare necessities for which he scrimped and saved for months. And there is the wealthy childless widow, who from force of habit has prepared the same marvelous Seder she always did when her husband was still alive. The Seder plate and the food are waiting on a table gleaming with silver and spotless linen, but the widow is alone and empty in soul and spirit. By chance she discovers the *shammes* on his way home and invites him to share the Seder with her. The time-honored words of the Haggadah and the old, familiar ritual blend into the most wonderful Seder for both of them, the hungry and the needy. At the conclusion, when the widow and the *shammes* recite the *Shir Ha-Shirim* together, there is hope that there will be no more hunger and loneliness at least for these Passover celebrants.

There are also people who have food and companionship but, having moved away from the glorious Jewish tradition, feel that their lives are empty and purposeless. They too are in need. Hence, we say, "Let anyone who is in need—in need of food, in need of companionship, in need of experiencing the glory of the Jewish tradition—come and spend Passover with us." The Seder is thus an opportunity to invite even those who have become estranged from the tradition and reunite them with their heritage.

The Disbeliever at the Seder

In our society the Seder has been so popularized that it is celebrated even in households where few rituals are observed. Occasionally even a Jew who professes no belief in God will find himself

at a Seder. But does the participation of an agnostic (or even an atheist) have any particular religious value, or is it simply a hypocritical act which "makes no sense"?

This question is related to the wider issue of whether the observance of mitzvot is predicated upon belief in God. Stated otherwise, is belief in God the central, underlying basis for all of Judaism, or is it one particular mitzvah out of the 613, albeit a very important one? The Rishonim nearly a thousand years ago debated this issue in connection with the status of the first of the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord thy God who took thee out of the Land of Egypt . . . ." Is this a separate mitzvah requiring belief in God, or is it simply a statement of fact? Most interesting is the view of Naḥmanides, who, to explain the omission of belief in God as one of the 613 mitzvot, proposes that this tenet of belief is more than just a commandment; it is the matrix from which all other commandments flow. The great medieval philosopher Ḥasdai Crescas (d. 1412) wrote in his treatise *Or Hashem* that to even mention the word *mitzvah* ("command") without predicating a *metzaveh* ("commander") is a logical absurdity. Thus, to return to our question, it would appear at the least incongruous to have an atheist or an agnostic participate in a religious ritual such as a Seder. Nevertheless, one can look upon the issue at hand from a different perspective—one that is commensurate with Rashi's interpretation of "I am the Lord thy God [who took thee out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage]." The commentator par excellence does not read this verse as a commandment, or as an introduction to the other commandments. To him it is a statement of experience. He has God saying to the Jewish people, "I am the Lord thy God—in all my manifestations to you I am the same God, viz.. the One who brought you out of the Land of Egypt." Whether it be the warring God at the Red Sea or the teaching God at Mount Sinai, it is one and the same God.

For some Jews participation in the Seder is not due to belief in a God who commanded such participation. Rather, their involvement is due to the need to share in a common religious or even social experience or perhaps out of plain curiosity. These Jews are often seekers rather than finders. If they do find God it is not from the wellsprings of belief but from the meanderings of experience. While they may not accept the God of the Sinaitic revelation, they

might discover the God of the Red Sea parting. It is one and the same God. We must, therefore, *not* discourage Jews who are agnostics, or even atheists, from joining with us at the Seder table. If they do not arrive at religious truth in one manner—through Torah—they may arrive at it in another manner—through history, through community, through the beauty of ritual. Let us recall that even the Wicked Son has his place at the Seder.

THE PASSOVER STORY מַגִּיד

Uncover the matzah and lift up the plate for all to see. The recital of the Haggadah begins with the following words:

הָא לַחְמָא עַנְיָא, דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְהָתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְמִצְרָיִם. כָּל-דִּכְפִין יֵיתֵי וְיֵכוֹל, כָּל-דְּצָרִיךְ יֵיתֵי וְיִפְסַח. הָשַׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל. הָשַׁתָּא עַבְדֵי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין:

This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry—let them come and eat. All who are needy—let them come and celebrate the Passover with us. Now we are here; next year may we be in the Land of Israel. Now we are slaves; next year may we be free men.

The plate is put down, the matzah is covered, and the second cup of wine is filled. The youngest present asks the Four Questions.

The Four Questions

Maggid has a dual purpose: to link us to the future as well as to the past. We must thrust into the future to remain human and not to despair. We communicate to our children (the future) the experience of the past in order to inform the present, and through them to shape our collective future. This is the goal of *maggid*.

What does *maggid* consist of? Questions and answers. There are two pedagogical principles that the Seder ritual—and all of Halakhah—presumes and that modern education has begun to recognize. First, you cannot make someone learn something he is

cc: sent to
mm
ABG
J. Simon

TEMPLE ISRAEL

Longwood Avenue and Plymouth Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
Telephone 617-566-3960

Rabbi Emeritus Roland B. Gittelsohn

20 March 1991

Dr. Michael A. Meyer
Hebrew Union College
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220-2488

Dear Michael:

In response to a letter from me on the same subject, Alex Schindler has been good enough to share with me his copy of your 20 December letter to Gene Mihaly. Because of my great respect for you and your integrity, I am dictating this letter of disagreement.

I do not choose to base my attitude only on the grounds voiced by Gene in his Responsum. I prefer rather to make my rejoinder a matter of semantics because I believe that we are in danger here of playing a game with words.

During my active years I frequently gave my Confirmation students an assignment to write a definition of God without using the word God or any synonym for it. I did this because so often when individuals volunteered the information that they were atheists, just a few minutes of conversation convinced me that they were not atheists at all, that in fact they had rejected the concepts of God they gained in childhood but had not yet developed an adult understanding of deity.

Not having seen the liturgy of Temple Beth Adam, I am not qualified to judge it. If, as you say, they deliberately avoid using the word God, I strongly disagree with them but do not believe this is adequate ground to reject any application they may make for membership in the UAHC. My strong suspicion is that if you gave the members of Beth Adam a questionaire to ascertain what they really believe about the meaning of reality and life, their responses would not differ in any substantial degree from those of any other congregation whose

liturgy does employ the word God. To reject them on such spurious grounds strikes me as renunciation of the basic principles of Reform Judaism.

I feel very strongly that when as and if this congregation applies for Union membership, assuming that they satisfy all other qualifications, they should be accepted and we should then within the Union seek to educate them to a different understanding.

Needless to say, I respect you, your scholarship and your integrity even when we disagree.

On another matter, you will be interested to know that your spur to me nearly a year ago has resulted in a short history of ARZA's beginnings. Unfortunately at the moment no one seems to have the funds to publish this monograph, but my work on it has been completed and as soon as some means of publications has been discovered a copy will be sent to you.

Meanwhile, Bubbles joins me in affectionate greetings for Pesach from house to house and heart to heart.

Shalom,

Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn

RBG:gs

cc: Professor Eugene Mihaly
Rabbi Alexander Schindler

MEMORANDUM

COPY

March 7, 1991

FROM: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO: Edith J. Miller

COPY:

Please note my letter to Roland Gittlesohn and send him a copy of Mike Meyer's response to the Gene Mihaly Responsum.

3/11/91

COPY

March 7, 1991
21 Adar 5751

Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn
Temple Israel
Longwood Ave & Plymouth St.
Boston, MA 02215

Dear Roland:

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter to Gene Mihaly. Alas, the matter has not come to the Union Board. In fact, it has not even reached the level of the Regional New Congregations Committee and as I understand it, the congregation will not make a formal application for admission to the Union for quite some time.

There have been several answers to the Gene Mihaly memorandum, some of which are most cogent. Of course the Responsum Committee of the CCAR has written a negative statement.

You might be particularly interested in the letter from Mike Meyer to Gene, a copy of which was sent to me. Unfortunately, Edie Miller is on jury duty and I can't find it - without her I am completely lost. Be that as it may, I will ask her to send you a copy once she returns.

Rhea joins me in sending you and Bubbles all our love.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

TEMPLE
ISRAEL

Longwood Avenue and Plymouth Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
Telephone 617-566-3960

Rabbi Emeritus Roland B. Gittelsohn

1 March 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New YOrk, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

It occurs to me that you might like to see a copy of the letter I sent a few days ago to Gene Mihaly regarding his recent Responsum.

Since I haven't attended a Union Board meeting for quite some time, I have no idea what action was finally taken on this matter. I hope, however, that the Board either has already agreed or soon will to the views expressed by Gene, with which obviously I strongly concur.

I can't dictate this without also extending the usual abundant affection from Bubbles and me to Rhea and yourself.

Shalom,

Roland

Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn

RBG:gs
enclosure

TEMPLE
ISRAEL

Longwood Avenue and Plymouth Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
Telephone 617-566-3960

Rabbi Emeritus Roland B. Gittelsohn

22 February 1991

Dr. Eugene Mihaly
3974 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220

Dear Gene:

Having been away from Boston for six weeks, I have only now on my return had an opportunity to read your Responsum of 7 December 1990. I write now for two purposes: first, to tell you that I agree thoroughly with what you have written and hope that the Union will act in accordance with your decision.

My second objective is to tell you that page 16 of the copy that I received was blank. Assuming that this was not generally the case, I would appreciate your sending me a complete copy, or, if all copies are deficient, please let me have the missing page.

You have performed a service thoroughly consistent with my understanding of the nature and objectives of Reform Judaism. Bubbles and I are among the many who thank you for that and we send you our very best wishes.

Shalom,

Roland

Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn

RBG:gs

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

COPY

February 28, 1991
14 Adar 5751

Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director
UAHC 10425 Old Olive Street Road
St. Louis MO 63141

Dear Jim:

I thank you for your letter of February 6. It awaited my return from the meetings of the Jewish Agency in Israel.

I am pleased to know that we have some time now to deal fully with the matter of the Humanistic Congregations requesting membership within the UAHC. Since the Cincinnati group is not going to apply for membership, there is nothing further to do. We do, however, have an impressive file of materials and opinions on what the stance of the UAHC should be in connection with such congregations. We will hold on to the file until the matter comes to the fore once again.

With fond regards and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
10425 OLD OLIVE STREET ROAD, SUITE 205, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63141 (314) 997-7566 FAX #: (314) 997-4041

MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

February 6, 1991

(1) Thank Schindler
(2) cc: of his letter to

PBB
MM

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

Thanks for your good letter of January 24. I have waited a bit to respond because I wanted to speak again with Rabbi Bob Barr of Beth Adam in Cincinnati before I got back to you.

As you know, since you wrote to me at the end of January Beth Adam has gone ahead (at their own expense) and professionally published and distributed close to 2000 copies if the Mihaly Responsum. I have a feeling that they did not feel comfortable allocating addition allocating the funds to also distribute Dr. Meyer's letter to Dr. Mihaly!

The bottom line is that (as I suspected) there is <u>not</u> going to be an application in the near future. As I mentioned to you in a previous letter, Bob Chaiken and I met with the board in early December and had a very candid and spirited discussion. We focused on a number of different questions, and it became very clear at the meeting (and I have mentioned this to you before) that they sought membership in the UAHC in order to increase their visibility in the community as well as their credibility as a congregation. It also came out at the meeting that they very much want to be part of the successful and prestigious Reform Community High School, which is currently open only to students from congregations that belong to the UAHC.

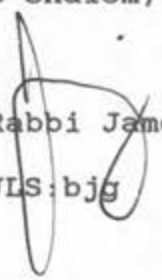
We left the meeting with the understanding that when they were ready to file an application they would let me know and then Bob and I would outline a formal and detailed process that would permit anyone who wanted to to participate in a full and meaningful manner. Bob and I have agreed that we want to do everything in accordance with your requests as well as handling this is a sensitive and a constructive manner. The other day Rabbi Barr confirmed to me that there is no application that is forthcoming and we may not see and application for another four to six months. He also indicated to me that the purpose of publishing the Mihaly Responsum was to try to raise the consciousness level of an issue that they think is a very important issue. I am not sure I agree with that, but in some ways it may not be so bad that this Responsum is being distributed.

That is where everything is now. I cannot or will not do anything more until I receive a formal application. When I do receive one I will let you know immediately and Bob Chaiken and I will consult with you as to our ideas as to how the process should unfold.

If you have any questions or need additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to seeing you next month when I come into town for the Budget hearings. Naturally, if you would like to put in a good word for the important work that we are doing here in the Midwest Council I will not object to this form of favoritism! I am sure you could do this featly!

B'shalom,



Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

2/12 sent MB
cc: to Jim Simon
PBG
return original
to files

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
O.C., Senior Scholar
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5P 3K9
(416) 789-3291 / Fax (416) 789 9697

February 7, 1991/23 Shevat 5751

Rabbi Alexander Schindler,
President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y.
U.S.A. 10021

Dear Alex,

The following comments are offered in response to Prof. Eugene Mihaly's responsum, entitled "Qualifications for Membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations" (December 7, 1990). They are rendered, it should be noted, in a personal and not official capacity.

You have already received the response by Prof. Michael Meyer which, incidentally, was not solicited by the Committee, and his letter will speak for itself. I will therefore not duplicate his arguments. The following, then, are some additional observations which I hope those who will make the decision to admit or not to admit Beth Adam to membership in the UAHC will take into consideration.

1. Prof. Mihaly's opening argument refers to the UAHC constitution. If this were nothing more than a legal question, it would surely be decided by lawyers on whom the UAHC would call. But the fact is that all parties are really agreed that we deal here with a religious and not a legal matter -- else why would Beth Adam apply to Prof. Mihaly, a teacher of Midrash, for a responsum, and why would you and your colleagues write to me and, thereby, to the Committee? Inquiries are addressed to us on issues of Jewish practice and observance and we answer these inquiries by drawing upon the resources of tradition -- which means both Reform and non-Reform tradition. We begin by asking whether the long history of halakhic interpretation yields certain answers, and if it does, we ask whether there is a Reform tradition or principle which would have us disagree with the conclusion. In the instant case, of course, only Reform tradition is in question.

Our Committee does not deal with right or wrong, for Reform Jews frequently differ widely amongst themselves on the spirit or essence of Reform -- and in fact, some members of the Committee themselves differed in this instance as well. What we do is try our best to arrive at the most suitable answer from the vantage point of Reform Judaism as we see it. Some of us on the Committee have legal training, but we speak as rabbis and not as attorneys-at-law. Prof. Mihaly is thus incorrect in stating (p. 9) that our discussion is

"irrelevant" to the question of Beth Adam's membership application. Called upon as rabbis to provide a rabbinic answer, we did precisely that.

Prof. Mihaly argues that the Union is precluded from denying membership to a congregation on the basis of "theologic belief, liturgic modes or religious practice" (p. 6). But in fact, Article III of the UAHC constitution makes acceptance of membership contingent upon the approval of the Union's Board of Trustees, which may be granted or withheld - presumably for a variety of reasons, including religious ones.

To be sure, congregational religious autonomy is guaranteed in Article VI, but this refers to "constituent congregations", that is, congregations which are already members of the Union. It may be noted that Prof. Mihaly omits these two key words "constituent congregations" (paragraph B, p. 5). There is, in other words, no constitutional provision which precludes the Board from denying membership to applicant congregations on the basis of whatever principle it deems appropriate and fitting.

(A parallel may be drawn to an application for U.S. citizenship. A U.S. citizen may state publicly that the Constitution of the United States is a silly document, drawn up by idiots. The Constitution allows such freedom of expression. But let an immigrant who applies for citizenship make this statement before the presiding judge. One may be sure that his/her application will be roundly rejected.)

2. At the heart of this entire controversy lies the question of the nature of Reform Judaism, and indeed Prof. Mihaly expresses himself vigorously on that issue, which is proper and meet. The very fact that the entire question was originally submitted to rabbis is an indication that the questioners themselves considered this matter a religious question and not, as Prof. Mihaly argues (pp. 4-6), solely a legal one. The issue is indeed religious in the obvious sense that whatever answer is given -- to admit or not to admit -- will have the effect of defining the limits of Reform Judaism as understood by the governing congregational body of the North American movement. Does Beth Adam's religion fit within the boundaries of Reform Judaism or does it not? This is the central issue of their application. This is the burden of the question addressed to us by the Union's leadership. And this is the inescapably religious question which the Board must answer.

Liberals that we are, we instinctively shrink from drawing limits that exclude Jews from our camp. This is as it should be: tolerance, pluralism and a healthy respect for the questioning religious spirit are hallmark values of Reform Jewish culture. At the same time we must ask: Can we exist as a distinct religious community and maintain our Jewish integrity if we set no limits at all? There are voices within the movement that would go in that direction. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that Reform Jews have in the past engaged in the setting of some limits in order to set themselves off from Orthodoxy on the one hand and Unitarianism and Ethical Culture on the other.

3. It should be understood that the Responsa Committee can make its judgment only on the basis of what Reform Jewish history and sentiment say to us up to this point. We are not a legislative body that makes new rules and defines Reform Judaism afresh. That is the function of the movement as a whole with its own legislative bodies, the Central Conference

of American Rabbis and the UAHC. Their pronouncements form the current limits that may help us to judge where Reform Judaism is. Thus the question of patrilineality was decided ultimately not by our Committee but by a convention of the CCAR, and even if all members of the Responsa Committee would disagree with that decision, they would still have to take it into consideration as being currently normative.

It is then the past history of Reform Judaism, its pronouncements and resolutions, that guide us in determining what limits there are. For instance, they would be the basis for deciding whether the following two hypothetical congregations should be accepted for Union membership.

(a) Congregation X considers itself a Reform congregation which hopes to develop Liberal Judaism. It has by-laws which provide for separate seating of men and women, and prohibit the engagement of women rabbis as well as offering aliyot for women. Would we admit this congregation or would we consider the religious equality of the sexes as a paramount principle of Reform Judaism and therefore say No?

(b) Congregation Y's main goal is outreach to the Christian members of the congregation, inasmuch as the majority live in mixed marriages. To accomplish this, the prayer service of the congregation includes significant portions from the New Testament, the Church Fathers and Christian hymnology. All of these selections are phrased in such a way that worshippers may (though they need not) understand Jesus to be not only a prophet but also their personal saviour. The congregation makes this religious outreach a centre point of its existence, and considers itself thoroughly Jewish, Reform and Zionist. Will we accept its application?

If the application of Beth Adam were acceptable on the grounds that no "theologic, liturgical or religious qualifications" may be used to deny membership in the Union, then no principled reason can possibly exist which would justify the denial of membership to either of our two hypothetical congregations, X and Y.

4. To be sure, we do not seek to impose a creed or a theology on our members. Individual Reform Jews may (or are indeed encouraged to) express their doubts and dissents as part of their religious strivings. Still, it is the hope of Reform Judaism as attested in the writings of our movement's greatest thinkers (and as Prof. Mihaly himself states on p. 13) that the end result of these strivings is a deep and abiding appreciation of the reality of God. That is true for individuals.

But the question before us deals with an entire congregation which has a clearly enunciated philosophy that renders God irrelevant to the religious and liturgical life of the community. The omission of such key phrases as "Hear O Israel the Lord is our God, the Lord alone" is in my opinion not an incidental liturgical diversion. Rather, by its very omission, the congregation states "Hear O Israel, there is no God". Such a declaration expressed or implied would be totally unprecedented and catastrophic for the future of our movement. Yet it is unavoidable unless the Board accepts the fact that even Reform Jews must engage in the setting of limits.

Prof. Mihaly objects to our statement that the presence of God is "the limit" on which we must agree. Yet he says (p. 10): "I discuss in another context the limits of Reform and the more vital issue -- not whether Reform has limits, which it surely does, but who is to define those limits..." (my emphasis). If the presence or absence of God does not constitute a limit, what does?

If we must set limits, those suggested in our responsum are, I believe, thoroughly reasonable. They constitute a sine qua non, a common denominator, without which Jews cannot claim to speak a common religious language. Whatever infringement upon religious autonomy they represent, they are our bottom line, the minimal requirement necessary if we are to maintain our integrity as a Jewish religious movement. Admitting Beth Adam would mean that atheism is a legitimate Reform option.

5. Prof. Mihaly adduces Friday night service no. 6 in Gates of Prayer as proof that our prayer book itself anticipates this kind of development. But the word "God" does appear, though primarily in Hebrew, and it is a prayer service. It speaks of a Power beyond us, leaving it up to the worshipper to understand these words as he/she sees fit. Quoting Prof. Meyer (his letter, no. 10): "An atheistic interpretation is not forced on the worshipper by a clearly atheistic English translation as in the humanistic liturgy". Beth Adam states amongst its principles that prayer cannot be part of its services.

6. Prof. Mihaly cites a number of aggadic passages which urge us to accept differing points of view. This is a principle to which I personally and our entire Committee would heartily subscribe. But the rabbis who authored these stories worked within a system which had limits and their acceptance of other points of view was limned by these limits. Thus the principle that "the authority of the permissive opinion prevails (over the most stringent)", which Prof. Mihaly quotes (p. 12)), and the citation of Rashi that "the authority of those who prohibit is not persuasive" are not related in their full context. For they are, as indicated, dependent upon a system, the limits of which are observed by both parties.

In sum, I take the liberty of quoting Prof. Meyer's final statement: "What is being asked is that the Reform movement, through the act of admission, make the symbolic statement: Faith, or lack thereof, is wholly irrelevant to Reform Judaism. I am not in favour of making that statement".

That is the point of view the majority of the Responsa Committee has taken; that is my point of view, and I hope it will be that of the Board of the UAHC as well.

With cordial regards,

Gunther

WGP/et
cc: Prof. Eugene Mihaly
Members of CCAR Responsa Committee

cc: ABG, BM.

Rabbi David S. Hachen
27500 Cedar Rd. #307
Beachwood, OH 44122

February 21, 1991

Dr. Eugene Mihaly
Hebrew Union College-
Jewish Institute of Religion
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

I have just read your Responsum regarding Beth Adam, the Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. I would like to respond as an individual and in no official way.

In the "Constitution and By-Laws of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations" there is a "Preamble" which reads as follows: "The congregations represented in this Union of American Hebrew Congregations affirm their faithful attachment to Judaism and their adherence to its liberal interpretation, and unite to discharge their responsibilities under the protection of benign Providence."

My dictionary says that "benign" means of a kind disposition, manifesting gentleness and mildness. And "Providence" with a capital "P" means God. Therefore, it seems to me that any congregation which seeks to become a member of the UAHC must believe that it is discharging its responsibilities under the guidance of God. They may believe in any one of the many different concepts of God, but they cannot be humanistic, believing solely in "Adam". Faith in man (and woman): yes; but faith in man alone without God: no.

And to prove that this was the intention of the Constitution and By-Laws of the UAHC, it is spelled out in the sample Constitution and By-Laws for congregations affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. On the very first page, under Article II - Purpose - we read: "The purpose of this congregation is to promote the enduring and fundamental principles of Judaism and to ensure the continuity of the Jewish people; to enable its adherents to develop a relationship to God through communal worship, study and assembly; and to apply the principles of Reform Judaism on the values and conduct of the individual, family, and the society in which we live."

A Humanistic Congregation by its very name commits itself to develop a relationship between persons - and that is all to the good. But it cannot enable its adherents to develop a relationship to God. Otherwise, why call itself humanistic.

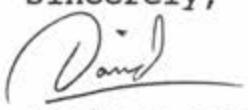
Gene, the Union as a group has set out the parameters of its association in a Constitution as every group does. Synagogues wishing to affiliate cannot ask the group to deny or ignore its own mandate. Beth Adam apparently seeks to come under the umbrella of the Reform movement. Instead it would better serve its members and its own integrity by going it alone or seeking other like-minded congregations so that they might support one another.

What seems clear to me, Gene, is that any congregation choosing to affiliate with the UAHC must abide by the spirit of the Preamble of its Constitution and By-Laws, and the purpose spelled out in the sample Constitution and By-Laws for congregations affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

It has been said: "Where does one find God? ---------Wherever one lets Him (Her) in!"

Love from home to home.

Sincerely,



David S. Hachen
Rabbi

cc: Rabbi Robert B. Barr
Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
Arthur Grant
Leon Plevin
Rabbi James Simon
Rabbi Allen Kaplan
Rabbi W.Gunther Plaut

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

February 12, 1991
28 Shevat 5751

Rabbi Rav A. Soloff
Beth Sholom Congregation
700 Indiana Street
Johnstown, PA 15905

Dear Rav:

I am responding to your February 5th letter in haste, as I will be leaving for Israel in a few hours. I will be attending meetings of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem.

I am not certain what you might be missing in regard to the Plaut responsum on the Humanistic Congregation, however, he has provided some additional comments and I enclose a copy herewith. I also enclose herewith a copy of Michael Meyer's resonse to Gene Mihaly on this subject. I believe both of these will be of interest to you and will provide additional insight.

With warm regards.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

encl.

Beth Sholom Congregation

700 Indiana Street
Johnstown, Pennsylvania 15905
814-536-0647

Rabbi Rav A. Soloff, Ph,D., D.D.

Cantor Paul Stone

February 5, 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
U.A.H.C.
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Rabbis,

Best personal regards. All good wishes.

Is there something about Rabbi Plaut's responsum about a "humanistic congregation" which I am missing? Otherwise, the responsum by Rabbi Mihaly entitled "Qualifications for Membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations" seems completely convincing to me. The development of Liberal Judaism in the centuries ahead may proceed toward a belief system or liturgy that is more or less theistic than the mix reflected in Gates of Prayer, but how does that justify denying UAHC membership to an applicant?

We pray for peace.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Rav A. Soloff

RAS/jl

cc: Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
46 Ridelle Avenue
Toronto M6B 1H8 Ontario

Rabbi Robert B. Barr
1720 Section Rd, Suite 107
Cincinnati, OH 45237

January 4, 1991
18 Tevet 5751

Mr. Melvin Merians
10 Bonnie Brair Lane
Larchmont, NY 10538

Dear Mel:

The enclosed materials deal with an issue which will probably explode during your tenure. Therefore, you might as well become acquainted with the situation. I suggest you read Mihaly's paper first and follow-up with Mike Meyer's response.

Fond regards.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

January 24, 1991
9 Shevat 5751

Dear Jim:

My visit to Oakland was most enjoyable. I met your parents and hope that they were pleased with the complimentary things I said about you publicly. I had to lie through my teeth but I do believe in being kind to parents and feed their misconceptions about their children.

How is the Humanistic Congregation Beth Adam matter going? As I told you, I think that this matter has to be reviewed and fully discussed by your New Congregations Committee. That committee ought to be enlarged to include thoughtful and knowledgeable lay leaders and also members of the regional rabbinate.... here, too, with a spectrum of views. Then this matter will have been properly and fully considered before it reaches the National New Congregations Committee.

Thal told me about his original plans of a special video for the Pacific Southwest Biennial....you're chicken!!!

Bestest to you and your gals.

Fondly,

Alexander M. Schindler

Rabbi James Simon
UAHC Midwest Council
St. Louis, MO

bcc JBG

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

January 3, 1991
17 Tevet 5751

Michael A. Meyer
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Mike:

It was thoughtful of you to share with me your response to Gene Mihaly. It is an impressive rebuttal.

With fond regards from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

December 28, 1990
11 Tevet 5751

Dr. Eugene Mihaly
HUC-JIR
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

Thanks for sharing with me your responsum on Beth Adam. You make a good case. I hope you don't mind if I give the paper wide distribution. It should be brought to the attention of some of the UAHC leadership.

Your Section E, of course, in a sense tempers your earlier argument. It is elegantly put!

Be assured your views will receive wide consideration.

With repeated thanks and best wishes for the New Year, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem

3101 CLIFTON AVENUE • CINCINNATI, OHIO 45220-2488
(513) 221-1875

December 11, 1990

Personal

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Attached is my responsum on Beth Adam, about which I wrote you. I do hope that you find it convincing. I believe that the issue involved is central to the direction of Reform Judaism. I should of course be grateful for your comments.

With warmest personal greetings, I am

As ever,

Gene

Eugene Mihaly

EM:pg
Enclosure

(1) Thank you. Makes a good case — ~~elegant~~ ~~essential~~. I hope you don't mind if I see if wide distribution. I, of course, in a sense tempers your section "E," I agree. Earlier argument is clear only put. Be assured that your views will receive wide consideration

(2) Make about 10 copies of the Lilly paper send to ABG Jimmy PLF DBG others back to me.

December 26, 1990
9 Tevet 5751

David W. Belin, Esq.
2000 Financial Center
Des Moines, IOWA 50309

Dear David:

Enclosed is the Responsum from Gunther Plaut for the CCAR Responsa Committee on UAHC membership for Humanistic Congregations. You may have received a paper from Gene Mihaly on this subject, if not do let me know and I will share a copy with you.

We do not have any special Responsum in regard to applications from gay and lesbian congregations. We do have a number of Union resolutions on the subject of equality for members of the homosexual community.

Warm regards and all the best for the New Year.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Please send
copies of
Warren
letter

BELIN HARRIS HELMICK
LAMSON McCORMICK

A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION • ATTORNEYS AT LAW

2000 Financial Center • Des Moines, Iowa 50309
Telephone: (515) 243-7100 • Telecopier: (515) 282-7615

December 18, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York NY 10021

Dear Alex:

It is my understanding that there was a Responsum prepared for the UAHC in connection with the application for membership of Beth Adam Congregation in Cincinnati. I would like to have a copy of that Responsum and any accompanying correspondence.

Also, if there was a similar Responsum in connection with the application for membership of any gay and lesbian congregation, I would appreciate receiving a copy of this, also.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

David W. Belin

DWB:cs

d:\jewish\alex.doc

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Alex-
I thought this
might be of interest.
Mike

3 Tevet 5751
December 20, 1990

Professor Eugene Mihaly
Hebrew Union College
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

Thank you very much for sharing with me your responsum entitled "Qualifications for Membership in UAHC Congregations." I found it both interesting and challenging. Since you asked for my reactions, let me present to you some of the reasons why I do not share your view. They follow in the sequence of the material: the question by Rabbi Barr and then your response.

1. First, regarding Rabbi Barr's question: that he was accepted into the CCAR has nothing whatever to do with the acceptability of his theological position, but only with the fact that the CCAR accepts every ordinee of HUC with no criteria whatever beyond ordination. Also it is not Rabbi Barr, but Beth Adam which is applying for membership. Many CCAR members serve congregations that are not in the UAHC.

2. The reason that Beth Adam wants to join the UAHC is nowhere stated. Yet it is well known that the reason is not identification with the Reform movement but only the desire to utilize its institutions, specifically the local Reform High School. It is apparently only this issue, of recent vintage, that has made the congregation consider membership. Otherwise, why did it not apply when it was first formed some years ago?

3. I do not understand why the congregation is applying to you for a responsum on what the constitution and by-laws of the UAHC state. If that were the whole issue (as you sometimes suggest in your reply), the proper addressee would be an attorney, not a professor of midrash.

4. You begin with a talmudic dictum--but if it is only a matter of what the UAHC constitution and bylaws say, then talmudic dicta are beside the point. If, however, Jewish tradition is relevant, then you can't say at the same time that the congregation should be admitted simply because the UAHC documents don't exclude them.

5. That you feel it is important to mention that the membership includes "men and women who have achieved prominent positions in the professions, the academic and business communities" I regard as not only irrelevent, but totally contrary to what is important about a congregation. If all of its members were men and women who had not made a name for themselves, they would--in that respect--be no less worthy of membership.

6. I do not know how it is that you know that this congregation is "in serious search of the spiritual substance of their Jewish identity." Perhaps some of them are and I do not want to impugn the sincerity of their quest, but you are clearly idealizing what from other perspectives is not that

ideal. In dwelling so much on background information about the congregation, would it not have been at least as relevant to mention that this congregation almost certainly has the highest percentage of mixed couples among its members of any congregation in Cincinnati and that lack of reference to God and lack of basic Jewish liturgical elements is in all likelihood also a response to this characteristic of the membership?

7. If, as the document that you quote indicates, "there are many Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God . . . ," why then is the word scrupulously eliminated from the liturgy altogether instead of including it at least occasionally and allowing that different members will interpret it differently. To leave it out entirely is not simply to avoid misunderstanding, but to take a position of dogmatic atheism.

8. The article on membership of the UAHC constitution which you cite says that any Jewish congregation can become a member "upon approval by the Board of Trustees." To me this implies that any Jewish congregation is eligible for membership, but is not automatically accepted. Else what would the stipulation of "approval" mean? To me, it implies that the Board of Trustees is free to apply whatever criteria it may choose to give or to withhold its approval.

9. True its constitution opposes interference by the UAHC in the mode of worship etc. of its congregations. But that does not imply it must accept a congregation with a mode of worship etc. which the UAHC Board regards as beyond the pale of Reform Judaism. Thus acceptance or rejection by theological criteria is not, in contradiction to your interpretation, a violation of the UAHC constitution.

10. The sixth Shabbat eve service of Gates of Prayer does not translate some of the basic responses into English. But the word "God" does occur in one instance in English, and the theistic Barchu and Sh'ma are retained in the Hebrew, leaving it up to the worshipper to understand them in terms of his or her theology. An atheistic interpretation is not forced on the worshipper by a clearly atheistic English translation as in the Humanistic liturgy.

11. Despite your insistence that only the UAHC constitution counts, you do eventually quote the Centenary Perspective. If so, then it is only fair to add the sentence of that document which says: "The trials of our own time and the challenges of modern culture have made steady belief and clear understanding difficult for some. Nevertheless, we ground our lives, personally and communally, on God's reality and remain open to new experiences and conceptions of the Divine." But in Beth Adam the divine is entirely excluded. Neither "light" nor "life" are God. And to bless, not God as the giver of sustenance, but to bless "the bread of the earth," is not even Jewish. It is Christian or pagan.

12. You argue that acceptance would be the "authentic" mode of Reform. But "authenticity" is in the mind of the beholder. Certainly, the history of the Reform movement indicates that there were times when boundaries were set. I am thinking in particular of the "Friends of Reform" group established in Frankfurt am Main in the 1840s, which almost every Reform rabbi of the day considered beyond the pale.

13. Finally, if there were genuine reason to believe that admitting this humanistic congregation to the UAHC would be likely to bring it closer to faith in God, then I might be amenable to the proposal. But I do not detect in the question any desire for that at all. What is being asked is that the Reform movement, through the act of admission, make the symbolic statement: faith or lack thereof is wholly irrelevant to Reform Judaism. I am not in favor of making that statement.

I am confident, Gene, that you will not be offended by my bluntness. Our friendship does not require putting on velvet gloves.

בהוקרה ובידודות

Michael

Michael A. Meyer

cc. Rabbi Alexander Schindler
Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut

QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

A Responsum

by

Eugene Mihaly

December 7, 1990

Beth Adam
The Cincinnati Congregation
for Humanistic Judaism

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

November 8, 1990

Dr. Eugene Mihaly
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220

Dear Dr. Mihaly,

I am writing to you on behalf of myself and Beth Adam, the congregation I have served as rabbi for approximately ten years. I turn to you because of your scholarship and knowledge of Reform Judaism. You have interpreted and helped to clarify the values and philosophy of Reform Judaism as a member of the faculty of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, your involvement with the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and your numerous committee appointments and publications.

As you know, I was ordained from the College-Institute in 1981 and upon ordination accepted a position with a newly organized congregation. The congregation and I were committed to exploring and creating an environment in which we could celebrate our Jewish identity with intellectual honesty and theological openness. I held and expressed these same values and attitudes while a student at the College-Institute. Though not all on the faculty were comfortable with my ideas and the services I conducted, I was ordained and continue to be involved with the College-Institute. Most recently, I served as adjunct faculty teaching a practical workshop to second year students. It should be noted as well, that upon ordination I was accepted for membership into the CCAR and remain a member in good standing.

Since its inception, Congregation Beth Adam has identified itself as a humanistic congregation. Though never affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism or any other congregational association, it is our belief that the term "humanistic" best reflects our approach to liturgy, theology, and the Jewish experience. In

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(513) 396-7730

translating our philosophic precepts into action our services do not contain traditional prayers. It is our belief that liturgy should clearly articulate the values and philosophy of our congregation. Drawing upon the rich traditions of our people, contemporary sources, and the writings of our own members, we create a liturgy which enriches our lives by giving expression to our Jewish identity. Our services attempt to capture, in a manner consistent with our philosophy, our deepest religious aspirations and beliefs.

Within the last two years, the fact that Beth Adam is unaffiliated with any national religious association has become a matter of concern for the congregation's Board of Trustees. Many in the congregation, myself included, feel it important that Beth Adam become associated with a larger body. Following much investigation and lengthy conversations, it was thought that this association would be most logically made with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. This realization arose from the congregation's sense of its Jewish identity, historic and current ties to the institutions of Reform Judaism which I have and which exist amongst the membership, and my understanding of the nature and philosophy of Reform Judaism. It is our belief that the philosophy and practices of Beth Adam fall within the broad spectrum of Reform Judaism.

In light of the above information and official publications of the congregation which are available to you we pose for your consideration the following question:

In light of the purposes and goals of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, as stated in its constitution and by-laws, does Congregation Beth Adam qualify for membership?

Thank you for considering this question.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Barr
Rabbi

QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

Question: "In light of the purposes and goals of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations as stated in its constitution and by-laws, does Congregation Beth Adam (The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism) qualify for membership? (See attached letter from Rabbi Robert B. Barr.)"

Response:

In consonance with the talmudic dictum that all matters are to be considered and adjudicated in context of the specific cirumstances, "in accordance with the time and the place," (hakhol lephi hamakom vehaz'man)[1]--a principle which informs and is the genius of Responsa Literature--I outline the relevant background and details:

I. Background.

A. The Congregation.

Beth Adam was founded over a decade ago. It currently has close to two hundred members, a number of whom have been actively involved in Reform congregations throughout their adult lives, and whose families have been identified with Reform for generations. The membership includes men and women who have achieved prominent positions in the professions, the academic and business communities. One of the active members was recently awarded the first "Outstanding Citizen Award" by the Hebrew Union College. Their general profile may be characterized as that of a group of intelligent, responsible, educated Jews in serious search of the spiritual substance of their Jewish identity, and the means to

articulate it in word and deed--a search pursued with integrity and intellectual honesty. The laity is actively involved in formulating the congregational liturgy, the ritual and ceremonial practice of their worship service and of the celebration of life-cycle events, as well as the curriculum of their religious school.

In a policy statement adopted by the group, they state, inter alia:

> "Judaism is a way of life from which rich tradition has evolved. Interpreting and preserving the history and tradition for posterity is a responsibility of Jews in each generation.
>
> "Torah, including interpretation of its text based on modern knowledge, is fundamental to Reform...Torah, Talmud and Midrash are appropriately incorporated into the fabric of the services."

The list of goals of the congregation includes: "To provide meaningful religious services...To continuously examine our concepts by critical reason and to make changes to meet the test of reality...To participate in Reform Judaism and to explore membership in the U.A.H.C."

One of the published documents of Beth Adam, "A Concept of God...." states that "The definition of Humanistic Judaism does not preclude one's having a concept of God. In fact, there are many concepts of God that are compatible with Humanistic Judaism...[and] there are many Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God, but not a God that intervenes or manipulates the events of this world...Neither would this God act in a way that would contradict, or be inconsistent with natural law or scientific

truth...Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God affirm their Jewish identities in services which focus upon human beings strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears."

Accordingly, the liturgy of Beth Adam does not include traditional forms of prayer like praise, petition, etc. Nor does the term "God" occur. Since they are persuaded at the current stage of their exploration that the term "God" has predominantly supernatural connotations, their sense of honesty dictates that the word "God" be deleted. "As part of an historically evolving people," their Statement on Liturgy affirms, "we choose existing symbols, adpating them to our use. Because what we say defines our community, we seek to balance our desire for tradition with our need to be honest. In short: We must believe what we say. We feel comfortable with adding Jewish ritual and tradition to our lives that are consistent with our philosophic beliefs."

B. The Rabbi of Congregation Beth Adam.

Rabbi Robert B. Barr, the spiritual guide of Beth Adam during the past ten years, received ordination from the Hebrew Union College in 1981. During his five years of study at the College, he was a diligent and dedicated student. During his entire student career, from admission to ordination, the HUC community was fully aware of Rabbi Barr's theologic position, which may loosely be defined as a non-dogmatic, anti-supernatural humanism. He was consistently candid about his naturalistic stance. When he conducted services in the HUC chapel, a requirement for all students, he did so with integrity, utilizing a non-theistic or an equivocal liturgy. Upon ordination, he was accepted as a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. He attends its regional and national conferences, and participates in its deliberations.

Rabbi Barr has pursued his vocation--as authorized by the theologic institution of Reform Judaism--with exemplary zeal and devotion. He is viewed by his congregants and by many others within the broader community as a dedicated, effective, and inspirational spiritual guide.

C. Eligibility for Membership in the UAHC (as defined in its "Constitution and By-Laws," as amended Nov. 1977).

Article III--Membership - Section 1

> "Any Jewish congregation in the United States of America, Canada or their Territories or Possessions, upon approval by the Board of Trustees, may become a member of this Union by subscribing to its Constitution and By-Laws."

Article VI--Congregational Autonomy

> (The historic background of this Article and the insistence by a number of founding congregations in 1873 that it be included in the Aims of the Union, indicate that a guarantee of congregational autonomy was a sine qua non for the establishment of the Union.[2]):
>
> "Nothing contained in this constitution or the By-Laws shall be construed so as to interfere in any manner whatsoever with the mode of worship, the school, the freedom of expression and opinion, or any of the other congregational activities of the constituent congregations of the Union."

II. Conclusions.

A. From the perspective of formal institutional requirements, Beth Adam certainly qualifies for membership in the Union of

American Hebrew Congregations. Beth Adam is beyond question a Jewish congregation. It is dedicated to the creative development and the perpetuation of a liberal interpretation of Judaism. Beth Adam defines itself as Reform. The functions of the congregation --worship, celebration of life-cycle events, adult study, religious school--are legitimate, historically valid activities of a synagogue. The group's application for membership indicates that they subscribe to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Union. There is therefore no objective, valid basis for denying them membership in the Union. They fulfill all the formal requirements for membership as defined in the Constitution of the Union: A Jewish congregation in the United States or Canada, and subcription to its Constitution and By-Laws.

B. Acceptance for membership in the Union implies neither agreement with, nor approval of the liturgic mode, the ceremonial practice, the theologic views, or the religious school curriculum of Beth Adam, or of any other congregation. These are matters for the individual congregations to decide. They are outside the legitimate purview of the Union. Article VI of the Union's Constitution affirms this principle in absolute terms. The Union must not "interfere <u>in any manner whatsoever</u> [emphasis in Article II of the original Statement of Aims of the Union, 1873] with the mode of worship, the school, the freedom of expression and opinion, or any of the other congregational activities...."

C. The sphere of jurisdiction of the Union in its relation to individual congregations is further clearly delineated in Article III of the Constitution. The only grounds for termination of membership is the non-compliance of a congregation with its dues obligation, as defined in the Union's Constitution and By-Laws. (See Article III Sections 2, 3 and 4.) No other bases for termination of membership are ever mentioned, nor is a process for such a procedure discussed.

D. Acceptance or rejection for membership on the basis of theologic belief, liturgic modes or religious practice would violate the Union's own Constitution. Even more seriously, such a procedure would undermine the cherished legacy of freedom---the hallmark of Reform Judaism. The Hebrew Union College has no credal tests for ordination, and neither does the Central Conference of American Rabbis have such a requirement for its applicants. It would be anomalous indeed if the one institution of Reform specifically committed to congregational autonomy would arrogate to itself the role of arbiter of Reform legitimacy and orthodoxy.

III. Obiter Dicta

A. When the questions concerning the "nature and constituency of Beth Adam," and "whether in [my] view the congregation qualifies for membership in the UAHC" were first confidentially addressed to me this past February, I replied informally (February 15, 1990): "My conclusion is that the UAHC should definitely accept this group within the Union. Such action would not only be wise, but a genuine constructive act...in terms of the group's search for its own identity. The rabbinic dictum 'Let the left hand push away, but the right hand bring near'[3] is certainly applicable in this instance."

Subsequently, Rabbis Alexander Schindler, James Simon, and Allen Kaplan of the Union addressed a formal she'elah regarding Beth Adam to the CCAR Committee on Responsa (as reported in the responsum "Humanistic Congregation," signed by W. Gunther Plaut, Chair, CCAR Responsa committee, Oct. 19, 1990). The question is formulated in the Responsum as follows:

"A humanistic congregation is interested in joining the UAHC whose constitution provides in Article III(1) that 'any Jewish congregation may become a member;' and in Article II(d) that it is among the objects of the Union 'to foster the development of Liberal Judaism.' Does this Humanistic congregation comply with these objectives?..."

The formulation of the question is puzzling. It is reminiscent of the old jocular saw current among yeshivah students, "I have an answer; please ask me a question." The response clearly indicates that the CCAR Committee is fully aware that the congregation in question is Beth Adam--The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. Their literature is quoted throughout the Teshuvah. Yet the question mentions neither the name of the group, nor the "Judaism" in their subtitle. The reference is only to "a humanistic congregation."

Even more puzzling is the quotation of the ostensibly relevant section from the UAHC Constitution which is adopted as the basis for the entire Responsum. The phrase from Article II(d) "to foster the development of Liberal Judaism" is not only a truncated quote, but is taken out of context, thereby distorting its meaning and intent. The full phrase reads, "to foster the development of Liberal Judaism throughout the world under the auspices of the World Union for Progressive Judaism." It is a commitment on the part of the Union to support the work of a sister institution, the World Union. This phrase is part of a series of objectives of the Union to support various institutions beyond the American borders: "to strengthen...the solidarity of Israel in all lands; to foster the development of Liberal Judaism throughout the world under the auspices of the World Union for Progressive Judaism; to enrich and strengthen the State of Israel...."

Furthermore, the phrase quoted in the Question (She'elah) on which the entire discussion and the conclusion in the responsum are based is part of a section of the Union's Constitution headed "Objects," which are non-operative, and irrelevant to the question of a congregation's eligibility for membership. The only sections of the Union's Constitution pertinent and applicable to the eligibility of Beth Adam are the operative Article III--Membership, and Article VI--Congregational Autonomy, which informs the entire document, as discussed above in Sections I.C and II.A, B, C and D. We may be grateful indeed that the American judiciary is not as cavalier in its interpretation of the United States Constitution as is the Responsa Committee with the UAHC Constitution.

B. Contrary to the clear and explicit statements in the UAHC Constitution, Rabbi Plaut perceives the central issue in accepting or rejecting Beth Adam's application for membership to be whether "it [Congregation Beth Adam] can be said to 'foster the development of Liberal Judaism.'" He thus concludes that though "The publications of CHJ (Congregation for Humanistic Judaism) leave no doubt about its being a Jewish Congregation; and even though "there can certainly be no disagreement with the statement that Reform Jews have different conceptions of God -- Our Gates of Prayer in the sixth Shabbat eve service...does not use the word 'God' in the English text--" and regardless of the affirmation of Beth Adam that "The definition of humanistic Judaism does not preclude having a concept of God"; nevertheless, "because CHJ's liturgy deletes any and all mention of God..." and therefore "precludes the people's right to interpret the God concept in their own way..." and because the CHJ liturgy does not include "key liturgical portions" in its services; "we find CHJ's system of beliefs to be outside the realm of historical Reform Judaism." "Persons of various shadings of belief, practice or non-practice may belong to UAHC congregations, as individuals" the Responsum

argues, "and we respect their rights." "But it is different when they come as a congregation whose declared principles are at fundamental variance with the historic God-orientation of Reform Judaism." In response to the question posed in the Responsum, "Are not diversity and inclusiveness a hallmark of Reform," Rabbi Plaut replies, "yesh gevul, there are limits. Reform Judaism cannot be everything, or it will be nothing." His final conclusion is: "In sum, we hold that CHJ, as presently constituted breaks the mold of Reform Judaism and does not have a place among the Union's Congregations."

C. As has been demonstrated in the discussion above, the issue in the Union's acceptance of Beth Adam's application for membership, contrary to the perception of the CCAR Committee, is not and must not be one of theology, liturgy or ceremonial practice. All of these are, according to the clear and explicit provisions in the UAHC Constitution and By-Laws, outside the legal limits of authority, jurisdiction, or competence of the Union. The entire discussion in the Teshuvah of the Responsa Committee is accordingly irrelevant to the question of Beth Adam's eligibility for membership in the UAHC.

D. Irrespective of its pertinence, the Teshuvah of the CCAR committee does raise a number of crucial issues which urgently require clarification and informed discussion. The most significant of these issues is what may be appropriately termed "the mood, the underlying attitude" which should inform Reform Responsa. Rabbi Plaut succinctly poses the question in his Responsum, "Are not diversity and inclusiveness a hallmark of Reform?" "The argument that we ourselves are excluded by the Orthodox and therefore should not keep others out who wish to join us," he continued, though it "has an attractive sound to it, must be rejected on the basis of yesh gevul, there are limits." Rabbi Plaut defines these limits as "the historic God-orientation of

Reform Judaism." Since Beth Adam is, in the Committee's view, outside these limits, it must not be permitted to join the UAHC.

I discuss in another context the "limits of Reform," and the more vital issue--not whether Reform has limits, which it surely does--but who is to define those limits, and the effective, permissable means to gain the acceptance of and adherence to those limits by the Reform constituency.[4] At this juncture, I discuss only the "mood" of the Responsum, its basic orientation, as exemplified in its conclusion to reject Beth Adam.

It is helpful and instructive to turn for guidance to the most recent formulation of Reform Principles overwhelmingly approved by the Reform rabbinate, "The Centenary Perspective." The section headed "Diversity Within Unity, the Hallmark of Reform" (a section not quoted by Rabbi Plaut) states:

> "Reform Jews respond to change in various ways according to the Reform principle of the autonomy of the individual. However, Reform Judaism does more than tolerate diversity; it engenders it. In our historical situation we must expect to have far greater diversity than previous generations knew...We stand open to any position thoughtfully and conscientiously advocated in the spirit of Reform Jewish belief."[5]

Even more instructive is a principle repeated a number of times, not in Reform documents of the 19th or 20th centuries, but in the earliest strata of Talmudic Literature--a principle which contemporary writers of responsa might well ponder with benefit:

> "Rabbi Elizer says: God said to Moses, 'I who spoke and the world came into being, I am the One who brings near and does not push away.' As it is said, 'I am a God who welcomes and does not repel' [a play on Jer.XXIII.23--mikarov and merahok

are read mekarev and merahek]...."[6] "Our Rabbis have taught: Always let the left hand keep distant, but let the right hand draw near. Not like Elisha who pushed Gehazi away with both hands [Gehazi is probably a veiled allusion to Saul of Tarsus--Paul],[7] and not like R. Joshua ben Perahyah who pushed away Jesus the Nazarene with both hands."[8]

It is remarkable that these outstanding teachers of the first and second centuries had the temerity--on the basis of what they considered to be the overriding ethical principle, "let the right hand always welcome and bring near"--to censure the prophet Elisha for banning his duplicitous servant, Gehazi (see, II Kings II.20ff), and R. Joshua b. Perahyah, the head of the Sanhedrin, for rejecting Jesus. Yet the Responsa Committee of the CCAR writing in 1990, for Reform Jews, apparently insensitive to the turmoil and confusion, the cataclysmic changes and challenges which are the experience of many of our rabbis and thoughtful laity, would recommend the rejection of a group of Jews in serious, sincere search--a congregation committed "to preserving the history and tradition [of the Jewish people]," to the support of Israel, and much else, as outlined above (Section I.A). And all of this on the basis of a nebulous, shibboleth "yesh gevul, there are limits," the rallying cry of every opponent of creative Reform--limits which historically have been left for each congregation, with the guidance of their rabbi, and for each informed individual Reform Jew to define.

In the familiar talmudic story when the would-be proselyte asked the great Hillel to "teach him the entire Torah while the heathen stood on one foot," the loving, embracing Sage responded not with yesh gevul. Nor did he expound an elaborate theology of Judaism. God is not mentioned at all. His reply was, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. Go study."[9]

Another halakhic principle frequently stated in the Talmud is: "The authority of the permissive opinion prevails [over the more stringent]--koaḥ de-heteira 'adiph."[10] Rabbi Sh'lomo Yitzḥaki (Rashi), the peer commentator on the Talmud of 11th century France, explains: "The authority of those who prohibit is not persuasive, for everyone can be stringent, even concerning matters that are permitted. It is therefore preferable to cite the one who permits, for he relies on his tradition and is not afraid to be permissive."[11] It is essential that those who assume the awesome responsibility of writing Reform responsa well ponder this principle and its implications.

The traditional halakhists tragically failed in their response to the revolutionary upheavals in Jewish life in the 19th and 20th centuries, in Western Europe, in the Pale, and, with the gravest consequences for the future, in the United States and Israel. An ever greater stringency and an encrusted literalism are the dominant mood of the traditional Responsa Literature. Those who have appropriated halakhah as their exclusive domain are enchained by a fundamentalist literalism, by their own timidity, yir'at hahoraah. Even the more "liberal" are paralyzed by a fear that they may be suspected of being too permissive. They must therefore display their piety by demonstrating that they can be more punctiliously stringent than their colleagues. We of Reform emulate them at our own peril.

Exclusion, ostracism, mindless stringency to appease the traditionalists, institutional coercion are alien to Reform Judaism. They chill and kill. They are the death knell of Liberal Religion. Reform's authentic mode is and must ever remain the sympathetic, loving embrace; gentle persuasion, open, accepting rational discourse; empathic appreciation for the sincere search. Reform responsa must reflect these attitudes if

they are to qualify as authentically Reform.

E. I conclude with an expression of hope and confidence that as the members of Beth Adam pursue their search with the guidance of their rabbi, they will come to appreciate ever more profoundly that, as Chesterton expressed it, "The trouble when people stop believing in God is not they thereafter believe in nothing; it is that they thereafter believe in everything." The realm of the absolute is never empty; a void is too easily filled with godlets of ethnicism, of racial chauvenism, of anthropotheism. The genius of Judaism is best expressed in the declaration: "Only God is God, there is none else"; but God can never be known, for "No man shall see me and live." This is the historic witness of the Jew which rejects every form of idol, and commits him to the eternal quest. The medieval poet phrased it:

> I have not seen Thee, yet I tell Thy praise,
> Not known thee, yet I image forth Thy ways."

The deletion of the word "God" from its liturgy after acknowledging, as Beth Adam does, that "the concept of God has undergone constant modification in Judaism" is to revert to a prosaic, naive literalism, and, at the very minimum, deprives the worshipper of the rich experience of poetic metaphor. Moreover, such a stance also eliminates the richest literary treasures of our heritage.

Francis Bacon once made the remark that "a little philosophy inclines one's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion." George Santayana wisely comments that Bacon "forgot to add that the God to whom depth in philosophy brings men's minds is far from being the same [God] from which a little philosophy estranges them."[12]

NOTES

1. See, for example, Mishnah Bav. Meẓ. III.7, Taanit 14b, and very often in the classic Responsa and Codes.

2. See, Sefton D. Temkin, "A Century of Reform Judaism in America," American Jewish Yearbook, Vol. 74, 1973, p. 11.

3. See Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yeshm'a'el, 'Amalek, ed. Horovitz, p. 193; Sotah 47a and Sanhedrin 107b. Note especially the uncensored manuscripts and the unexpurgated editions of the Talmud. Cf. R. Rabbinowicz, Dikdukei Soph'rim, Senhedrin, pp. 338f.

4. See my forthcoming proposal for a Reform Congregational Synod, which I initially suggested at the meeting of the National Board of the UAHC in Seattle this past June.

5. CCAR Yearbook, 1976, p. 177.

6. Mekhilta, loc. cit. The Rabbis, because of a textual difficulty, understand the subject of Ex. XVIII.6 to be not Jethro, as it clearly is in biblical context, but God. They interpret "Vayo'mer el Moshe 'ani..." as "God says to Moses, "I am the One...."

7. See, R. T. Herford, Christianity in Talmud and Midrash, pp. 97ff.

8. See references in note 3, above. The reference to Jesus was expunged by the Christian censors. Also, Joshua b. Peraḥyah lived considerably before Jesus. The legend that he was the teacher of Jesus is not historically tenable.

9. Shabbat 31a.

10. Beẓah 2b, and often.

11. Ibid.

12. See, Emanuel Rice, Freud and Moses, pp. 118f.

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

COPY

December 13, 1990
26 Kislev 5751

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5P 3K9 CANADA

Dear Gunther:

I have your letter of December 5th and I thank you for enlightening me on the manner in which she'elahs are handled. It was thoughtful of you to clarify this matter further.

With warmest regards and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: DR EUGENE MIHALY

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, J.D., D.D.
SENIOR SCHOLAR

December 5, 1990

Dear Alex,

Thank you for your letter of November 27th, which calls for an enlargement of my previous answer to you.

Generally, when a she'elah arrives, I send it to all committee members asking for their opinion. No one in particular is assigned the task of writing a teshuvah, but everyone is free to do so.

Most of the time I receive an expression of gut opinions. My vice-chair, Mark Washofsky, at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, is one of those who delves into rabbinic literature and provides me with the sources.

Once I receive the replies, I then create the teshuvah.

If the subject is controversial and the letters I have received clearly indicate a division of opinion, I send out a draft, which is then commented upon by the members.

You are quite wrong when you assume that the members of the committee will automatically go along with what I write. Not so. On one occasion, the objections were strong enough to persuade me that I had erred, and I reversed myself when I wrote the second draft, in order to conform with what had become the clear majority and also, at this stage, my revised opinion.

The members received a draft of the teshuvah on the Humanistic congregation and they responded freely.

If there is any further clarification that I can provide, please do not hesitate to let me know. With cordial regards from house to house.

Faithfully, Gunther

P.S. You may be interested in a recent she'elah which dealt with the permissibility of holding annual meetings on Friday night. I will send it to you in the near future.

HOLY BLOSSOM TEMPLE · 1950 BATHURST STREET · TORONTO M5P 3K9, ONTARIO

UAHC New Congregations Committee
c/o Stanley R. Loeb
520 SW Yamhill, Suite 800
Portland, OR 97204
Telephone: 503/778-2129
Facsimile: 503/224-0388

July 20, 1992

Mr. Melvin Merians
UAHC, Chairperson
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Re: New Congregations Committee/Application of Temple Beth Adam, Cincinnati

Dear Mel:

Thank you for your July 15 telephone call - sorry we couldn't talk. I hope you have had a wonderful time in Israel.

I spoke to Bob Chaiken on July 17. Here is the schedule he sees:

July 26 — Regional Committee will consider Beth Adam's application in Cincinnati. There will be presentations by the applicant congregation and by an opposition group. Bob is considering transcribing the presentations. Thereafter, the regional committee will make some form of recommendation and the regional director will compete the administration aspects of the application.

Early November — Application will be presented to the Mid-West Regional Board at its convention in Cincinnati for its recommendation to the National New Congregations Committee. The application with those prior recommendations will be presented to the National New Congregations Committee in time for its December 1992 meeting in Palm Beach, just prior to the December Board meeting.

I look forward to talking to you when you get back to the States and have a moment or two.

Sincerely,

Stanley R. Loeb

cc: Rabbi Alexander N. Schindler
Allan B. Goldman, Esq.
Rabbi Allen Kaplan
Bernard L. Isaacs
Horace A. Stern

J:\CG1\SRL\10123SRL.MIS

BETH ADAM POLICY AND THE REFORM JEWISH COMMUNITY 12/8/89

We believe that:

1. Judaism is a way of life from which rich tradition has evolved. Interpreting and preserving the history and tradition for posterity is a responsiblity of Jews in each generation.
2. Torah, including interpretations of its text based on modern knowledge, is fundamental to Reform.
3. Reform is flexible and adapts to new approaches within its overall philosophy and historical context. Humanistic Judaism is consistent with that flexibility.
4. We should not rely on benign providence for the betterment of humanity or the preservation of our planet.
5. Each person is free to hold his/her religious beliefs whether or not they agree with those of others.

Our goals as a congregation are:

1. To provide meaningful education and life cycle religious services.
2. To participate in community programs designed for the benefit of humankind.
3. To continuously examine our concepts by critical reason and to make changes to meet the test of reality.
4. To emphazize the relevant aspects of modern life and to de-emphasize those which have become irrelevant.
5. To participate in Reform Judaism and to explore membership in the U.A.H.C.
6. To advocate and facilitate a continuity of rabbinic clergy for Humanistic Judaism.

We affirm that:

1. **HUC-JIR is the keystone of Reform Judaism in America.**
2. **The branch of HUC-JIR in Jerusalem is testimony to Reform's Zionist committment. It merits support.**
3. **The academic excellence in all fields emanating from HUC-JIR are invaluable assets to all faiths throughout the world.**

Beth Adam, now in its tenth year, is a pioneering effort to provide Jews with an alternative to meet religious desires. We believe that Beth Adam broadens and strenghtens the scope of the Reform movement. We encourage HUC-JIR to familiarize rabbinic students with the concept of Humanistic Judaism.

Members of the congregation, encouraged and assisted by the Rabbi, have energetically and enthusiastically created religious services for all occasions. Liturgy and musical content of the services are updated to ensure relevancy. Torah, Talmud, and Midrash are appropriately incorporated into the fabric of the services.

*Adopted in principle on 12/12/89

cc: DR E. MIHALY

COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • PRESIDENT
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

November 27, 1990
10 Kislev 5751

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto Ontario
M5P 3K9 CANADA

Dear Gunther:

You misunderstood my inquiry. I was neither happy nor unhappy with the response. I only wanted to learn.

My inquiry concerning the Responsa Committee procedures were motivated by concerns much wider than this particular issue. I have been troubled for some time now about the lack of ideological cohesion within our movement. This is why I recently devoted the Seattle Board meeting to the subject of Reform Judaism - its commitments as well as its limits. It was a very satisfactory meeting. As a matter of fact, a video tape of it was made and I can probably get you a copy if you are at all interested.

Be that as it may, the procedures of the Responsa Committee are a logical extension of my concerns along these lines.

I'll be frank to say that your description of these procedures does not allay my wider worries, alas, it only deepens them. When the head of a synod "suggests" to its members just what their response should be, dissent is discouraged and the encrusting of practice ensues.

Again, this has nothing at all to do with the Cincinnati congregation issue. I shall leave that to the properly constituted regional and national new congregation committees on which the rabbinate will be widely represented.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, J.D., D.D.
SENIOR SCHOLAR

November 21, 1990

Dear Alex:

The procedure of the Responsa Committee is as follows:

Upon receipt of a question, I mail it out to all the members, although on occasion, I enclose my own preliminary suggestion for a response. This latter procedure was followed in the instant case.

The majority responded approvingly; there were several dissents. I asked the dissenters to write a formal teshuvah, but that invitation was not taken up.

As you will see, the procedure is very democratic but also time-consuming. Occasionally, when an immediate answer is necessary because circumstances so warrant it, I will respond personally, indicating that the committee at large has not participated in the formulation.

I gather from the tone of your letter and inquiry that you are not too happy with the response, but, that is the chance which anyone takes when he asks a question. Incidentally, I would like to repeat what I said in a previous letter, namely, that a discussion or presentation on the responsa process would, I think, make a valuable contribution to the forthcoming Biennial.

I have just come back from a stint as scholar-in-residence for the Foundation for Jewish Studies in Washington. Josh Haberman is really doing a marvellous job. I gave nine lectures to Reform and Conservative congregations, and found the experience most stimulating.

Elizabeth joins me in sending you and Rhea our cordial good wishes.

Sincerely,

Gunther

HOLY BLOSSOM TEMPLE · 1950 BATHURST STREET · TORONTO M5P 3K9, ONTARIO

VIA FAX (5 pages including cover)

November 26, 1990

From: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

To: Allan B. Goldman, Esq.

Am sharing a letter from Jim Simon in regard to the Cincinnati Congregation of Humanistic Judaism for your perusal.

Also enclosed is a resolution from the Northeast Lakes Council.

See you soon. Regards, have a good journey,

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Hold for Board Meeting

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
10425 OLD OLIVE STREET ROAD, SUITE 205, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63141 (314) 997-7566 FAX #: (314) 997-4041

MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

November 21, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

I am faxing this to you today not so much because of the urgency of the letter but I did want to make sure that I send this to you while my memory is still fresh from my recent trip in Cincinnati. It is my hope that we will have a few minutes in Rye to talk about this so you can give me your advice and counsel as to how we should continue to proceed.

I wanted to give you a brief update on the situation with Beth Adam in Cincinnati and indicate to you that while the process is moving along you should know that the situation is beginning to heat up considerably and I anticipate that this application may engender much more controversy than previously imagined.

To briefly review, we have been in contact off and on with this congregation for close to two and one-half years. Following your advice, we had an informal discussion about the general issue of a Humanistic congregation at our Spring 1990 Board Meeting and I felt it was a very candid and fruitful preliminary discussion. Obviously, no decision was reached because we have not received any application. During the spring and the summer of 1990, Bob Chaiken and I have been in touch with Rabbi Bob Barr and other leaders of the congregation and have continued our discussions on an informal basis. At the same time as a matter of courtesy we have informed the Rabbis and the Presidents of the four Cincinnati Reform congregations that we area involved in this process of discussion.

Last Monday, November 19 Bob Chaiken and I met with the board of Beth Adam and had a most intense and lively discussion which lasted over two hours. It is clear that they are going to pursue this application and they feel very strongly about the fact that they wish to be a part of the UAHC. It is also clear that in the private discussions that Bob Chaiken and I have had with Rabbis in Cincinnati

that there is strong sentiment against the idea that Beth Adam would become part of the UAHC. I am sure that once we receive the formal application and invite the four congregations of Cincinnati to comment on the application that we will most likely receive from at least three of the boards very strong letters which indicate the fact that they do not believe that Beth Adam should be part of the UAHC. There are many, many reasons as to this opposition and I do not want to try to guess at what they are now but rather would want the congregations to speak for themselves in the future. There might be a few things I could share with you privately when I see you.

I also wanted you to know that they were very much concerned with respect to the Responsum authored by Rabbi Plaut and the committee and they will probably want to write some type of a formal response that would then be sent along to all members of our board along with the Responsum and other materials. I have indicated to them that I will make sure that all relevant materials are made available to the entire Midwest Council Regional Board and in all likelihood we will invite representatives of Beth Adam to come and speak to the board at the next meeting to be held in Colorado in April. We will also set aside sufficient time so as to have a full and meaningful discussion on this very sensitive and important issue.

One final note. Unlike other congregations that wish to join the UAHC, there are a few interesting wrinkles in this situation that go beyond the very fascinating ideological issues. First, you should know that even though Beth Adam has been in existence for well over a decade, they see that membership in the UAHC will help to validate their identity and their credibility within the context of the Cincinnati Reform community. They were very candid in indicating that it is their hope to secure the services of a Rabbinic intern from Hebrew Union College, and it is also their hope that once they are a member of the UAHC that they will be permitted to be part of the successful and growing Reform Jewish Community High School which is currently a joint effort of the four Reform synagogues. While it is true that they are desirous of utilizing some of the services and benefits of the UAHC, it is equally clear that they have very little interest in most of what we produce and they clearly have no interest whatsoever in any of our materials which pertain to Jewish education and the like. Finally, you should know that a few of their members sit on the Board of Overseers of Hebrew Union College and that Dr. Gottschalk has indicated to the leaders of the congregation that it might be nice if the congregation is part of the UAHC so that those overseers and Beth Adam itself could continue to make contributions to institutions of the Reform movement. (Obviously the majority of those contributions would not come to us!)

At any rate this is where we are right now. It is my feeling that an application will arrive in our office within the next month or so and then we will begin to compile a packet of materials which will be mailed out to all of the board members of our Region. It is our hope to include not only materials pertaining to Beth Adam but copies of

the CCAR Responsum as well as some of the other letters that have been accumulated from other Rabbis throughout the country. I will probably put together some type of cover memo as well.

I am very much interested in some of your thoughts and ideas as to how we should proceed during the next few months . . .

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER
PRESIDENT
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

COPY

November 14, 1990
26 Heshvan 5751

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5P 3K9 Canada

Dear Gunther:

Thank you for your print out of the teshuvah concerning the Humanistic congregation.

Can you enlighten me on the procedures which the Responsa Committee of the Central Conference uses in order to reach its decisions?

Do you meet in concert to discuss the various issues, or are individual queries assigned to a specific person whose answer is then normative. I would really like to know.

In any event, I thank you for your prompt consideration of my query which has been relayed to the leadership of our Midwest Council, which, in the first instance, is going to review this application.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

BCC: EUGENE MIHALY

from the study of

RABBI W. GUNTHER PLAUT, O.C., J.D.S., D.D., LL.D., H.LITT.D.

SENIOR SCHOLAR, HOLY BLOSSOM TEMPLE

#7

To Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

Herewith a somewhat
better print out of the
Teshuvah.

Regards,

G.

24/10
'90

1950 BATHURST STREET, TORONTO, ONTARIO M5P 3K9

Humanistic Congregation.

She'elah

A Humanistic congregation is interested in joining the UAHC whose constitution provides in Article III (1) that "any Jewish congregation"...may become a member; and in Article II (d) that it is among the objects of the Union "to foster the development of Liberal Judaism." Does this Humanistic congregation comply with these objectives? Its rabbi is a graduate of HUC-JIR and a member of the CCAR. (The inquiry comes from Rabbis Alexander Schindler, James Simon and Allen Kaplan of the Union.)

Teshuvah

The question before us is twofold:

1. Can the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (hereafter referred to as CHJ) be considered a "Jewish congregation"?

2. Can it be said to "foster the development of Liberal Judaism"?

ad 1. The CHJ sees itself as a legitimate member of the Jewish community; it is not syncretistic like the Hebrew-Christians; it is, quite simply, a Jewish group that has banded together for the celebration of festivals, life cycle events, etc., but without the traditional theistic framework.

In its statement of belief (adopted December 1989) CHJ avows:

> Judaism is a way of life from which a rich tradition has evolved. Interpreting and preserving the history and tradition for posterity is the responsibility of Jews in every generation.

The publications of CHJ leave no doubt about its being a Jewish congregation.

ad 2. The CHJ proclaims itself as a Reform congregation. Seeing that it acclaims the human being and not a supernatural power as the ultimate reference point, may it indeed be said to "foster Liberal Judaism"?

Reform Judaism has been an open-ended and variegated movement. It is historically flexible, but how far does its flexibility go? Can it accommodate the philosophy and liturgy of CHJ?

CHJ's liturgy deletes any and all mention of God, either in Hebrew (of which there is almost none) or in English. One of its publications, entitled *A Concept of God, and a Statement on Liturgy,* explains the congregation's position in this regard as follows.

> The concept of God has undergone constant modification in Judaism...There has always been and continues to be great diversity in the Jewish understanding of God.

There can certainly be no disagreement with the statement that Reform Jews (like other Jews) have different conceptions of God. Our *Gates of Prayer,* in the sixth Shabbat eve service, while leaving the traditional Hebrew God-language undisturbed, does not use the word "God" in the English text. Instead it speaks of "The Power that makes for freedom" and says: "We worship the power that unites all the universe into one great harmony" (p.210). It is clear that *the sixth service remains a prayer service,* which leaves it to the worshippers to fill the word "Power" with their interpretation of the supernatural. The language is purposefully ambiguous only within these limits.

That kind of ambiguity does not, however, exist in the HCJ liturgy. To be sure, the above-mentioned statement says:

> Many falsely assume that humanism is atheistic...The definition of Humanistic Judaism does not preclude one's having a concept of God.

This affirmation of people's right to interpret the God-concept in their own way is, however, not borne out by the liturgy which *precludes the exercise of this right by omitting any and all references to a supernatural power in whatever language.* In fact, the statement goes on to say unequivocally:

> The use of prayer in services would be incompatible with such a theological system.

The CHJ's liturgy therefore, and quite logically in its view, does not include either *Kiddush* or *Kaddish.* The rabbi of the CHJ states expressly (in his publication *Resources and Reflections*) that on principle he will not say *Kaddish,* though he would allow someone else to say it if so desired by a congregant.

Needless to add that such key liturgical portions as *Barekhu, Shema', Ve'ahavta, 'Amidah* or *'Aleinu* are also absent, as are selections from Psalms, or the familiar songs *Yigdal, 'Adon 'Olam,* and *Ein kelohenu.*

The congregation's *Haggadah* is equally instructive. In the song "Who knows one? (*Echad mi yode'a?*) the traditional response, "One is our God who is present everywhere," is replaced by "One is all the universe." And in the second verse (where the number two stands traditionally for the two tables of the Covenant) the two we are to remember are the "two people in the Garden of Eden."

The latter change is especially noteworthy: Because of its elision of God, CHJ's philosophy does not admit of Covenant or commandments. Hence, the *Shenei luchot ha-brit* have been replaced by two human beings.

While CHJ's liturgy contains a number of sensitive and poetic meditations, may we consider the congregation's service agenda as a recognizable form or development of Reform Judaism? Can Reform Judaism accommodate this kind of philosophy? It is well, therefore, to turn to the three basic Reform statements, the Pittsburgh and Columbus platforms and the CCAR's Centenary Perspective which attempt to define the nature of Reform Judaism.

Pittsburgh (1885).

> We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite One, and in every mode source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man.. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our holy Scriptures... *We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended...this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.*

Columbus (1935).

> *The heart of Judaism and its chief contribution to religion is the doctrine of the One, living God,* who rules the world through law and love. In Him all existence has its creative source, and mankind its ideal of conduct...
>
> Judaism affirms that man is created in the Divine image...He is an active co-worker with God...
>
> *The Torah, both written and oral, enshrines Israel's ever-growing consciousness of God and the moral law.*

Centenary Perspective (1976).

> The affirmation of God has always been essential to our people's will to survive. In our struggle to preserve our faith we have experienced and conceived of God in many ways. The trials of our own time and the challenges of modern culture have made steady belief and clear understanding difficult for some. Nevertheless, *we ground our lives, personally and communally, on God's reality* and remain open to new experiences and conceptions of the Divine. Amid the mystery we call life, we affirm that human beings, created in God's image, share in God's eternality despite the mystery we call death....
>
> *Torah results from the relationship between God and the Jewish people...*

CHJ declares itself to be a group that makes the human being the measure of all things. This concept, with its roots in Greek philosophy, has been opposed by Judaism, which has always staunchly affirmed its belief in a supernatural God and Creator who sustains the world. Reform has never wavered in its adherence to this faith and has never abandoned the central role of prayer from its belief structure. Persons of various shadings of belief or unbelief, practice or non-practice, may belong to UAHC congregations as individuals, and we respect their rights. *But it is different when they come as a congregation whose declared principles are at fundamental variance with the historic God-orientation of Reform Judaism.*

In view of these statements we find CHJ's system of beliefs to be outside the realm of historical Reform Judaism.

But should we not open the gates wide enough to admit even such concepts into our fold? Are not diversity and inclusiveness a hallmark of Reform? To this we would reply: *yesh gevul*, there are limits. *Reform Judaism cannot be everything, or it will be nothing.* The argument that we ourselves are excluded by the Orthodox and therefore should not keep others out who wish to join us, has an attractive sound to it. Taken to its inevitable conclusion, however, we would end up with a Reform Judaism in which "Reform" determines what "Judaism" is and not the other way around.

The argument has been made that our doors should always be open to *ba'alei teshuvah*. Our reading of the texts the congregation has published does not bear out such an intent. Rather we find in them a declared purpose to redefine the essence of Reform Judaism. The CHJ is of course free to

pursue this goal and may wish to attract other groups to its philosophy. It must do this, however, outside and not inside the UAHC.

In sum, we hold that the CHJ, as presently constituted, breaks the mold of Reform Judaism and does not have a place among the Union's congregations.

Toronto, 30 Tishrei 5751 / October 19 1990

W. GUNTHER PLAUT,
Chair, CCAR Responsa Committee

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

cc: AMS for Edie Isaacs.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA AND
PACIFIC NORTHWEST COUNCILS

Rabbi Morris M. Hershman
Regional Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Rabbi James L. Simon

FROM: Rabbi Morris M. Hershman

DATE: March 20, 1990

RE: The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism poses a number of interesting challenges, and either we should be grateful to you for raising these issues for serious consideration, or we should hold you fully responsible! Probably the latter.

At the outset, I consider "humanistic Judaism" to be something of an oxymoron. The policy statement which you sent appears to go beyond the bounds of normative Reform Judaism. While interpretations of God may vary greatly, the Beth Adam policy seems to remove God from the equation. The Covenant is central to Judaism, as I understand it, yet this congregation honors and recognizes all religious beliefs, "whether or not they agree with those of others." Apparently the test of reality and "relevance" are more important to Beth Adam than Covenant, tradition, and other rubrics of Jewish life.

The range of issues and diversity of opinion in Reform Judaism is broad enough without going beyond those limits to the sphere of the humanists. Even the name of the congregation is revealing, representing universalism rather than an attachment to Jewish life. This congregation appears to be more interested in promoting its own interpretations (see point number six) than it is in joining the congregational community for the sake of common goals and purposes. In my view, a congregation which is atypical such as this may have every right to exist, but until we see evidence of programs and committments which are consonant with those of Reform Judaism, I do not believe that the UAHC should embrace and/or endorse the principles of this congregation by according it membership in the movement.

MMH:lf

Draft

PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

March 26, 1990
29 Adar 5750

Mr. Robert Chaiken
P.O. Box 5367
Cincinnati, OH 45201

and

Rabbi James L.Simon
UAHC Midwest Council
10425 Old Olive Street
St. Louis, MO 63141

Dear Bob and Jim:

As you know, I have asked a few particular colleagues to share their thoughts on the matter of Congregations for Humanistic Judaism as we might possibly receive requests for affiliation with the UAHC. Responses have been received by all of the rabbis I contacted. I enclose them all herewith for your perusal.

This sampling of opinions gives sufficient expression to varying views as far as I am concerned. While I ask you to keep these responses confidential for the time being, I do ask that you convene a meeting of the regional New Member Congregastions Committee. You may want to expand the committee for this meeting and I hope you will be sure to have a good rabbinical representation present for a discussion of this matter. It will be interesting to get the views of the Midwest Council.

You should know that while I believe we may well have to discuss each humanistic congregation as we receive requests, having read all of the responses I tend to agree with Gene Mihaly. His was a very thoughtful and informed opinion.

Don't hesitate to call upon me if you need any further information. And, of course, I trust you will keep me informed as matters develop. This is a subject which should receive the widest possible discussion within our movement. The Midwest may well be the first of many regions to receive an official application for affiliation from a humanistic congregation.

With fondest regards to you both and to Roz and Rebecca, from Rhea too, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Encl.

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100 CABLES UNIONUAHC

NEW YORK FEDERATION OF REFORM SYNAGOGUES

Rabbi Bernard M. Zlotowitz
Director

Rabbi Allen S. Kaplan
Associate Director

February 23, 1990

Rabbi James L. Simon
Midwest Council, UAHC
10425 Old Olive Street Road, Suite 205
St. Louis, MO 63141

Dear Rabbi Simon:

In response to your memorandum of January 25, 1990, please note that I am not in favor of the admission of Beth Adam to the UAHC. We are a religious institution that believes in the existence of God as the basic and foremost tenet in Judaism. To accept a congregation that does not believe in God flies in the face of our faith. I am fully aware that the Gates of Prayer -- the GOP latest Republican prayer book, has a service that is Humanistic. It should never have been included. To use the argument that it represents the spectrum of Reform is fallacious and misleading.

Do we have to give in to every single little group? In a word, I guess you realize I am opposed to Beth Adam becoming a member of our movement.

Warmly,

Rabbi Bernard M. Zlotowitz

BMZ:mb

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
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Union of American Hebrew Congregations

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MID-ATLANTIC COUNCIL
Rabbi Richard S. Sternberger
Director

John F. Lippmann
Regional President

March 15, 1990

To: Rabbi James Simon

From: Rabbi Richard S. Sternberger

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Even though I spoke to you at length over the phone, I have had a great deal of difficulty answering your memo. As I grow older, I have less and less patience with rules and restrictions. I believe that Reform Judaism should be as inclusive as possible, and am not enthusiastic about barriers which will exclude people or groups. And yet if our Movement is to have any dynamism and send forth a compelling message, we cannot be all things to all people. True there are areas where we must still do battle with orthodoxy; however, the significant area of controversy is that of secularism and the secular Jew. I believe that we must underscore the importance of theology-belief-faith. Even our Reconstructionist brothers and sisters are using terms that would have been anathema even a decade ago. The theology of Mordecai Kaplan - which had its roots in the time of Russell and Dewey - is meaningless today. The work of our Committee on Religious Living is absolutely critical, and we have found great response to the programs of our Regional committee.

About a dozen years ago, a rabbi was in town to establish a Humanist congregation. He called and asked me whether I would be helpful. I gave him a negative answer, and have had my moments of guilt concerning that answer over the years. And yet I believe that we must take our stand with such contemporary Jewish thinkers as Steinheim, Rosenweig, Buber, Heschel, etc., who really have a message concerning God which our people must hear. A circuitous road to answer that we should not admit a congregation that defines itself as Humanist.

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
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SOUTHEAST COUNCIL

Rabbi Frank N. Sundheim
Regional Director

February 14, 1990

FROM : Frank Sundheim

TO : Jim Simon

CC : Rabbi Alexander Schindler

RE : HUMANIST CONGREGATION

Dear Jim:

I am writing you this letter in follow-up to our conversation a few days ago and your February 12th memo. I am enclosing a copy of my first letter in case you do not find it. I shall, however, summarize some of the material that was in that letter in this memo.

This will be a lengthy memo, and I will do my best to make it Mishnah rather than Gemara. However, there are some items which I feel will need further explanation. Others if I just mention them, you certainly can fill in the commentary, as can Alex.

It is a great temptation to make this response a multi-volume tome, because the more I thought about it, the more offended I became at the thought that so many of our colleagues might feel that a Humanist congregation does not have a place underneath the Reform umbrella. If some of my points seem repetitive, it is because when I started to think in detail about our conversation, the deeper my convictions became in supporting what I wrote you in the last letter, and my pen did not stop making notes at that time. Nonetheless, let me try these arguments out for size in no particular order of importance.

My final introductory thought is that most of the time I am a theist. However, at other times, I become a Buberian, Kaplanian, a Humanist, an Agnostic, and a Polydoxist. It sometimes takes me as long as 24 hours to run the entire gamut of these approaches.

Here is my list of thoughts:

1) The CCAR does not excludes humanists from membership.

2) Our congregations do not ask for a loyalty oath to God when people become members. For whatever reasons people join congregations, very few of them do so for the theological reasons.

3) Would we keep a holocaust survivor out of one of our congregations because that person is a humanist? Or even an atheist?

4) By the nature of its faculty, HUC is committed to a multiplicity of ideas. An institution that can tenure Alvin Rienes, Abraham Chronbach, Samuel Cohon, Samuel Atlas, Gene Borowitz, plus a multitude ofothers could hardly be described as an institution that discourages a multiplicity of ideas. The UAHC must be the same.

5) As I understand it, humanists do not automatically deny God and in this point it differs from atheism. Some humanists may be theists and others may not. Many of them ignore God. Others define God in their own terms. I find none of these alternatives destructive of the Reform Jewish spirit.

6) Related to #5, modern humanism is far less destructive to the spirit of Judaism than was Koheleth.

7) I see these people as non-traditional Jews struggling to find an institutional home. If the UAHC keeps people like this away, they will find homes elsewhere and we will lose thousands of people who would in the long run be confortable under our umbrella.

8) Humanists care enough about theology to think seriously about it. Many times, they are much more honest than many of us who play word games, but really don't mean what we say. Sometimes the language we use cleverly and conveniently covers our own misgivings, but because we are good at language, we can give ourselves a "kosher cop-out." I personally find humanists most refreshing in holding us to the meaning of the words we use.

9)* As regional directors, we must deal with political situations relating to new congregations. I am not aware of the realities in Cincinnati, but I would hate to think of the repercussions from many of our colleagues including those at HUC if a congregation were excluded because it was Humanist. Nonetheless, sometimes decisions must be made that reflect the political realities of the moment. If this should happen, we will have to live with it however distasteful it might be. But, the UAHC certainly should not be part of rejection of such a congregation L'hatchilah.

10) The UAHC has demonstrated its openness in the types of congregations it has taken in. We have openly embraced gay and lesbian congregations, and we even have a prison congregation within the UAHC. Given this track record, how can we keep out a congregation because it "thinks" differently than most of our congregations (at least officially)?

11)* This reflects part of the conversation I had with you. I understand that the UAHC Constitution and Charter does speak of the importance of God, as do the preambles to most congregational constitutions. In no way does that bind the congregation legally to these doctrines anymore than congregations are bound to agree with resolutions of a UAHC biennial. Such statements are Haggadah not Halacha. It seems that those who would oppose this humanist congregation are coming dangerously close to demanding conformity of ideology to within the Reform movement. We must give a loud and resounding NO to such thinking. Any congregation entering the UAHC is aware of the statements concerning God that are part of our Charter. If they have a problem with those words, then let them wrestle with it, and make a decision on their joining the UAHC on the basis of their deliberations. But let <u>them</u> state the problem, not us. If they have a problem with the UAHC Charter, then they must deal with it. It is not to us to have litmus tests or loyalty oaths to statements that were meant and should still be meant to be descriptive rather than perscriptive.

12)* I also discussed with you an analogy with ARZA that you asked me to enunciate in writing. When ARZA came into being many of us struggled with the question of whether we could accept the Jerusalem Platform that makes aliyah the central mitzvah of the Jewish people. We struggled with it because we took the idea seriously and we did not want to be hypocritical in our responses. I am sure that a <u>tiny</u> number of the people who eventually joined ARZA did so because they accepted that part of the Jerusalem Platform. I certainly was among that majority who joined for other reasons. My commitment to what ARZA was trying to do as a Reform Jewish presence within the Zionist movement simply over-rode the misgivings I had concerning the Jerusalem Platform. I would imagine that most people joining ARZA did not take this matter nearly so seriously as did I. In fact, I gave an entire Holy Day sermon on the subject, including my own questions. The result is that we have a major Jewish organization, ARZA, the vast majority of whose members do not subscribe to one of the things that was supposedto be a very basis of joining the Zionist Movement. If there is a contradiction, we live with that contradiction, most of us happily.

I think there is an analogy here to a Humanist congregation. They may have misgivings, or even deny an aspect of the UAHC Charter. But they are so close to us in 98% of everything else for which we stand, it would seem to me hypocritical on our part to exclude them.

13) I conclude where I started. I am very disturbed and concerned about the future of Reform Judaism if such matters as loyalty oaths to God are necessary for congregations to join the Union when we certainly do not make that request or demand of people joining our congregations. Reform Judaism has always been open to the present and the future, and I think to exclude these people on the basis of their deeply thought-through theological position would be on our parts hypocritical, destructive of the UAHC in the long run, and unconsciounable.

STRONG MESSAGE TO FOLLOW!

DR. WALTER JACOB
RABBI
RODEF SHALOM TEMPLE
FIFTH AND MOREWOOD AVENUES
PITTSBURGH, PA. 15213
412-621-6566 FAX: 412-621-5475

1 March 1990

Dr. Alexander M. Schindler President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Thank you for your letter and the difficult question which you sent. If I understood it correctly, a "congregation" whose charter states that they are humanists, may apply for membership in the UAHC. How should the UAHC respond.

It is hard for me to understand their reasoning behind their application. Why should they wish to join a religious organization which regularly deals with God, prayer, **mitzvot**, religious education, and much more along the same lines. They would not fit into structure or programming.

Let me, however, look at the question through the eyes of tradition which would consider all Jews who reject God as sinners. Sinners, however, remain Jews (San 44a) and possess the right to attend the synagogue for prayer and study. We know, as Judaism has refrained from making dogmatic requirements, a Jew could adopt virtually any system of thought and even be an agnostic without being considered outside the fold. Spinoza was expelled from the Jewish community because it feared the retribution of the Gentile surrounding world; under other circumstances he would have remained a member of the synagogue community. Even with an apostate there is always the hope that the individual will return to Judaism, so unless the community feels endangered, he/she remains undisturbed in the synagogue and is readmitted with no formality (Jeremiah 3.22; Moses Isserles to **Shulhan Arukh** Yoreh Deah 268.12; Abraham Gombiner, **Magen Avraham** to **Shulhan Arukh** Orah Hayim 326; Solomon ben Simon Duran **Responsa** #89). There is no question therefore that <u>individuals</u> who absolutely reject God may be members of our congregations and are welcome. We hope that they will change their views and many have done so.

In this instance we are dealing with an entire group which has banded together as a "congregation". We normally associate that term with a religious group, but, of course, it can be secular as well. By joining together, they have made the statement that they do not wish to establish their philosophy and firmly impart it to their children. The group sounds very much like the Ethical Culture Society which seeks to teach ethics without theology. Its founder felt it necessary to leave Temple Emanuel and he was right.

Would the Ethical Culture Society have asked to be a founding member of the UAHC? They would have considered such a thought absurd and properly so.

The UAHC is a group of congregations which affirms Reform Judaism and seeks to strengthen it. Reform Judaism has been defined through the Pittsburgh Platform, the Columbus Platform, the Centenary Statement as well as numerous resolutions of the UAHC. God, however, conceived, is basic to each of those statements. A "congregation" which rejects the centrality of God in Judaism cannot be considered for membership.

We would I am certain, reject the application of a Conservative or an Orthodox congregation as it would be inappropriate ideologically. Yet our differences on ideological matters are less basic than on the centrality of God.

Any thought of moving in this direction would weaken us, lead to conflict every time we gather for prayer, to edit a textbook, or to debate a resolution.

We should not consider the application of such a congregation.

All the best to you for a continued pleasant winter. With kindest regards to Rhea.

Sincerely,

Walter Jacob

/bb

Rabbi Jack Bemporad
Temple Israel
140 Central Avenue, Lawrence, New York 11559

(516) 239-1140 Study

(516) 371-2809 Home

March 6, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex,

I am in favor of accepting Congregation Beth Adam as an affiliate of the union.

I know something about the Rabbi of this congregation and its programming and I am convinced that it is not an antitheistic congregation, rather it emphasizes the humanistic elements within Judaism.

It stresses traditional beliefs which emphasize the primacy of the ethical and the interpretation of Judaism as a way of life and not solely as a Theocentric Faith.

If we make a distinction between a nominal definition as to what it means to be a Reform Jew, and a maximal definition; then minimally a reform Jew is one who has one parent that is Jewish, is brought up Jewish and has not converted to another religion; or who has converted into Judaism according to the standards of the converting Rabbi.

It seems to me that the members of Congregation Beth Adam qualify under this definition.

Judaism is not a creedal religion and questions of faith have always been open to wide variations. If our Jewish faith is the ultimate context of what gives us meaning in life, and if Judaism is the symbol through which we express that faith, then Schulweiss' Predicate Theology and Kaplan's reconstructionism, though rejecting any kind of supernaturalism and any form of a personal god still would qualify under my nominal definition as would the members of congregation Beth Adam.

Perhaps we can find a parallel in Zionism. Zionism was a solution thrust upon us by historical events. It is nevertheless an anti-theistic expression of Judaism. It may be that a non-supernatural Judaism is again a solution for some of us as a response to the events of our time.

I believe our responsibility is to embrace this community and bring them closer to other Jews and a God Faith which they leave open to each individual member.

As an affiliate of the Union, we would open up the full range of UAHC programming to include them into a broader sense of Jewish Identity.

With warm regards I am,

Sincerely,

Jack Bemporad

WESTCHESTER REFORM TEMPLE 255 MAMARONECK ROAD • SCARSDALE, N. Y. 10583

Jack Stern, Jr.
Rabbi

March 5, 1990

Rabbi Alexander Schindler
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

I am responding to your letter of February 9 regarding "The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism."

My own feeling is that the term "Humanistic Judaism" should not in itself be grounds for rejecting the congregation as a Union affiliate. After all, many of us in "normal" congregations will make use of that same word to describe aspects of our tradition and our own Jewish philosophical approach.

However, if the congregation describes or defines itself in specifically atheistic terminology, then I would have strong reservations about accepting them into the Union. It is one thing to say we are searching but quite another to say that we define ourselves without God. If the congregation adopts the latter course, I personally would not welcome them into our family of congregations.

I also make a distinction between a congregation many of whose members may reject any concept of a divine being and a congregation which by its own congregational self-definition, as a matter of policy and principle, rejects such a belief.

I await the outcome with interest.

Priscilla joins in warm regards to Rhea and yourself.

Sincerely,

JS:tm

Rabbi

Founded in 1889

אגוד הרבנים המתקדמים

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

192 LEXINGTON AVENUE NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10016-6801 FAX (212) 689-1649 (212) 684-4990

Office of the President:
Rabbi Samuel E. Karff
Temple Beth Israel
5600 N. Braeswood Blvd.
Houston, TX 77096

Acknowledge file w/letter

February 20, 1990
25 Shevat 5750

Dear Alex:

Concerning your inquiry on the "Society for Humanistic Judaism" let me respond as follows:

If the prospectus or statement of principles explicitly rules out the worship of God, then I would not favor the congregation's membership in the UAHC.

All Jews are, of course, welcome to join synagogues regardless of the state of their God-faith. Judaism is congenial to those who struggle with God and, of course, there is considerable theological leverage in God concepts. But to organize a synagogue on the premise that the three-dimensional covenant (God, Torah and Israel) is no longer our norm is to go beyond the boundaries of institutional legitimacy.

That at least is my inital response to your question.

With every good wish, I am

Warmly,

Samuel E. Karff

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

RABBI SOLOMON B. FREEHOF, D. D.
RODEF SHALOM TEMPLE
FIFTH AND MOREWOOD AVENUES
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15213

February 21, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Colleague:

You have asked me a difficult and a troublesome question. Of course, if it were not difficult, you would not need to ask it. The question deals with the relationship of the UAHC to the numerous organizations of "Humanistic Judaism." Some of these groups already are members of the Union and others want or may want to be accepted as members. What should be the attitude of the Union to these societies? Should they be accepted as congregational members of the Union, or not?

The essential question involved is the fact of the basic belief of these societies. By the term "humanistic," they mean only "human" and nothing beyond. They do not believe in God. They believe only in the people of Israel. Can the UAHC accept members who declare openly and as a principle that they do not believe in God? It seems that a number of those god-less groups are already congregational members of the Union and others want to join. What shall be the attitude of the Union to those who are already members? Should they be expelled and if not, should those that are not members be accepted?

If we were living in Israel the problem would be in a way simpler. The Jewish community or the Jewish state welcomes all Jews. Their belief as to religious questions is irrelevant to their rights of citizenship. But our problem is different. We are not a secular state but a <u>religious</u> organization and certainly the word "religious" cannot be stretched to include atheism. But we do not exclude them from the Jewish <u>community.</u> They are expected to participate in Jewish charities, etc. But our UAHC group is specifically a religious group. We also have secular Jewish contacts in which we maintain a brotherly relationship to all Jews including them. But

now they ask membership in our religuous organization. We cannot give it to them.

As for those who are already members of the Union, what shall be our relationship to them? There comes to mind a recent Orthodox responsa-book in which the question was asked whether a Yeshiva scholar may accept being a teacher in a Conservative religious school. The answer is, yes, if he is able to win them over to Orthodoxy. We might say that this should be our attitude to those humanistic societies that are already members of the Union. We do not expel them and we do not shun them. We hope that we, by our relationship can win them over to the true worship of God.

As for non-membership of humanist groups that went to join the Union, I would have a simple test. If they will accept the Union Prayerbook as the text used in their assemblies, we are willing to extend our Jewish brotherhood tentatively and hopefully to accept them too.

Perhaps the fairest solution of the problem would be as follows: You, as the head of the Union ask the department of theology of the Hebrew Union College to decide whether the doctrine of Humanism is to be accepted as legitimate branch of our Jewish religion. The Union will then abide by this authoritative decision.

Sincerely,

Sol Freehof

Solomon B. Freehof

SBF:mgf

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
O.C., Senior Scholar
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5P 3K9
(416) 789-3291 / Fax (416) 789 9697

February 12, 1990
17 Shevat 5750

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President, UAHC.
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

I hasten to answer your personal inquiry of February 9.

My suggestion is that you submit this to the Responsa Committee of the CCAR. This would have the advantage that, by making this referral, the Union would then have a well researched and considered Reform opinion which would help it to arrive at a judgment.

Of course, I respect the personal nature of your letter and at this point will go no further. Incidentally, your she'elah, if you wish to submit it, need not come from you but might be submitted, for instance, by the chairperson of the Admissions Committee. Nor would the name of the congregation have to be mentioned in the she'elah.

With cordial regards,

Gunther

RABBI W. GUNTHER PLAUT
O.C., J.D.S., D.D., LL.D., LIT.HUM.D.
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ont. M5P 3K9
Tel. (416) 789 3291 Fax (416) 789 9697

11 Adar 5750/ March 8, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President, UAHC
838 Fifth Ave.
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

Thank you for sending me further information on the question of admitting humanistic congregations (your letter of March 2).

In order to focus more clearly on the issues involved I would isolate four sub-questions:

a. Does the congregation that seeks admission to the UAHC have a constitution that declares it to be "humanistic" and does it define that term?

b. Does the congregation declare itself to be a "secular" institution?

c.. Does the congregation, in its gatherings and its rites, expressly deny or eschew a supernatural power?

d. Does it matter whether the congregation engages or keeps a rabbi who is a declared humanist and teaches his/her belief regularly to the congregation?

You might wish to ask the Responsa Committee questions along these lines, but they would have to be buttressed by fairly specific information. It would of course be easier if you would ask only with regard to a single congregation, which would give you a better opportunity to provide details in the above-mentioned categories. The advice which our Committee would proffer might then become the basis for your admission policy in other, similar instances.

In case New York is a walled city and this letter arrives in time for Shushan Purim, please accept a cordial wish for a *hag Purim same'ah.*

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VICE-PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
PROFESSOR OF RABBINIC LITERATURE AND HOMILETICS

3101 CLIFTON AVE. • CINCINNATI, OHIO 45220-2488
(513) 221-1875

February 15, 1990

Personal and Confidential

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Re your inquiry about The Congregation of Humanistic Judaism, Beth Adam

There are three humanistic congregations which have as their spiritual leader rabbis ordained by the Hebrew Union College: the one in Detroit led by Sherwin Wine, the "pope of the movement;" Dan Friedman's group in Chicago; and the one in Cincinnati led by Robert Barr. The Society for Humanistic Judaism claims to have about twelve other tiny groups who are nominally affiliated and have no spiritual leadership. They are insignificant both in size and in quality. Sherwin Wine is by far the most radical. He has recently changed the name of the association to "The Society for Secular Humanistic Judaism." He has also managed to interest a few intellectuals in Israel, primarily Judah Bauer and Ze'ev Katz of the Hebrew University, Simon Susskin of Paris, and, even though he is now very frail and old, Ḥayyim Cohen, the former chief justice of the Israeli Supreme Court. I understand that Judah Bauer will be in the United States this coming summer to help Sherwin develop and train leaders for the group, a project which Sherwin has been strongly advocating. He would like to see an independent institution to train leaders for his "movement."

Rabbi Dan Friedman has for some time been disenchanted, and he has gradually distanced himself from the Society. He will not participate in their forthcoming annual conference in San Francisco. He seriously differs from Sherwin Wine on a number of issues and is pursuing his own independent course, to the point of disaffiliation.

Robert Barr is very much at odds with Sherwin Wine, who sees Bob as "selling out." He has not been in touch with Wine for a long time. He and his group have nothing to do with the Society for Secular Humanistic Judaism. They do not belong to the Society, even though they call themselves "The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism." Barr himself is a very decent, honorable, and sincere person. He was a fine student while at the Hebrew Union College. He has been searching for a number of years and would very much like to get closer to the mainstream. He needs help in this endeavor. The application of his group to the Union is very much part of this process.

Rabbi Barr has counseled with me on numerous occasions. I am sympatheic to him. I am persuaded that we should help him in his search and buttress his resolve to find himself within the broad consensus of Reform. The three groups which have rabbinic leadership should not be viewed as a uniform entity. Each one is to be treated differently, since each one is unique and has its own character. Robert Barr's group does have within its membership a number of substantial, responsible and thinking members in prominent positions in the professions and in the academic and business worlds. Bob himself is a dedicated spiritual leader who, in my view, may well be included within the broad umbrella of Reform.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the UAHC should definitely accept his group within the Union. Such action would not only be wise, but a genuine constructive act in terms of Bob's personal struggle and in terms of the group's search for its own identity. The rabbinic dictum "let the left hand push away, but let the right hand bring near" is certainly applicable in this instance.

I hope that the above information, which I am sending you in confidence, will be helpful in your decision.

With warmest greetings and best wishes, I am

As ever,

Eugene Mihaly

P. S. I am enclosing a brief brochure put out by Beth Adam entitled "A Concept of God," which I urge you to read. I also have in my files a number of other of their publications, including services for various occasions, etc. I should be happy to send additional material if you would like to see them.

Also got from Jim Simon
Have in this folder

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
2027 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
Tel: (202) 232-4242 Fax: (202) 483-6550

MID-ATLANTIC COUNCIL
Rabbi Richard S. Sternberger
Director
John F. Lippmann
Regional President

March 15, 1990

To: Rabbi James Simon

From: Rabbi Richard S. Sternberger

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Even though I spoke to you at length over the phone, I have had a great deal of difficulty answering your memo. As I grow older, I have less and less patience with rules and restrictions. I believe that Reform Judaism should be as inclusive as possible, and am not enthusiastic about barriers which will exclude people or groups. And yet if our Movement is to have any dynamism and send forth a compelling message, we cannot be all things to all people. True there are areas where we must still do battle with orthodoxy; however, the significant area of controversy is that of secularism and the secular Jew. I believe that we must underscore the importance of theology-belief-faith. Even our Reconstructionist brothers and sisters are using terms that would have been anathema even a decade ago. The theology of Mordecai Kaplan - which had its roots in the time of Russell and Dewey - is meaningless today. The work of our Committee on Religious Living is absolutely critical, and we have found great response to the programs of our Regional committee.

About a dozen years ago, a rabbi was in town to establish a Humanist congregation. He called and asked me whether I would be helpful. I gave him a negative answer, and have had my moments of guilt concerning that answer over the years. And yet I believe that we must take our stand with such contemporary Jewish thinkers as Steinheim, Rosenweig, Buber, Heschel, etc., who really have a message concerning God which our people must hear. A circuitous road to answer that we should not admit a congregation that defines itself as Humanist.

Rabbi Jack Bemporad
Temple Israel
140 Central Avenue, Lawrence, New York 11559

(516) 239-1140 Study

(516) 371-2809 Home

March 6, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex,

I am in favor of accepting Congregation Beth Adam as an affiliate of the union.

I know something about the Rabbi of this congregation and its programming and I am convinced that it is not an antitheistic congregation, rather it emphasizes the humanistic elements within Judaism.

It stresses traditional beliefs which emphasize the primacy of the ethical and the interpretation of Judaism as a way of life and not solely as a Theocentric Faith.

If we make a distinction between a nominal definition as to what it means to be a Reform Jew, and a maximal definition; then minimally a reform Jew is one who has one parent that is Jewish, is brought up Jewish and has not converted to another religion; or who has converted into Judaism according to the standards of the converting Rabbi.

It seems to me that the members of Congregation Beth Adam qualify under this definition.

Judaism is not a creedal religion and questions of faith have always been open to wide variations. If our Jewish faith is the ultimate context of what gives us meaning in life, and if Judaism is the symbol through which we express that faith, then Schulweiss' Predicate Theology and Kaplan's reconstructionism, though rejecting any kind of supernaturalism and any form of a personal god still would qualify under my nominal definition as would the members of congregation Beth Adam.

Perhaps we can find a parallel in Zionism. Zionism was a solution thrust upon us by historical events. It is nevertheless an anti-theistic expression of Judaism. It may be that a non-supernatural Judaism is again a solution for some of us as a response to the events of our time.

I believe our responsibility is to embrace this community and bring them closer to other Jews and a God Faith which they leave open to each individual member.

As an affiliate of the Union, we would open up the full range of UAHC programming to include them into a broader sense of Jewish Identity.

With warm regards I am,

Sincerely,

Jack Bemporad

WESTCHESTER REFORM TEMPLE 255 MAMARONECK ROAD • SCARSDALE, N. Y. 10583

Jack Stern, Jr.
Rabbi

March 5, 1990

Rabbi Alexander Schindler
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

I am responding to your letter of February 9 regarding "The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism."

My own feeling is that the term "Humanistic Judaism" should not in itself be grounds for rejecting the congregation as a Union affiliate. After all, many of us in "normal" congregations will make use of that same word to describe aspects of our tradition and our own Jewish philosophical approach.

However, if the congregation describes or defines itself in specifically atheistic terminology, then I would have strong reservations about accepting them into the Union. It is one thing to say we are searching but quite another to say that we define ourselves without God. If the congregation adopts the latter course, I personally would not welcome them into our family of congregations.

I also make a distinction between a congregation many of whose members may reject any concept of a divine being and a congregation which by its own congregational self-definition, as a matter of policy and principle, rejects such a belief.

I await the outcome with interest.

Priscilla joins in warm regards to Rhea and yourself.

Sincerely,

JS:tm

Rabbi

DR. WALTER JACOB
RABBI
RODEF SHALOM TEMPLE
FIFTH AND MOREWOOD AVENUES
PITTSBURGH, PA. 15213
412-621-6566 FAX: 412-621-5475

1 March 1990

Dr. Alexander M. Schindler President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Thank you for your letter and the difficult question which you sent. If I understood it correctly, a "congregation" whose charter states that they are humanists, may apply for membership in the UAHC. How should the UAHC respond.

It is hard for me to understand their reasoning behind their application. Why should they wish to join a religious organization which regularly deals with God, prayer, **mitzvot**, religious education, and much more along the same lines. They would not fit into structure or programming.

Let me, however, look at the question through the eyes of tradition which would consider all Jews who reject God as sinners. Sinners, however, remain Jews (San 44a) and possess the right to attend the synagogue for prayer and study. We know, as Judaism has refrained from making dogmatic requirements, a Jew could adopt virtually any system of thought and even be an agnostic without being considered outside the fold. Spinoza was expelled from the Jewish community because it feared the retribution of the Gentile surrounding world; under other circumstances he would have remained a member of the synagogue community. Even with an apostate there is always the hope that the individual will return to Judaism, so unless the community feels endangered, he/she remains undisturbed in the synagogue and is readmitted with no formality (Jeremiah 3.22; Moses Isserles to **Shulhan Arukh** Yoreh Deah 268.12; Abraham Gombiner, **Magen Avraham** to **Shulhan Arukh** Orah Hayim 326; Solomon ben Simon Duran **Responsa** #89). There is no question therefore that <u>individuals</u> who absolutely reject God may be members of our congregations and are welcome. We hope that they will change their views and many have done so.

In this instance we are dealing with an entire group which has banded together as a "congregation". We normally associate that term with a religious group, but, of course, it can be secular as well. By joining together, they have made the statement that they do not wish to establish their philosophy and firmly impart it to their children. The group sounds very much like the Ethical Culture Society which seeks to teach ethics without theology. Its founder felt it necessary to leave Temple Emanuel and he was right.

Would the Ethical Culture Society have asked to be a founding member of the UAHC? They would have considered such a thought absurd and properly so.

The UAHC is a group of congregations which affirms Reform Judaism and seeks to strengthen it. Reform Judaism has been defined through the Pittsburgh Platform, the Columbus Platform, the Centenary Statement as well as numerous resolutions of the UAHC. God, however, conceived, is basic to each of those statements. A "congregation" which rejects the centrality of God in Judaism cannot be considered for membership.

We would I am certain, reject the application of a Conservative or an Orthodox congregation as it would be inappropriate ideologically. Yet our differences on ideological matters are less basic than on the centrality of God.

Any thought of moving in this direction would weaken us, lead to conflict every time we gather for prayer, to edit a textbook, or to debate a resolution.

We should not consider the application of such a congregation.

All the best to you for a continued pleasant winter. With kindest regards to Rhea.

Sincerely,

Walter Jacob

/bb

RABBI SOLOMON B. FREEHOF, D. D.
RODEF SHALOM TEMPLE
FIFTH AND MOREWOOD AVENUES
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15213

February 21, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Colleague:

You have asked me a difficult and a troublesome question. Of course, if it were not difficult, you would not need to ask it. The question deals with the relationship of the UAHC to the numerous organizations of "Humanistic Judaism." Some of these groups already are members of the Union and others want or may want to be accepted as members. What should be the attitude of the Union to these societies? Should they be accepted as congregational members of the Union, or not?

The essential question involved is the fact of the basic belief of these societies. By the term "humanistic," they mean only "human" and nothing beyond. They do not believe in God. They believe only in the people of Israel. Can the UAHC accept members who declare openly and as a principle that they do not believe in God? It seems that a number of those god-less groups are already congregational members of the Union and others want to join. What shall be the attitude of the Union to those who are already members? Should they be expelled and if not, should those that are not members be accepted?

If we were living in Israel the problem would be in a way simpler. The Jewish community or the Jewish state welcomes all Jews. Their belief as to religious questions is irrelevant to their rights of citizenship. But our problem is different. We are not a secular state but a <u>religious</u> organization and certainly the word "religious" cannot be stretched to include atheism. But we do not exclude them from the Jewish <u>community.</u> They are expected to participate in Jewish charities, etc. But our UAHC group is specifically a religious group. We also have secular Jewish contacts in which we maintain a brotherly relationship to all Jews including them. But

now they ask membership in our religuous organization. We cannot give it to them.

As for those who are already members of the Union, what shall be our relationship to them? There comes to mind a recent Orthodox responsa-book in which the question was asked whether a Yeshiva scholar may accept being a teacher in a Conservative religious school. The answer is, yes, if he is able to win them over to Orthodoxy. We might say that this should be our attitude to those humanistic societies that are already members of the Union. We do not expel them and we do not shun them. We hope that we, by our relationship can win them over to the true worship of God.

As for non-membership of humanist groups that went to join the Union, I would have a simple test. If they will accept the Union Prayerbook as the text used in their assemblies, we are willing to extend our Jewish brotherhood tentatively and hopefully to accept them too.

Perhaps the fairest solution of the problem would be as follows: You, as the head of the Union ask the department of theology of the Hebrew Union College to decide whether the doctrine of Humanism is to be accepted as legitimate branch of our Jewish religion. The Union will then abide by this authoritative decision.

Sincerely,

Sol Freehof

Solomon B. Freehof

SBF:mgf

Founded in 1889

אגוד הרבנים המתקדמים

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

192 LEXINGTON AVENUE NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10016-6801 FAX (212) 689-1649 (212) 684-4990

Office of the President:
Rabbi Samuel E. Karff
Temple Beth Israel
5600 N. Braeswood Blvd.
Houston, TX 77096

Acknowledge
file W/letter

February 20, 1990
25 Shevat 5750

Dear Alex:

Concerning your inquiry on the "Society for Humanistic Judaism" let me respond as follows:

If the prospectus or statement of principles explicitly rules out the worship of God, then I would not favor the congregation's membership in the UAHC.

All Jews are, of course, welcome to join synagogues regardless of the state of their God-faith. Judaism is congenial to those who struggle with God and, of course, there is considerable theological leverage in God concepts. But to organize a synagogue on the premise that the three-dimensional covenant (God, Torah and Israel) is no longer our norm is to go beyond the boundaries of institutional legitimacy.

That at least is my inital response to your question.

With every good wish, I am

Warmly,

Samuel E. Karff

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100 CABLES UNIONUAHC

NEW YORK FEDERATION OF REFORM SYNAGOGUES

Rabbi Bernard M. Zlotowitz
Director

Rabbi Allen S. Kaplan
Associate Director

February 23, 1990

Rabbi James L. Simon
Midwest Council, UAHC
10425 Old Olive Street Road, Suite 205
St. Louis, MO 63141

Dear Rabbi Simon:

In response to your memorandum of January 25, 1990, please note that I am not in favor of the admission of Beth Adam to the UAHC. We are a religious institution that believes in the existence of God as the basic and foremost tenet in Judaism. To accept a congregation that does not believe in God flies in the face of our faith. I am fully aware that the Gates of Prayer -- the GOP latest Republican prayer book, has a service that is Humanistic. It should never have been included. To use the argument that it represents the spectrum of Reform is fallacious and misleading.

Do we have to give in to every single little group? In a word, I guess you realize I am opposed to Beth Adam becoming a member of our movement.

Warmly,

Rabbi Bernard M. Zlotowitz

BMZ:mb

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

March 2, 1990
5 Adar 5750

Mr. Robert Chaiken
Aronowitz, Chaiken & Hardesty
PO. Box 5367
Cincinnati, OH 45201

Dear Bob:

As you know, Jim Simon has been in touch with me concerning the Congregation of Humanistic Judaism, Beth Adam, of Cincinnati. I have been contacting various colleagues to determine their views on the admission of Humanistic Congregations. I received the enclosed response from Gene Mihaly. I believe it will be of help to you in your deliberations. I may share some quotes from this letter with others, but without identifying the author. Thus, should you discuss this matter and use quotes from the letter, perhaps you, also, might withhold naming the source.

It was good seeing you. I appreciate your helpfulness with regard to the budget process. I am also delighted that you will confirm the degrees at Founders' Day in Cincinnati.

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Rabbi James Simon

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

March 2, 1990
5 Adar 5750

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5P 3K9

Dear Gunther:

I have been in contact with a few other colleagues with regard to the Congregations of Humanistic Judaism. I am enclosing one response which may be of interest to you. Indeed, on the basis of the information included in this opinion, perhaps you will want to give the matter further thought and share your judgment with me.

Obviously, I intend to continue to study this matter. it will also be discussed on a number of levels once we have a sampling of opinions.

I hope all is well with you and Elizabeth. Rhea joins me in sending our fondest regards to you both.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

February 26, 1990
1 Adar 5750

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5P 3K9

Dear Gunther:

Thank you for your prompt response to my inquiry concerning the "humanistic" congregation. I have since discovered that this is not a monistic movement, that there are actually radical divergences between the rabbis leading these congregations, as well as between the congregations themselves, so that we may well have to deal with them on an ad hoc basis.

Let me, then, gather all pertinent information and then get back to you. At the moment, there is not enough at hand to allow for a meaningful responsum.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

file folder

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(513) 221-1875

February 22, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Welcome home! I hope you had a pleasant and fruitful trip.

Attached is a policy statement of the Beth Adam Congregation which was adopted in principle by the group on 12/12/89. It may be of help in your decision regarding their application for membership in the UAHC. I call your special attention to item 5 under "Our goals as a congregation."

With warmest greetings and best wishes, I am

As ever,

Eugene Mihaly

EM:pg
Attachment

BETH ADAM POLICY AND THE REFORM JEWISH COMMUNITY 12/8/89

We believe that:

1. Judaism is a way of life from which rich tradition has evolved. Interpreting and preserving the history and tradition for posterity is a responsiblity of Jews in each generation.
2. Torah, including interpretations of its text based on modern knowledge, is fundamental to Reform.
3. Reform is flexible and adapts to new approaches within its overall philosophy and historical context. Humanistic Judaism is consistent with that flexibility.
4. We should not rely on benign providence for the betterment of humanity or the preservation of our planet.
5. Each person is free to hold his/her religious beliefs whether or not they agree with those of others.

Our goals as a congregation are:

1. To provide meaningful education and life cycle religious services.
2. To participate in community programs designed for the benefit of humankind.
3. To continuously examine our concepts by critical reason and to make changes to meet the test of reality.
4. To emphazize the relevant aspects of modern life and to de-emphasize those which have become irrelevant.
5. To participate in Reform Judaism and to explore membership in the U.A.H.C.
6. To advocate and facilitate a continuity of rabbinic clergy for Humanistic Judaism.

We affirm that:

1. HUC-JIR is the keystone of Reform Judaism in America.
2. The branch of HUC-JIR in Jerusalem is testimony to Reform's Zionist committment. It merits support.
3. The academic excellence in all fields emanating from HUC-JIR are invaluable assets to all faiths throughout the world.

Beth Adam, now in its tenth year, is a pioneering effort to provide Jews with an alternative to meet religious desires. We believe that Beth Adam broadens and strenghtens the scope of the Reform movement. We encourage HUC-JIR to familiarize rabbinic students with the concept of Humanistic Judaism.

Members of the congregation, encouraged and assisted by the Rabbi, have energetically and enthusiastically created religious services for all occasions. Liturgy and musical content of the services are updated to ensure relevancy. Torah, Talmud, and Midrash are appropriately incorporated into the fabric of the services.

*Adopted in principle on 12/12/89

Humanistic Judaism

Irene file
W Gottlieb

March 4, 1990
4 Adar 5750

Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof, D.D.
Rodef Shalom Temple
Fifth And Morewood Avenues
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dear Dr. Freehof:

Your thoughtful response to my query concerning "Humanistic Judaism" is much appreciated. As always, you are sage in your advice and in your approach to the situation.

I am grateful to you and as my study of the matter and discussions proceed, I will, of course, keep you informed.

Rhea joins me in sending warm regards from house to house.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

February 26, 1990
1 Adar 5750

Rabbi Samuel E. Karff
Temple Beth Israel
5600 N. Braeswood Boulevard
Houston, TX 77096

Dear Sam:

I have just received your response to my inquiry concerning the Society for Humanistic Judaism. Many thanks for your prompt response.

I am gathering responses from various sources so that this matter can receive proper study. I do appreciate your having shared your thoughts with me.

With fond regards from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Love
Dottie

March 9, 1990
12 Adar 5750

Rabbi Jack Stern, Jr.
Westchester Reform Temple
255 Mamaroneck Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Dear Jack:

Many thanks for your thoughtful response to my query concerning congregations whose members consider themselves to be Humanistic Jews. I am grateful for your thoughtful comments.

There will be further study of this matter and your judgment will be very helpful in our consideration of possible application for affiliation from Humanistic Judaism congregations.

With fondest regards from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

March 8, 1990
11 Adar 5750

Rabbi Jack Bemporad
Temple Israel
140 Central Avenue
Lawrence, NY 11559

Dear Jack:

I appreciate your thoughtful response to my query regarding Congregation Beth Adam. Your comments will be very helpful in discussing this congregation should they apply for membership in the UAHC.

I do have one further question. You direct your comments to this one particular congregation since you know something of the congregation and the rabbi. What is your view concerning the question of Humanistic Congregations on a more general level, rather than the specifics of this one congregation. Would you be in favor of open acceptance?

Of course there will be further discussion of this matter and, as always, having the benefit of your judgment is helpful.

With fondest regards from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

file s/l
Other

March 5, 1990
8 Adar 5750

Rabbi Walter Jacob
Rodef Shalom Temple
Fifth and Morewood Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dear Walter:

Many thanks for your prompt and thoughtful response to my inquiry concerning the Society for Humanistic Judaism. I am grateful to you.

I am gathering responses from various sources so that this matter may receive proper study. Your comments will be helpful for our discussions.

With fondest regards from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
DORAL EXECUTIVE OFFICE PARK
3785 NORTHWEST 82 AVENUE, SUITE 210, MIAMI, FLORIDA 33166, (305) 592-4792
FAX (305) 477-7866

SOUTHEAST COUNCIL

Rabbi Frank N. Sundheim
Regional Director

February 14, 1990

FROM : Frank Sundheim

TO : Jim Simon

CC : Rabbi Alexander Schindler

RE : HUMANIST CONGREGATION

Dear Jim:

I am writing you this letter in follow-up to our conversation a few days ago and your February 12th memo. I am enclosing a copy of my first letter in case you do not find it. I shall, however, summarize some of the material that was in that letter in this memo.

This will be a lengthy memo, and I will do my best to make it Mishnah rather than Gemara. However, there are some items which I feel will need further explanation. Others if I just mention them, you certainly can fill in the commentary, as can Alex.

It is a great temptation to make this response a multi-volume tome, because the more I thought about it, the more offended I became at the thought that so many of our colleagues might feel that a Humanist congregation does not have a place underneath the Reform umbrella. If some of my points seem repetitive, it is because when I started to think in detail about our conversation, the deeper my convictions became in supporting what I wrote you in the last letter, and my pen did not stop making notes at that time. Nonetheless, let me try these arguments out for size in no particular order of importance.

My final introductory thought is that most of the time I am a theist. However, at other times, I become a Buberian, Kaplanian, a Humanist, an Agnostic, and a Polydoxist. It sometimes takes me as long as 24 hours to run the entire gamut of these approaches.

Here is my list of thoughts:

1) The CCAR does not excludes humanists from membership.

2) Our congregations do not ask for a loyalty oath to God when people become members. For whatever reasons people join congregations, very few of them do so for the theological reasons.

3) Would we keep a holocaust survivor out of one of our congregations because that person is a humanist? Or even an atheist?

4) By the nature of its faculty, HUC is committed to a multiplicity of ideas. An institution that can tenure Alvin Rienes, Abraham Chronbach, Samuel Cohon, Samuel Atlas, Gene Borowitz, plus a multitude ofothers could hardly be described as an institution that discourages a multiplicity of ideas. The UAHC must be the same.

5) As I understand it, humanists do not automatically deny God and in this point it differs from atheism. Some humanists may be theists and others may not. Many of them ignore God. Others define God in their own terms. I find none of these alternatives destructive of the Reform Jewish spirit.

6) Related to #5, modern humanism is far less destructive to the spirit of Judaism than was Koheleth.

7) I see these people as non-traditional Jews struggling to find an institutional home. If the UAHC keeps people like this away, they will find homes elsewhere and we will lose thousands of people who would in the long run be confortable under our umbrella.

8) Humanists care enough about theology to think seriously about it. Many times, they are much more honest than many of us who play word games, but really don't mean what we say. Sometimes the language we use cleverly and conveniently covers our own misgivings, but because we are good at language, we can give ourselves a "kosher cop-out." I personally find humanists most refreshing in holding us to the meaning of the words we use.

9)* As regional directors, we must deal with political situations relating to new congregations. I am not aware of the realities in Cincinnati, but I would hate to think of the repercussions from many of our colleagues including those at HUC if a congregation were excluded because it was Humanist. Nonetheless, sometimes decisions must be made that reflect the political realities of the moment. If this should happen, we will have to live with it however distasteful it might be. But, the UAHC certainly should not be part of rejection of such a congregation L'hatchilah.

10) The UAHC has demonstrated its openness in the types of congregations it has taken in. We have openly embraced gay and lesbian congregations, and we even have a prison congregation within the UAHC. Given this track record, how can we keep out a congregation because it "thinks" differently than most of our congregations (at least officially)?

11)* This reflects part of the conversation I had with you. I understand that the UAHC Constitution and Charter does speak of the importance of God, as do the preambles to most congregational constitutions. In no way does that bind the congregation legally to these doctrines anymore than congregations are bound to agree with resolutions of a UAHC biennial. Such statements are Haggadah not Halacha. It seems that those who would oppose this humanist congregation are coming dangerously close to demanding conformity of ideology to within the Reform movement. We must give a loud and resounding NO to such thinking. Any congregation entering the UAHC is aware of the statements concerning God that are part of our Charter. If they have a problem with those words, then let them wrestle with it, and make a decision on their joining the UAHC on the basis of their deliberations. But let <u>them</u> state the problem, not us. If they have a problem with the UAHC Charter, then they must deal with it. It is not to us to have litmus tests or loyalty oaths to statements that were meant and should still be meant to be descriptive rather than perscriptive.

12)* I also discussed with you an analogy with ARZA that you asked me to enunciate in writing. When ARZA came into being many of us struggled with the question of whether we could accept the Jerusalem Platform that makes aliyah the central mitzvah of the Jewish people. We struggled with it because we took the idea seriously and we did not want to be hypocritical in our responses. I am sure that a <u>tiny</u> number of the people who eventually joined ARZA did so because they accepted that part of the Jerusalem Platform. I certainly was among that majority who joined for other reasons. My commitment to what ARZA was trying to do as a Reform Jewish presence within the Zionist movement simply over-rode the misgivings I had concerning the Jerusalem Platform. I would imagine that most people joining ARZA did not take this matter nearly so seriously as did I. In fact, I gave an entire Holy Day sermon on the subject, including my own questions. The result is that we have a major Jewish organization, ARZA, the vast majority of whose members do not subscribe to one of the things that was supposedto be a very basis of joining the Zionist Movement. If there is a contradiction, we live with that contradiction, most of us happily.

I think there is an analogy here to a Humanist congregation. They may have misgivings, or even deny an aspect of the UAHC Charter. But they are so close to us in 98% of everything else for which we stand, it would seem to me hypocritical on our part to exclude them.

13) I conclude where I started. I am very disturbed and concerned about the future of Reform Judaism if such matters as loyalty oaths to God are necessary for congregations to join the Union when we certainly do not make that request or demand of people joining our congregations. Reform Judaism has always been open to the present and the future, and I think to exclude these people on the basis of their deeply thought-through theological position would be on our parts hypocritical, destructive of the UAHC in the long run, and unconsciounable.

STRONG MESSAGE TO FOLLOW!

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Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
2027 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
Tel: (202) 232-4242 Fax: (202) 483-6550

MID-ATLANTIC COUNCIL
Rabbi Richard S. Sternberger
Director
John F. Lippmann
Regional President

March 15, 1990

To: Rabbi James Simon

From: Rabbi Richard S. Sternberger

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Even though I spoke to you at length over the phone, I have had a great deal of difficulty answering your memo. As I grow older, I have less and less patience with rules and restrictions. I believe that Reform Judaism should be as inclusive as possible, and am not enthusiastic about barriers which will exclude people or groups. And yet if our Movement is to have any dynamism and send forth a compelling message, we cannot be all things to all people. True there are areas where we must still do battle with orthodoxy; however, the significant area of controversy is that of secularism and the secular Jew. I believe that we must underscore the importance of theology-belief-faith. Even our Reconstructionist brothers and sisters are using terms that would have been anathema even a decade ago. The theology of Mordecai Kaplan - which had its roots in the time of Russell and Dewey - is meaningless today. The work of our Committee on Religious Living is absolutely critical, and we have found great response to the programs of our Regional committee.

About a dozen years ago, a rabbi was in town to establish a Humanist congregation. He called and asked me whether I would be helpful. I gave him a negative answer, and have had my moments of guilt concerning that answer over the years. And yet I believe that we must take our stand with such contemporary Jewish thinkers as Steinheim, Rosenweig, Buber, Heschel, etc., who really have a message concerning God which our people must hear. A circuitous road to answer that we should not admit a congregation that defines itself as Humanist.

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VICE-PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
PROFESSOR OF RABBINIC LITERATURE AND HOMILETICS

3101 CLIFTON AVE. • CINCINNATI, OHIO 45220-2488
(513) 221-1875

February 28, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Welcome back! I knew of your safe return when I read your recent very important plea not to make a political football out of the immigration of Russian Jews. As usual, your candid statement is courageous. We sorely need your voice on this as well as many other issues. May you go from strength to strength.

By all means, share the information I sent you concerning Beth Adam. I repeat that I am fully persuaded that this congregation should be admitted to the Union.

If you have continued going through the pile of your accumulated mail, you have undoubtedly seen my other letters regarding the Midrash on the seven stages of man and my proposal relating to the program you are planning for the UAHC board meeting.

With warmest greetings and best wishes, I am

As ever,

Eugene Mihaly

EM:pf

February 26, 1990
1 Adar 5750

Dr. Eugene Mihaly
Vice President Academic Affairs
Professor of Rabbinic Literature
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

I just returned from Israel and am going through the mail, one by one. I suspect that there may be other letters from you in the pile. If there are, you will hear from me later.

At the moment, I want to acknowledge your lengthy note concerning Beth Adam. Your letter is very important, since it provides information about the movement as a whole and delineates the divergence that exists between the various congregations and especially their rabbis. I would like to share this information with those who will ultimately be called upon to make the decision. May I do so without identifying your authorship?

Please let me know - - - and again, my thanks.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Rabbi Daniel Freelander,
Regional Director

DATE: 13 February 1990
18 Shevat 5750

TO: Rabbi James Simon

Dear Jim,

I'm finally responding to your January 25 memo about the Humanistic congregation.

I've had a number of contacts with congregations of questionable ideology or no ideology at all. Usually they come to us because we have a reputation of delivering at least some of the services they need.

I would urge you to continue talking with them, but throw the ball into their court. If they wish to affiliate they must be willing to amend their constitution to say they are a Reform congregation affiliated with the National bodies of American Reform Judaism. Constitutional amendments usually require a congregational vote which would require republic ideological debate as to whether they want to call themselves Reform. If they do, I think we have to take them. Our own Movement is a full ideological spectrum and I don't want to be in the position of judging another's theology.

I hope this is helpful.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

New Jersey-West Hudson Valley Council
ONE KALISA WAY, SUITE 104, PARAMUS, NJ 07652
(201) 599-0080 FAX (201) 599-1085

MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi Lennard R. Thal

Date 1/31/90

To Rabbi James L. Simon

Copies

Subject

There is a congregation for Humanistic Judaism in the Los Angeles area but I have had no contact with them at all and would not have any idea how to reach them. To the best of my knowledge, they do not have the services of a rabbi.

Once upon a time either they or some other incarnation of the group had the late Rabbi Leslie Freund. After Les' untimely death some years ago, I have not had any contact of any sort.

If they were to contact me, I guess I would have mixed feelings. On the one hand, I firmly believe in the diversity of the Reform movement. On the other hand, there is part of me that is not even sure that such groups are really Jewish, at least in a religious sense in any conventional interpretation of that term. It might be helpful to probe, not just with the rabbi, but a number of the key lay leaders as to exactly why they would seek affiliation.

Regarding the other matter you mentioned, I would be truly offended if you named your child Lennard especially if it turns out to be a daughter. Have you thought about names such as Simple, Hyman or Lyman?

Would you truly consider naming your kid Morris?

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
O.C., Senior Scholar
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5P 3K9
(416) 789-3291 / Fax (416) 789 9697

February 12, 1990
17 Shevat 5750

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President, UAHC.
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

I hasten to answer your personal inquiry of February 9.

My suggestion is that you submit this to the Responsa Committee of the CCAR. This would have the advantage that, by making this referral, the Union would then have a well researched and considered Reform opinion which would help it to arrive at a judgment.

Of course, I respect the personal nature of your letter and at this point will go no further. Incidentally, your she'elah, if you wish to submit it, need not come from you but might be submitted, for instance, by the chairperson of the Admissions Committee. Nor would the name of the congregation have to be mentioned in the she'elah.

With cordial regards,

Gunther

RABBI W. GUNTHER PLAUT
O.C., J.D.S., D.D., LL.D., LIT.HUM.D.
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ont. M5P 3K9
Tel. (416) 789 3291 Fax (416) 789 9697

11 Adar 5750/ March 8, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President, UAHC
838 Fifth Ave.
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

Thank you for sending me further information on the question of admitting humanistic congregations (your letter of March 2).

In order to focus more clearly on the issues involved I would isolate four sub-questions:

a. Does the congregation that seeks admission to the UAHC have a constitution that declares it to be "humanistic" and does it define that term?

b. Does the congregation declare itself to be a "secular" institution?

c.. Does the congregation, in its gatherings and its rites, expressly deny or eschew a supernatural power?

d. Does it matter whether the congregation engages or keeps a rabbi who is a declared humanist and teaches his/her belief regularly to the congregation?

You might wish to ask the Responsa Committee questions along these lines, but they would have to be buttressed by fairly specific information. It would of course be easier if you would ask only with regard to a single congregation, which would give you a better opportunity to provide details in the above-mentioned categories. The advice which our Committee would proffer might then become the basis for your admission policy in other, similar instances.

In case New York is a walled city and this letter arrives in time for Shushan Purim, please accept a cordial wish for a *hag Purim same'ah*.

G.

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(513) 221-1875

February 15, 1990

Personal and Confidential

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Re your inquiry about The Congregation of Humanistic Judaism, Beth Adam

There are three humanistic congregations which have as their spiritual leader rabbis ordained by the Hebrew Union College: the one in Detroit led by Sherwin Wine, the "pope of the movement;" Dan Friedman's group in Chicago; and the one in Cincinnati led by Robert Barr. The Society for Humanistic Judaism claims to have about twelve other tiny groups who are nominally affiliated and have no spiritual leadership. They are insignificant both in size and in quality. Sherwin Wine is by far the most radical. He has recently changed the name of the association to "The Society for Secular Humanistic Judaism." He has also managed to interest a few intellectuals in Israel, primarily Judah Bauer and Ze'ev Katz of the Hebrew University, Simon Susskin of Paris, and, even though he is now very frail and old, Ḥayyim Cohen, the former chief justice of the Israeli Supreme Court. I understand that Judah Bauer will be in the United States this coming summer to help Sherwin develop and train leaders for the group, a project which Sherwin has been strongly advocating. He would like to see an independent institution to train leaders for his "movement."

Rabbi Dan Friedman has for some time been disenchanted, and he has gradually distanced himself from the Society. He will not participate in their forthcoming annual conference in San Francisco. He seriously differs from Sherwin Wine on a number of issues and is pursuing his own independent course, to the point of disaffiliation.

Robert Barr is very much at odds with Sherwin Wine, who sees Bob as "selling out." He has not been in touch with Wine for a long time. He and his group have nothing to do with the Society for Secular Humanistic Judaism. They do not belong to the Society, even though they call themselves "The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism." Barr himself is a very decent, honorable, and sincere person. He was a fine student while at the Hebrew Union College. He has been searching for a number of years and would very much like to get closer to the mainstream. He needs help in this endeavor. The application of his group to the Union is very much part of this process.

Rabbi Barr has counseled with me on numerous occasions. I am sympatheic to him. I am persuaded that we should help him in his search and buttress his resolve to find himself within the broad consensus of Reform. The three groups which have rabbinic leadership should not be viewed as a uniform entity. Each one is to be treated differently, since each one is unique and has its own character. Robert Barr's group does have within its membership a number of substantial, responsible and thinking members in prominent positions in the professions and in the academic and business worlds. Bob himself is a dedicated spiritual leader who, in my view, may well be included within the broad umbrella of Reform.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the UAHC should definitely accept his group within the Union. Such action would not only be wise, but a genuine constructive act in terms of Bob's personal struggle and in terms of the group's search for its own identity. The rabbinic dictum "let the left hand push away, but let the right hand bring near" is certainly applicable in this instance.

I hope that the above information, which I am sending you in confidence, will be helpful in your decision.

With warmest greetings and best wishes, I am

As ever,

Eugene Mihaly

P. S. I am enclosing a brief brochure put out by Beth Adam entitled "A Concept of God," which I urge you to read. I also have in my files a number of other of their publications, including services for various occasions, etc. I should be happy to send additional material if you would like to see them.

Also got from Jim Simon
Love is this
folder

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
10425 OLD OLIVE STREET ROAD, SUITE 205, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63141 (314) 997-7566 FAX #: (314) 997-4041

MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

איחוד
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February 8, 1990

Alex
Beth Adam
Cincy.

Ms. Edith Miller
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Edie:

Since you indicate that Alex is very interested in this whole question of Beth Adam in Cincinnati, I felt it would be valuable to share with you the relevant portions of the file as it now exists. Of course I am interested in any comments, advice or guidance that I can receive from either of you on this matter.

I promise to keep you fully informed as to all developments.

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

enclosure

He had called before I got your memo. Want out to Cincy. Plan to go in weeks. Thanks! w/ Cabinet officers. Bd. etc. This will be for file

Why I'm not Reform
Why I'm here. Unique!!
Overview of a Movement
How our Movement Works!!
How many Corps? Dual? How much dues?

BETH ADAM POLICY AND THE REFORM JEWISH COMMUNITY 12/8/89

We believe that:

1. Judaism is a way of life from which rich tradition has evolved. Interpreting and preserving the history and tradition for posterity is a responsiblity of Jews in each generation.
2. Torah, including interpretations of its text based on modern knowledge, is fundamental to Reform.
3. Reform is flexible and adapts to new approaches within its overall philosophy and historical context. Humanistic Judaism is consistent with that flexibility.
4. We should not rely on benign providence for the betterment of humanity or the preservation of our planet.
5. Each person is free to hold his/her religious beliefs whether or not they agree with those of others.

Tradition
Role of God

Our goals as a congregation are:

1. To provide meaningful education and life cycle religious services.
2. To participate in community programs designed for the benefit of humankind.
3. To continuously examine our concepts by critical reason and to make changes to meet the test of reality.
4. To emphazize the relevant aspects of modern life and to de-emphasize those which have become irrelevant.
5. To participate in Reform Judaism and to explore membership in the U.A.H.C.
6. To advocate and facilitate a continuity of rabbinic clergy for Humanistic Judaism.

Youth
Camps
College
Books
HUC
Outreach
RAC
NIOS
Syn Admin

We affirm that:

1. HUC-JIR is the keystone of Reform Judaism in America.
2. The branch of HUC-JIR in Jerusalem is testimony to Reform's Zionist committment. It merits support.
3. The academic excellence in all fields emanating from HUC-JIR are invaluable assets to all faiths throughout the world.

Beth Adam, now in its tenth year, is a pioneering effort to provide Jews with an alternative to meet religious desires. We believe that Beth Adam broadens and strenghtens the scope of the Reform movement. We encourage HUC-JIR to familiarize rabbinic students with the concept of Humanistic Judaism.

Members of the congregation, encouraged and assisted by the Rabbi, have energetically and enthusiastically created religious services for all occasions. Liturgy and musical content of the services are updated to ensure relevancy. Torah, Talmud, and Midrash are appropriately incorporated into the fabric of the services.

MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi James L. Simon Date 1/25/90

To Regional Directors

Copies

Subject Beth Adam - The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

During the last year, I have had conversations off and on with Rabbi Bob Barr, the Rabbi of Beth Adam, the Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. Last weekend, on a trip to Cincinnati, I met with the board to have tentative and exploratory discussions concerning the possibility of an application for membership in the UAHC. Obviously, this is a most interest- ing and sensitive matter, and there are many issues yet to be explored as discussed but I felt that early on in the process it might be advisable to drop each of you a note to find out if you have any strong thoughts, ideas or suggestions with respect to this proposed application.

Even though in the last four years we have talked with and worked with many prospective congregations in the region, there are some very interesting ideological questions that must be explored by both sides in the near future. I am writing to inquire if you have had any specific contact or experience with a similar congregation or if you yourself have any ideas or guidance for me with respect to the way in which this process can and should be handled.

I am not exactly sure how everything is going to turn out and it may indeed be that in the months to come that it appears that this is not something that is going to come to fruition, but I would like to make sure that I am very much on top of the situation. If you would be so kind as to give me a call or drop me a note and share with me some of your thoughts, ideas and experiences I would be most grateful.

Thanks for your assistance in this matter. As you know, Rebecca is standing ready to deliver our child at the end of March or early April, and accordingly the first person who sends back a written response will have the joy of knowing that we will name our child after him or her. I think it would be a shame to have to name a son of my Lennard, so I hope that the rest of you will GOYA and make contact with me quickly!

Richard - OK

MIDWEST COUNCIL, UAHC
10425 Old Olive Street Road
Suite 205
St. Louis, MO 63141
314-997-7566

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

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MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

איחוד
יהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

January 26, 1990

Rabbi Bob Barr
Beth Adam
1720 Section Road, Suite 107
Cincinnati, Ohio 45237

Dear Bob:

It was good to see you last week and I am sorry we did not have more time to be together. However I am happy that I had sufficient amount of time to talk with you and your board and I very much enjoyed and appreciated that opportunity. I hope that we will have the opportunity to continue the dialogue in the months to come.

To follow up on one of the suggestions that I made, it might be worthwhile for you to identify one or two people on the board who would take the time to go over the UAHC materials that have been sent to you (especially The Guide) and to do some type of analysis of the types of services and benefits of the UAHC that would be of value to your congregation.

At the same time, and equally important, I believe that all of us should spend sufficient time talking about the very serious ideological questions that must be thoroughly confronted and discussed in the time to come. I think that one of the things that I was worried about after I left the meeting (although it did not occur to me at the time!) was the question as to whether or not the congregation and its leaders would feel that by joining the Reform movement and becoming part of the UAHC that over a long period of time the congregation would either make a number of changes or feel frustrated because the movement might not be moving in the same direction that Beth Adam is moving. I think this is a very important question to think about, and I certainly do not want to board to feel that if they do become a part of the movement that they are going to make any significant headway with respect to some of the ideas espoused by the congregation.

Let me try to be a bit more specific on this particular point because I believe it is an important point. As you know and as I mentioned, the movement clearly does not, cannot and should not go around monitoring the religious

practices of its Rabbis and congregations. On the other hand, it should be made clear to the leaders of your congregation that it is my sense that if there is going to be any movement at all within Reform Judaism it is clearly going to be the type of ideological change that is completely opposite of the direction in which I sense that Beth Adam is going. Ironically, you would not only then be confronting a movement which is generally loathe to return to classical Reform, but you would also be encountering a movement that is in the process of debating the question as to how much more traditional we should become. At any rate this is just one of my thoughts and I am sure that we will have other opportunities to discuss this matter. I only wanted to mention this because I believe it is an important point and one that merits further discussion by your board.

By the way, I am still checking into the whole by-law thing and when I have a definitive answer on that I will get back to you.

In the interim I hope you will keep in touch and if you have any questions or need additional information please do not hesitate to contact me. The only other piece of advice that I would offer at this point is that now that I have met with the board you might want to begin to consider spending some time with some of your Reform colleagues to get a definitive sense of their assessment of this situation. My gut feeling is that while I am sure that all of them are unanimous in their personal regard and affection for you as a friend and colleague, I would be equally interested to know if that affection and respect extends to the question of whether or not the congregation should become part of the UAHC.

I am hopeful that the next time that I come that you and I and Terri will have the chance to have dinner together. I would like that very much.

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi James L. Simon Date 1/26/90

To All Rabbis and Presidents of Cincinnati Reform Congregations

Copies Robert Chaiken, Dr. Harry Morrison, MWC Small and New Congregations Committee

Subject Beth Adam - Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

As many of you know, a small (but significant) part of my work for the UAHC includes developing and working with new congregations as well as those congregations which show an interest in the possibility of joining the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. At this date, we are working directly and indirectly with seven to ten congregations all over the region. In April, our board will take under consideration applications from Agudas Achim (Iowa City, Iowa), Har Shalom (Fort Collins, Colorado) and Congregation Beth Torah (Overland Park, Kansas).

I am writing to you now to tell you that on January 20 I was in Cincinnati on UAHC business and at that time accepted an invitation to meet with the leaders of Beth Adam at the request and invitation of Rabbi Bob Barr. It was a very interesting exploratory meeting. The primary purpose of the meeting was for me to outline to the leaders of the congregation a number of ideas and questions that they might consider with respect to the possibility of applying for membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Because this is a somewhat unusual situation, I felt it would be good for me to identify some important parts of the UAHC application process so that there is no misunderstanding whatsoever. Of course, after you read this letter if you need more explanations or information feel free to call or drop me a note and I will be happy to help in any way that I can.

1. It is important to understand at the outset that the UAHC tries to walk a very delicate line with respect to new applications. On one hand, the UAHC feels (and I agree with no hesitation) that our (and my) initial obligation is to maintain and strengthen existing member congregations. It is not in anyone's interests for the UAHC to ever hurt or diminish a member congregation in any way, manner, shape or form. On the other hand, the Reform movement feels that it has a right and (at times) an obligation to help develop and encourage those new (or not so new) congregations which do have a legitimate interest in being part of the Reform movement. The problem occurs when the new congregation which seeks to become a member of the UAHC does so in such a way that it clearly threatens the existence and survival of a current UAHC congregation. The most obvious example that many of you are aware of is a "split-off" congregation which

MIDWEST COUNCIL, UAHC
10425 Old Olive Street Road
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314-997-7566

form and whose presence seeks only to hurt and diminish the other congregation in the community. Accordingly, while we certainly are willing to talk with everyone and to try to clearly identify if there is a real potential for UAHC membership, the UAHC and my office are always mindful of the fact that our initial obligation must be to protect and enhance current UAHC congregations. It is for this reason that I do not go out of my way to recruit prospective congregations nor do I spend an inordinate amount of time working with them.

2. The meeting that was held at Beth Adam was similar to many of the meetings that I hold with prospective new congregations and it is similar to the meeting that I will be holding next month in Denver when I go to meet with the leaders of a new congregation (B'nai Torah) which has just formed in Arvada, Colorado. At this meeting I talked and gave an overview of the Reform movement, described some of the programs and services of the UAHC, and carefully urged the leaders of the congregation to think very seriously about the ramifications of an application to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. In this particular situation, as you can well imagine, there certainly are some very important and interesting ideological questions that both Beth Adam and the UAHC must carefully consider. I tried to be very candid in making it clear that this is a somewhat long process, that it involves many questions, and that it is important at the outset that both sides understand that in the final analysis it may indeed not be in the best interests of both Beth Adam and the UAHC for Beth Adam to become a member of the Reform movement. Much of the meeting was spent on this particular subject, and the only promise that I made was that at some point in the late spring I would try to return to meet again with the board to see where things stand. That is exactly where we are right now in this process.

   Let me apologize at this point for the prolixity of this letter, but I feel if I must err I must err on the side of telling you more than you may need or want to know!

3. A brief explanation of the UAHC application process is probably valuable at this point. It is really quite simple. After a congregations has had a number of contacts and conversations with the UAHC Regional Director they might want to file a formal application to become part of the UAHC. The application itself is six pages long and requires a number of different documents to show the vitality and the financial stability of the congregation. The application also includes an agreement by the congregation that they will agree to abide by the UAHC ethical guidelines which govern the relationships between member congregations and which primarily focus on soliciting for membership congregants from other UAHC congregations and refraining from disparaging the image personnel or the practices of another congregation. (If you would like to see a photocopy of this application please let me know.) After the application is received, two things happen. First, I carefully review the application and then pass it on to Dr. Harry Morrison, Chairman of the Midwest Council New and Small Congregations Committee. At that point, I encourage Dr. Morrison to be in

touch with leaders of the congregation to glean more information if needed, and if other questions need to be answered I work with Dr. Morrison to get the answers to those questions. At the next regularly scheduled Regional Board Meeting, Dr. Morrison will go over the application with members of his committee and they will offer a recommendation to the Regional Board as to whether or not this application should be approved.

Before the application comes to the Regional Board I write to any or all congregations in the immediate surrounding area and I ask that the board of directors of each of those congregations make some type of comment or suggestion as to whether or not they feel this application should be approved. I ask that the board communicate its feelings to me in writing, and then I pass these feelings and opinions on to the Regional New Congregations Committee. If a congregation objects strongly to a proposed application, I ask them to be very specific with respect to their objections because this is something that the New Congregations Committee and our Regional Board needs to hear and understand clearly. The key point in all of this is that existing and surrounding congregations have a voice but not a veto with respect to this application. When the Small and New Congregations Committee sits down to make its decision I will make sure that they have available all relevant materials and documents and then they will make a recommendation to the board of the Midwest Council.

If the application is not approved by the board it stops right there. If the board votes to approve the application, the application is sent on for the next meeting of the National New Congregations Committee, and at that meeting I appear to represent the Region. Quite candidly, it is very rare for an application to get that far in the process and then be turned down by the New Congregations Committee or by the National Board of Trustees of the UAHC. It is fair to say that when the National New Congregations Committee sends a favorable recommendation to the board of trustees that it is generally adopted and approved unanimously. That, in a nutshell, is the application process.

The purpose of this memo has been to try to clarify exactly what is going on and what may occur. Please know that you will be kept informed at every step of the process and that if indeed an application is received then you and your board of directors will clearly have sufficient time and opportunity to offer your own thoughts and opinions on the merit of this application. You certainly need not feel obligated to comment at this particular time. For many reasons, I believe that a comment at this time might be premature. However, if you do wish to discuss this or any of the ramifications of this with me please know that I am certainly happy to speak with you and to discuss this further.

I hope this memo clarifies the situation.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

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MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

איחוד
קהילות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

January 30, 1990

Rabbi Robert Barr
Beth Adam
1720 Section Road, Suite 107
Cincinnati, Ohio 45237

Dear Bob:

As an addendum to my previous letter, I am enclosing for your perusal the most recent copy of the UAHC Constitution and By-Laws as well as another copy of the UAHC Membership application. I am sending you the latter for informational purposes, and not to put pressure on you to fill in the application!

A careful reading of the UAHC Constitution indicates that any Jewish congregation in the United States, upon approval by the Board of Trustees, may become a member of this Union by subscribing to its Constitution and By-Laws.

Similarly, the application for membership itself does not require that the congregation identify itself as a Reform congregation in its By-Laws, but if you look carefully at the middle page of the blue UAHC application form you will note that the secretary and the president of the congregation must attest to the fact that Beth Adam is familiar with and will abide by the Constitution and By-Laws of the UAHC and will incorporate this obligation into its By-Laws.

I hope this information is helpful to you. Just to make sure that we are on the safe side, I have sent a memo to all of my Regional colleagues to find out their experience in this particular area. If I hear anything from them I will let you know.

Very truly yours,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

enclosure

MEMORANDUM

NORTHEAST LAKES COUNCIL, UAHC
25550 Chagrin Blvd. - Suite #108
Cleveland, Ohio 44122
Phone: 216-831-6722
Regional Rabbi Dr. David S. Hachen

Date January 30, 1990

From Rabbi David S. Hachen, Regional Rabbi

To Rabbi James L. Simon

Copy for information of Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Subject Beth Adam

Dear Jim:

Please don't name the baby after me!

Twenty years ago, when I first came into the region, I visited with Sherwin Wine in Detroit. He did not say anything about his congregation joining the Union, and I did not bring up the subject. I think we both understood that the whole matter was problematic. Later, I learned that Rabbi Leon Fram had serious reservations about Sherwin's congregation, and was strongly opposed to their becoming a member of the Union. However, the subject was never brought to a head. The sample Constitution and By-Laws for congregations affiliated with the UAHC states in Article II that "The purpose of this congregation is ..... to develop a relationship to God." The Constitution of the Union, in its Preamble, indicates that "Congregations in the UAHC affirm their faithful attachment to Judaism ..... under the protection of benign Providence." It would be my view that these two statements indicate that a congregation which clearly asserts that it believes "in humans", and not in God, has no place in the Union. Alex might take a different view, but "thems" my thoughts.

Love from home to home.

As ever,

Dave

Beth Adam ain't Beth El !

Beth Adam
The Cincinnati Congregation
for Humanistic Judaism

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

February 1, 1990

Rabbi James L. Simon
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
10425 Old Olive Street Road, Suite #205
St. Louis, Missouri 63141

Dear Jim,

I want to thank you for meeting with members of Beth Adam's Board of Trustees and past presidents. Since our meeting, I have received many positive comments from those in attendance. Though no formal discussion and vote has occurred, I am certain that there is a desire to carry on a dialogue with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations regarding membership. Jim Cummins is arranging a meeting with Bob Chaiken to discuss some of the matters raised at our initial meeting.

I just received your letter dated January 26. I agree that sufficient time needs to be spent addressing the "ideological questions that must be thoroughly confronted." Though, I am not certain of the outcome of our discussions, I believe that no matter the final disposition, this process will be beneficial for both the Union and Beth Adam. It is through exploring our commonality and differences that we will come to better understand ourselves.

As per your suggestion, I will begin discussing with local rabbis the possibility of Beth Adam joining the Union. I am looking forward to our continue contacts and having an opportunity to socialize when you are next in Cincinnati.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Robert B. Barr

1720 Section Road, Suite 107, Cincinnati, Ohio 45237
(513) 396-7730

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MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

February 1, 1990

Rabbi Robert Barr
Beth Adam
1720 Section Road, Suite 107
Cincinnati, Ohio 45237

Dear Bob:

As an addendum to the addendum that I sent you on January 30 (!) my Regional colleague David Hachen has called to my attention that the preamble to the Constitution and By-Laws of the UAHC (as seen on the first page of the document) indicates clearly that congregations represented in the UAHC affirm their faithful attachment to Judaism and their adherence to its liberal interpretation, and unite to discharge their responsibilities under the protection of benign Providence.

I call this to your attention for two specific reasons. First, the Beth Adam policy statement of December 8, 1989 indicates that the congregation should not rely on benign Providence and it may be that we might have a conflict here with respect to the needs and desires of the members of your congregation who hold this belief in a strong and firm manner. Second, it's important for you to understand at the outset that this preamble, and the By-Laws of your own congregation, may come into conflict with members of the Regional Board of the UAHC or with members of the Small Congregations Committee of the National Board of Trustees of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Accordingly, we may have a theological problem and a practical problem as well. With respect to the theological problem, I think you and I know and agree that we are never going to resolve that one, and I am not even sure that I want to try! However, the practical problem remains, and brings up (again) the question of how uncomfortable will it be for members of your congregation who are going to be part of an organization and part of the Reform movement that clearly seeks to be God-centered or God oriented in a number of different ways.

I am certainly not trying to cause problems, but I felt that as soon as I became aware of the language and the preamble (which I had inadvertently overlooked before) I thought I should call this to your attention.

Please feel free to combine this letter with my previous letter of January 30 when you discuss this matter with the leaders of your congregation.

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi Lennard R. Thal

Date 1/31/90

To Rabbi James L. Simon

Copies

Subject

There is a congregation for Humanistic Judaism in the Los Angeles area but I have had no contact with them at all and would not have any idea how to reach them. To the best of my knowledge, they do not have the services of a rabbi.

Once upon a time either they or some other incarnation of the group had the late Rabbi Leslie Freund. After Les' untimely death some years ago, I have not had any contact of any sort.

If they were to contact me, I guess I would have mixed feelings. On the one hand, I firmly believe in the diversity of the Reform movement. On the other hand, there is part of me that is not even sure that such groups are really Jewish, at least in a religious sense in any conventional interpretation of that term. It might be helpful to probe, not just with the rabbi, but a number of the key lay leaders as to exactly why they would seek affiliation.

Regarding the other matter you mentioned, I would be truly offended if you named your child Lennard especially if it turns out to be a daughter. Have you thought about names such as Simple, Hyman or Lyman?

Would you truly consider naming your kid Morris?

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

6300 WILSHIRE BLVD., SUITE 1475, LOS ANGELES, CA. 90048 (213) 653-9962

JAMES SALINGER & ASSOCIATES

Financial Service

REGISTERED INVESTMENT ADVISER

2601 SECTION ROAD
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45222
(513) 531-3106

February 5,1990

Dear Rabbi Simon,

Thank you for your gracious letter of Janaury 26. Our meeting, I thought, was a mutually useful effort.

The leaders of Beth Adam are for the most part relatively young and inexperienced in congregational operation. They had a chance to learn about the UAHC and its operation. Even if our membership in the UAHC never eventuates, the meeting was a valuable educational experience for them.

My education in congregational operation and knowledge of UAHC is broad and long-standing. One of my goals for Beth Adam is to achieve recognition by the UAHC and HUC-JIR that Humanistic Judaism, as practiced at Beth Adam, in all respects, is a qualitative practice of Reform Judaism, as I understand its tenets. I am at Beth Adam because I can no longer bring myself to attend services regularly in which the liturgy of the Union Prayer Book and its successor publications are used because it no longer stands the test of critical reason. Furthermore Beth Adam offers an alternative to people who for many reasons will not belong to our local Reform and Conservative congregations because they have become disenchanted with them for different reasons.

You, I hope, understand that Beth Adam enthusiastically and energetically programs Jewish education, life cycle and holiday celebration, and community participation---all in consonence with both Jewish tradition and Reform Judaism. You should also realize that the congregation spends more time studying and discussing theology than any other congregation with which I am familar. Our members are not discouraged from possessing their personal God concepts and are encouraged to appropriately interpolate our liturgy and religious practices for their individual and private beliefs.

I appreciate your invitation to my expressing these thoughts. I do so with the fervent hope that Beth Adam's efforts to create a practicing spiritual Jewish community will gain respect from the whole Reform Jewish movement which we think is merited.

Go well!

Jim

cc: Rabbi Barr

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MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

איחוד
לדות
מיסדות
באמריקה

February 8, 1990

Mr. Jim Salinger
2601 Section Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45222

Dear Jim:

Thanks for your good letter of February 5. It was kind of you to write and I too look forward to future discussions on this very important issue.

Since you are obviously very knowledgeable and interested in this area, I am sure that you will find of value two recent letters that I sent to Rabbi Barr on January 30 and February 1 concerning some theological issues that should be discussed by the leaders of the congregation at a future meeting. I am sure that Rabbi Barr will share these with you and the others at an appropriate time.

I do want to respond to the middle two paragraphs of your letter of February 5 because I think they bring up another important issue that we unfortunately did not have time to discuss in a thorough manner at our meeting in January. You indicate that one of your goals for Beth Adam is "to achieve recognition by the UAHC and HUC that Humanistic Judaism, as practiced at Beth Adam, in all respects, is a qualitative practice of Reform Judaism . . ." I can certainly understand your spiritual discomfort with the liturgy of the UPB and its successor publications, but I think we might have a quarrel as to whether or not Humanistic Judaism (whether or not it is practiced at Beth Adam or anywhere else!) is indeed at all connected with Reform Judaism. This is not to imply that somehow or another Humanistic Judaism is not and cannot be a valid and authentic expression of Judaism, but rather to indicate to you that perhaps the history of the movement of Humanistic Judaism in this country was designed to be a clear and viable alternative to Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Judaism. I certainly respect the fact that Beth Adam offers an alternative to people who cannot or will not or should not belong to local Reform and Conservative congregations, but does this necessarily mean that because they do belong to Beth Adam that it indicates that they do identify as Reform or Conservative Jews? I think not.

This is a subject worthy of future discussion for sure.

In your penultimate paragraph, you make two points that are very important. With respect to your point about Beth Adam's enthusiastic and energetic programs, I certainly do not disagree with that. Whether or not those programs are completely in harmony with Jewish tradition and Reform Judaism is a most interesting question, because while I would agree that many of the materials that I have reviewed are clearly in keeping with the spirit of Jewish tradition in general, one could argue that the somewhat drastic and radical innovations that have been made in the context of liturgy thus render these programs and materials unique and accordingly fundamentally different from a Reform Jewish interpretation. As to the fact that the congregation spends more time studying and discussing theology than an other congregation with which you are familiar, I certainly would not disagree with you but I feel that this is somewhat of a moot point. The UAHC (and I think Judaism in general) has never been that keen on comparing congregations and Jews with each other.

I do appreciate your taking the time and effort to write. I find these questions to be extremely important and I look forward to continuing the dialogue in one form or another.

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

cc: Rabbi Bob Barr

MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi Lennard R. Thal

Date 1/31/90

To Rabbi James L. Simon

Copies

Subject

There is a congregation for Humanistic Judaism in the Los Angeles area but I have had no contact with them at all and would not have any idea how to reach them. To the best of my knowledge, they do not have the services of a rabbi.

Once upon a time either they or some other incarnation of the group had the late Rabbi Leslie Freund. After Les' untimely death some years ago, I have not had any contact of any sort.

If they were to contact me, I guess I would have mixed feelings. On the one hand, I firmly believe in the diversity of the Reform movement. On the other hand, there is part of me that is not even sure that such groups are really Jewish, at least in a religious sense in any conventional interpretation of that term. It might be helpful to probe, not just with the rabbi, but a number of the key lay leaders as to exactly why they would seek affiliation.

Regarding the other matter you mentioned, I would be truly offended if you named your child Lennard especially if it turns out to be a daughter. Have you thought about names such as Simple, Hyman or Lyman?

Would you truly consider naming your kid Morris?

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

[illegible] LOS ANGELES, CA 90069 (213) 653-9962

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Rabbi Daniel Freelander,
Regional Director

DATE: 13 February 1990
18 Shevat 5750

TO: Rabbi James Simon

Dear Jim,

I'm finally responding to your January 25 memo about the Humanistic congregation.

I've had a number of contacts with congregations of questionable ideology or no ideology at all. Usually they come to us because we have a reputation of delivering at least some of the services they need.

I would urge you to continue talking with them, but throw the ball into their court. If they wish to affiliate they must be willing to amend their constitution to say they are a Reform congregation affiliated with the National bodies of American Reform Judaism. Constitutional amendments usually require a congregational vote which would require republic ideological debate as to whether they want to call themselves Reform. If they do, I think we have to take them. Our own Movement is a full ideological spectrum and I don't want to be in the position of judging another's theology.

I hope this is helpful.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations
New Jersey-West Hudson Valley Council
ONE KALISA WAY, SUITE 104, PARAMUS, NJ 07652
(201) 599-0080 FAX (201) 599-1085

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MIDWEST COUNCIL
Rabbi James L. Simon
Regional Director

March 20, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

I know that you are interested in hearing some of the reactions and opinions of my colleagues and thus I am taking the liberty of enclosing for your perusal the responses of Richard Sternberger, Lennard Thal, Frank Sundheim, Danny Freelander and Bernie Zlotowitz. These are the only Regional Directors that I have heard from. You may have already received a copy of Frank Sundheim's February 14 letter, but I am enclosing it just to make sure that you are able to read it.

If I receive any additional responses I will pass them on to you.

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

cc: Robert Chaiken

P. S. Although I am very much a fan as well as a student of Dr. Mihaly, I was unimpressed with his recent letter to you. I feel that he has intentionally or inadvertently neglected discussion of the serious ideological questions which are posed by the existence of this congregation.

Attend the Midwest Council Regional Biennial
Indianapolis, Indiana • November 9-11, 1990

MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi Lennard R. Thal

Date 1/31/90

To Rabbi James L. Simon

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Subject

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Union of American Hebrew Congregations

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FAX (305) 477-7866
SOUTHEAST COUNCIL
Rabbi Frank N. Sundheim
Regional Director

February 14, 1990

FROM : Frank Sundheim

TO : Jim Simon

CC : Rabbi Alexander Schindler

RE : HUMANIST CONGREGATION

Dear Jim:

I am writing you this letter in follow-up to our conversation a few days ago and your February 12th memo. I am enclosing a copy of my first letter in case you do not find it. I shall, however, summarize some of the material that was in that letter in this memo.

This will be a lengthy memo, and I will do my best to make it Mishnah rather than Gemara. However, there are some items which I feel will need further explanation. Others if I just mention them, you certainly can fill in the commentary, as can Alex.

It is a great temptation to make this response a multi-volume tome, because the more I thought about it, the more offended I became at the thought that so many of our colleagues might feel that a Humanist congregation does not have a place underneath the Reform umbrella. If some of my points seem repetitive, it is because when I started to think in detail about our conversation, the deeper my convictions became in supporting what I wrote you in the last letter, and my pen did not stop making notes at that time. Nonetheless, let me try these arguments out for size in no particular order of importance.

My final introductory thought is that most of the time I am a theist. However, at other times, I become a Buberian, Kaplanian, a Humanist, an Agnostic, and a Polydoxist. It sometimes takes me as long as 24 hours to run the entire gamut of these approaches.

Here is my list of thoughts:

1) The CCAR does not excludes humanists from membership.

2) Our congregations do not ask for a loyalty oath to God when people become members. For whatever reasons people join congregations, very few of them do so for the theological reasons.

3) Would we keep a holocaust survivor out of one of our congregations because that person is a humanist? Or even an atheist?

4) By the nature of its faculty, HUC is committed to a multiplicity of ideas. An institution that can tenure Alvin Rienes, Abraham Chronbach, Samuel Cohon, Samuel Atlas, Gene Borowitz, plus a multitude ofothers could hardly be described as an institution that discourages a multiplicity of ideas. The UAHC must be the same.

5) As I understand it, humanists do not automatically deny God and in this point it differs from atheism. Some humanists may be theists and others may not. Many of them ignore God. Others define God in their own terms. I find none of these alternatives destructive of the Reform Jewish spirit.

6) Related to #5, modern humanism is far less destructive to the spirit of Judaism than was Koheleth.

7) I see these people as non-traditional Jews struggling to find an institutional home. If the UAHC keeps people like this away, they will find homes elsewhere and we will lose thousands of people who would in the long run be confortable under our umbrella.

8) Humanists care enough about theology to think seriously about it. Many times, they are much more honest than many of us who play word games, but really don't mean what we say. Sometimes the language we use cleverly and conveniently covers our own misgivings, but because we are good at language, we can give ourselves a "kosher cop-out." I personally find humanists most refreshing in holding us to the meaning of the words we use.

9)* As regional directors, we must deal with political situations relating to new congregations. I am not aware of the realities in Cincinnati, but I would hate to think of the repercussions from many of our colleagues including those at HUC if a congregation were excluded because it was Humanist. Nonetheless, sometimes decisions must be made that reflect the political realities of the moment. If this should happen, we will have to live with it however distasteful it might be. But, the UAHC certainly should not be part of rejection of such a congregation L'hatchilah.

10) The UAHC has demonstrated its openness in the types of congregations it has taken in. We have openly embraced gay and lesbian congregations, and we even have a prison congregation within the UAHC. Given this track record, how can we keep out a congregation because it "thinks" differently than most of our congregations (at least officially)?

11)* This reflects part of the conversation I had with you. I understand that the UAHC Constitution and Charter does speak of the importance of God, as do the preambles to most congregational constitutions. In no way does that bind the congregation legally to these doctrines anymore than congregations are bound to agree with resolutions of a UAHC biennial. Such statements are Haggadah not Halacha. It seems that those who would oppose this humanist congregation are coming dangerously close to demanding conformity of ideology to within the Reform movement. We must give a loud and resounding NO to such thinking. Any congregation entering the UAHC is aware of the statements concerning God that are part of our Charter. If they have a problem with those words, then let them wrestle with it, and make a decision on their joining the UAHC on the basis of their deliberations. But let <u>them</u> state the problem, not us. If they have a problem with the UAHC Charter, then they must deal with it. It is not to us to have litmus tests or loyalty oaths to statements that were meant and should still be meant to be descriptive rather than perscriptive.

12)* I also discussed with you an analogy with ARZA that you asked me to enunciate in writing. When ARZA came into being many of us struggled with the question of whether we could accept the Jerusalem Platform that makes aliyah the central mitzvah of the Jewish people. We struggled with it because we took the idea seriously and we did not want to be hypocritical in our responses. I am sure that a <u>tiny</u> number of the people who eventually joined ARZA did so because they accepted that part of the Jerusalem Platform. I certainly was among that majority who joined for other reasons. My commitment to what ARZA was trying to do as a Reform Jewish presence within the Zionist movement simply over-rode the misgivings I had concerning the Jerusalem Platform. I would imagine that most people joining ARZA did not take this matter nearly so seriously as did I. In fact, I gave an entire Holy Day sermon on the subject, including my own questions. The result is that we have a major Jewish organization, ARZA, the vast majority of whose members do not subscribe to one of the things that was supposedto be a very basis of joining the Zionist Movement. If there is a contradiction, we live with that contradiction, most of us happily.

I think there is an analogy here to a Humanist congregation. They may have misgivings, or even deny an aspect of the UAHC Charter. But they are so close to us in 98% of everything else for which we stand, it would seem to me hypocritical on our part to exclude them.

13) I conclude where I started. I am very disturbed and concerned about the future of Reform Judaism if such matters as loyalty oaths to God are necessary for congregations to join the Union when we certainly do not make that request or demand of people joining our congregations. Reform Judaism has always been open to the present and the future, and I think to exclude these people on the basis of their deeply thought-through theological position would be on our parts hypocritical, destructive of the UAHC in the long run, and unconsciounable.

STRONG MESSAGE TO FOLLOW!

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Rabbi Daniel Freelander,
Regional Director

DATE: 13 February 1990
18 Shevat 5750

TO: Rabbi James Simon

Dear Jim,

I'm finally responding to your January 25 memo about the Humanistic congregation.

I've had a number of contacts with congregations of questionable ideology or no ideology at all. Usually they come to us because we have a reputation of delivering at least some of the services they need.

I would urge you to continue talking with them, but throw the ball into their court. If they wish to affiliate they must be willing to amend their constitution to say they are a Reform congregation affiliated with the National bodies of American Reform Judaism. Constitutional amendments usually require a congregational vote which would require republic ideological debate as to whether they want to call themselves Reform. If they do, I think we have to take them. Our own Movement is a full ideological spectrum and I don't want to be in the position of judging another's theology.

I hope this is helpful.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations
New Jersey-West Hudson Valley Council
ONE KALISA WAY, SUITE 104, PARAMUS, NJ 07652
(201) 599-0080 FAX (201) 599-1085

MEMORANDUM

March 26, 1990
29 Adar 5750

FROM: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO: Allan B. Goldman, Esq. & Melvin Merians

RE: CONGREGATIONS FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

We will undoubtedly receive an official request for affiliation with the UAHC from a Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in the Midwest Council. There are a growing number of such congregations and thus I thought we should study the situation with care.

Enclosed are the responses which I received from respected colleagues I contacted to request their opinions. I share them for your perusal. These congregations may well turn to us in the future and we must be prepared to deal with them with knowledge and thoughtfulness.

Right now the matter is under consideration and study in the Midwest Council and I have asked them to enlarge their regular New Congregations Committee to assure a spectrum of lay and rabbinic as well as ideological representation, so that this matter will be properly pre-digested before it comes to national.

Warm regards.

Encl.

DR. WALTER JACOB
RABBI
RODEF SHALOM TEMPLE
FIFTH AND MOREWOOD AVENUES
PITTSBURGH, PA. 15213
412-621-6566 FAX: 412-621-5475

1 March 1990

Dr. Alexander M. Schindler President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Thank you for your letter and the difficult question which you sent. If I understood it correctly, a "congregation" whose charter states that they are humanists, may apply for membership in the UAHC. How should the UAHC respond.

It is hard for me to understand their reasoning behind their application. Why should they wish to join a religious organization which regularly deals with God, prayer, **mitzvot**, religious education, and much more along the same lines. They would not fit into structure or programming.

Let me, however, look at the question through the eyes of tradition which would consider all Jews who reject God as sinners. Sinners, however, remain Jews (San 44a) and possess the right to attend the synagogue for prayer and study. We know, as Judaism has refrained from making dogmatic requirements, a Jew could adopt virtually any system of thought and even be an agnostic without being considered outside the fold. Spinoza was expelled from the Jewish community because it feared the retribution of the Gentile surrounding world; under other circumstances he would have remained a member of the synagogue community. Even with an apostate there is always the hope that the individual will return to Judaism, so unless the community feels endangered, he/she remains undisturbed in the synagogue and is readmitted with no formality (Jeremiah 3.22; Moses Isserles to **Shulhan Arukh** Yoreh Deah 268.12; Abraham Gombiner, **Magen Avraham** to **Shulhan Arukh** Orah Hayim 326; Solomon ben Simon Duran **Responsa** #89). There is no question therefore that <u>individuals</u> who absolutely reject God may be members of our congregations and are welcome. We hope that they will change their views and many have done so.

In this instance we are dealing with an entire group which has banded together as a "congregation". We normally associate that term with a religious group, but, of course, it can be secular as well. By joining together, they have made the statement that they do not wish to establish their philosophy and firmly impart it to their children. The group sounds very much like the Ethical Culture Society which seeks to teach ethics without theology. Its founder felt it necessary to leave Temple Emanuel and he was right.

Would the Ethical Culture Society have asked to be a founding member of the UAHC? They would have considered such a thought absurd and properly so.

The UAHC is a group of congregations which affirms Reform Judaism and seeks to strengthen it. Reform Judaism has been defined through the Pittsburgh Platform, the Columbus Platform, the Centenary Statement as well as numerous resolutions of the UAHC. God, however, conceived, is basic to each of those statements. A "congregation" which rejects the centrality of God in Judaism cannot be considered for membership.

We would I am certain, reject the application of a Conservative or an Orthodox congregation as it would be inappropriate ideologically. Yet our differences on ideological matters are less basic than on the centrality of God.

Any thought of moving in this direction would weaken us, lead to conflict every time we gather for prayer, to edit a textbook, or to debate a resolution.

We should not consider the application of such a congregation.

All the best to you for a continued pleasant winter. With kindest regards to Rhea.

Sincerely,

Walter Jacob

/bb

Aronowitz, Chaiken & Hardesty *Certified Public Accountants*

105 East Fourth Street, P.O. Box 5367, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201 · (513) 621-8300

Bernard Aronowitz, CPA
Robert Chaiken, CPA
Richard J. Hardesty, CPA
John T. McKinley, CPA
Richard R. Vestring, CPA
Jerome D. Kreger, CPA
William G. Wessendarp, CPA
Linda Tracy Gill, CPA

March 8, 1990

Rabbi James L. Simon
UAHC
10425 Old Olive Street Road
Suite 205
St. Louis, Missouri 63141

Dear Jimmy:

I wish to report to you on the meeting that I had yesterday with Rabbi Robert B. Barr of Beth Adam Congregation in Cincinnati, James Cummins, Treasurer of the Congregation, and Harriett Edwards, President of the Congregation.

We had a cordial meeting and the issues, in no particular order, raised and discussed were as follows:

1. They were a concerned about the criteria for admission to the UAHC. They were afraid that there might be some people who had some philosophical objectives to their congregation and would "veto" their admission. I advised them that the only time in my experience that the admission of a new congregation had been questioned was where the congregation seeking admission was a split-off of another congregation and some ill feelings still remain between the former congregation and members of the new congregation. I assured them that this, in my opinion, was not the case as it relates to their congregation so that there should not be any "political" considerations for their admission to the UAHC.

2. We discussed the benefits of their belonging to the UAHC vis-a-vis the 100 things that the UAHC does for member congregations, as well as how their members could participate in activities of the UAHC (specifically, committee participation, Regional Board, National Board, etc., etc.).

   We did discuss the issue of their membership being exposed to religious practices that they might not follow in the course of their activities at Beth Adam and that they have to prepared for that eventuality. They did ask whether or not in the course of their members' activities in the UAHC there would be the opportunity for them to show, tell, exhibit, or otherwise disseminate the practices and materials that they use in the course of their worship services. I told them that I wasn't sure, but it seemed to me that there is an interchange of ideas and practices that exist and they certainly would not be excluded from that.

3. I asked whether they had a long-range plan as far as where they wanted their congregation to go. The practical considerations of their making a financial commitment to paying dues to the UAHC and the fact that, at the present time, do not have a building and would they need a building in the future, etc., etc. They did tell me that there was no long-range plan, but they will shortly form a committee to begin that exercise.

4. They asked me what the next step is. I told them that, in my opinion, the UAHC must determine whether or not any theological differences can be overcome. That must be decided before anything else happens. If, in fact, those differences are not an impediment to their becoming a member congregation of the UAHC, then they can begin the process of getting their Board and membership to agree to modify their bylaws and to formerly apply for membership in the UAHC.

I suggested that it might be appropriate (subject to Rabbi Schindler's approval) that Rabbi Barr and perhaps one of the officers of the congregation visit New York to meet with Rabbi Schindler and a group Lay and Rabbinic leaders of the UAHC to discuss the theologic issues. I indicated I was not qualified to do that, but I felt Rabbi Schindler might wish to do that.

I also indicated that we might extend an invitation to them to come to the Midwest Regional Board meeting in April in St. Louis as observers to see just exactly what goes on at the Board meetings and to get a flavor of how the Union membership functions. They thought they might do so.

The meeting concluded with their indicating to me that they have an annual meeting sometime in May and that would be an appropriate time to start the process of their making application, if, in fact, the UAHC has indicated no impediment to their membership in so far as the theological problems are concerned.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Rabbi Schindler to ask for his reactions to this meeting and to perhaps give me some insight as to his thinking on how to proceed.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Kindest, personal regards.

Sincerely,

ARONOWITZ, CHAIKEN & HARDESTY

Robert Chaiken

RC/kk

cc: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President

WESTCHESTER REFORM TEMPLE 255 MAMARONECK ROAD • SCARSDALE, N. Y. 10583

Jack Stern, Jr.
Rabbi

March 5, 1990

Rabbi Alexander Schindler
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

I am responding to your letter of February 9 regarding "The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism."

My own feeling is that the term "Humanistic Judaism" should not in itself be grounds for rejecting the congregation as a Union affiliate. After all, many of us in "normal" congregations will make use of that same word to describe aspects of our tradition and our own Jewish philosophical approach.

However, if the congregation describes or defines itself in specifically atheistic terminology, then I would have strong reservations about accepting them into the Union. It is one thing to say we are searching but quite another to say that we define ourselves without God. If the congregation adopts the latter course, I personally would not welcome them into our family of congregations.

I also make a distinction between a congregation many of whose members may reject any concept of a divine being and a congregation which by its own congregational self-definition, as a matter of policy and principle, rejects such a belief.

I await the outcome with interest.

Priscilla joins in warm regards to Rhea and yourself.

Sincerely,

JS:tm

Rabbi

Rabbi Jack Bemporad
Temple Israel
140 Central Avenue, Lawrence, New York 11559

(516) 239-1140 Study

(516) 371-2809 Home

March 6, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex,

I am in favor of accepting Congregation Beth Adam as an affiliate of the union.

I know something about the Rabbi of this congregation and its programming and I am convinced that it is not an antitheistic congregation, rather it emphasizes the humanistic elements within Judaism.

It stresses traditional beliefs which emphasize the primacy of the ethical and the interpretation of Judaism as a way of life and not solely as a Theocentric Faith.

If we make a distinction between a nominal definition as to what it means to be a Reform Jew, and a maximal definition; then minimally a reform Jew is one who has one parent that is Jewish, is brought up Jewish and has not converted to another religion; or who has converted into Judaism according to the standards of the converting Rabbi.

It seems to me that the members of Congregation Beth Adam qualify under this definition.

Judaism is not a creedal religion and questions of faith have always been open to wide variations. If our Jewish faith is the ultimate context of what gives us meaning in life, and if Judaism is the symbol through which we express that faith, then Schulweiss' Predicate Theology and Kaplan's reconstructionism, though rejecting any kind of supernaturalism and any form of a personal god still would qualify under my nominal definition as would the members of congregation Beth Adam.

Perhaps we can find a parallel in Zionism. Zionism was a solution thrust upon us by historical events. It is nevertheless an anti-theistic expression of Judaism. It may be that a non-supernatural Judaism is again a solution for some of us as a response to the events of our time.

I believe our responsibility is to embrace this community and bring them closer to other Jews and a God Faith which they leave open to each individual member.

As an affiliate of the Union, we would open up the full range of UAHC programming to include them into a broader sense of Jewish Identity.

With warm regards I am,

Sincerely,

Jack (SH)

Jack Bemporad

איחוד
ליהדות
מתקדמת
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

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MID-ATLANTIC COUNCIL
Rabbi Richard S. Sternberger
Director
John F. Lippmann
Regional President

March 15, 1990

To: Rabbi James Simon

From: Rabbi Richard S. Sternberger

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Even though I spoke to you at length over the phone, I have had a great deal of difficulty answering your memo. As I grow older, I have less and less patience with rules and restrictions. I believe that Reform Judaism should be as inclusive as possible, and am not enthusiastic about barriers which will exclude people or groups. And yet if our Movement is to have any dynamism and send forth a compelling message, we cannot be all things to all people. True there are areas where we must still do battle with orthodoxy; however, the significant area of controversy is that of secularism and the secular Jew. I believe that we must underscore the importance of theology-belief-faith. Even our Reconstructionist brothers and sisters are using terms that would have been anathema even a decade ago. The theology of Mordecai Kaplan - which had its roots in the time of Russell and Dewey - is meaningless today. The work of our Committee on Religious Living is absolutely critical, and we have found great response to the programs of our Regional committee.

About a dozen years ago, a rabbi was in town to establish a Humanist congregation. He called and asked me whether I would be helpful. I gave him a negative answer, and have had my moments of guilt concerning that answer over the years. And yet I believe that we must take our stand with such contemporary Jewish thinkers as Steinheim, Rosenweig, Buber, Heschel, etc., who really have a message concerning God which our people must hear. A circuitous road to answer that we should not admit a congregation that defines itself as Humanist.

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February 15, 1990

Personal and Confidential

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Re your inquiry about The Congregation of Humanistic Judaism, Beth Adam

There are three humanistic congregations which have as their spiritual leader rabbis ordained by the Hebrew Union College: the one in Detroit led by Sherwin Wine, the "pope of the movement;" Dan Friedman's group in Chicago; and the one in Cincinnati led by Robert Barr. The Society for Humanistic Judaism claims to have about twelve other tiny groups who are nominally affiliated and have no spiritual leadership. They are insignificant both in size and in quality. Sherwin Wine is by far the most radical. He has recently changed the name of the association to "The Society for Secular Humanistic Judaism." He has also managed to interest a few intellectuals in Israel, primarily Judah Bauer and Ze'ev Katz of the Hebrew University, Simon Susskin of Paris, and, even though he is now very frail and old, Ḥayyim Cohen, the former chief justice of the Israeli Supreme Court. I understand that Judah Bauer will be in the United States this coming summer to help Sherwin develop and train leaders for the group, a project which Sherwin has been strongly advocating. He would like to see an independent institution to train leaders for his "movement."

Rabbi Dan Friedman has for some time been disenchanted, and he has gradually distanced himself from the Society. He will not participate in their forthcoming annual conference in San Francisco. He seriously differs from Sherwin Wine on a number of issues and is pursuing his own independent course, to the point of disaffiliation.

Robert Barr is very much at odds with Sherwin Wine, who sees Bob as "selling out." He has not been in touch with Wine for a long time. He and his group have nothing to do with the Society for Secular Humanistic Judaism. They do not belong to the Society, even though they call themselves "The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism." Barr himself is a very decent, honorable, and sincere person. He was a fine student while at the Hebrew Union College. He has been searching for a number of years and would very much like to get closer to the mainstream. He needs help in this endeavor. The application of his group to the Union is very much part of this process.

Rabbi Barr has counseled with me on numerous occasions. I am sympatheic to him. I am persuaded that we should help him in his search and buttress his resolve to find himself within the broad consensus of Reform. The three groups which have rabbinic leadership should not be viewed as a uniform entity. Each one is to be treated differently, since each one is unique and has its own character. Robert Barr's group does have within its membership a number of substantial, responsible and thinking members in prominent positions in the professions and in the academic and business worlds. Bob himself is a dedicated spiritual leader who, in my view, may well be included within the broad umbrella of Reform.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the UAHC should definitely accept his group within the Union. Such action would not only be wise, but a genuine constructive act in terms of Bob's personal struggle and in terms of the group's search for its own identity. The rabbinic dictum "let the left hand push away, but let the right hand bring near" is certainly applicable in this instance.

I hope that the above information, which I am sending you in confidence, will be helpful in your decision.

With warmest greetings and best wishes, I am

As ever,

Eugene Mihaly

P. S. I am enclosing a brief brochure put out by Beth Adam entitled "A Concept of God," which I urge you to read. I also have in my files a number of other of their publications, including services for various occasions, etc. I should be happy to send additional material if you would like to see them.

Also got from Sam Simon
Care in this
folder

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut
O.C., Senior Scholar
Holy Blossom Temple
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5P 3K9
(416) 789-3291 / Fax (416) 789 9697

February 12, 1990
17 Shevat 5750

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President, UAHC.
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

I hasten to answer your personal inquiry of February 9.

My suggestion is that you submit this to the Responsa Committee of the CCAR. This would have the advantage that, by making this referral, the Union would then have a well researched and considered Reform opinion which would help it to arrive at a judgment.

Of course, I respect the personal nature of your letter and at this point will go no further. Incidentally, your she'elah, if you wish to submit it, need not come from you but might be submitted, for instance, by the chairperson of the Admissions Committee. Nor would the name of the congregation have to be mentioned in the she'elah.

With cordial regards,

Gunther

RABBI W. GUNTHER PLAUT
O.C., J.D.S., D.D., LL.D., LIT.HUM.D.
1950 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ont. M5P 3K9
Tel. (416) 789 3291 Fax (416) 789 9697

11 Adar 5750/ March 8, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
President, UAHC
838 Fifth Ave.
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

Thank you for sending me further information on the question of admitting humanistic congregations (your letter of March 2).

In order to focus more clearly on the issues involved I would isolate four sub-questions:

a. Does the congregation that seeks admission to the UAHC have a constitution that declares it to be "humanistic" and does it define that term?

b. Does the congregation declare itself to be a "secular" institution?

c.. Does the congregation, in its gatherings and its rites, expressly deny or eschew a supernatural power?

d. Does it matter whether the congregation engages or keeps a rabbi who is a declared humanist and teaches his/her belief regularly to the congregation?

You might wish to ask the Responsa Committee questions along these lines, but they would have to be buttressed by fairly specific information. It would of course be easier if you would ask only with regard to a single congregation, which would give you a better opportunity to provide details in the above-mentioned categories. The advice which our Committee would proffer might then become the basis for your admission policy in other, similar instances.

In case New York is a walled city and this letter arrives in time for Shushan Purim, please accept a cordial wish for a *hag Purim same'ah.*

RABBI SOLOMON B. FREEHOF, D. D.
RODEF SHALOM TEMPLE
FIFTH AND MOREWOOD AVENUES
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15213

February 21, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Colleague:

You have asked me a difficult and a troublesome question. Of course, if it were not difficult, you would not need to ask it. The question deals with the relationship of the UAHC to the numerous organizations of "Humanistic Judaism." Some of these groups already are members of the Union and others want or may want to be accepted as members. What should be the attitude of the Union to these societies? Should they be accepted as congregational members of the Union, or not?

The essential question involved is the fact of the basic belief of these societies. By the term "humanistic," they mean only "human" and nothing beyond. They do not believe in God. They believe only in the people of Israel. Can the UAHC accept members who declare openly and as a principle that they do not believe in God? It seems that a number of those god-less groups are already congregational members of the Union and others want to join. What shall be the attitude of the Union to those who are already members? Should they be expelled and if not, should those that are not members be accepted?

If we were living in Israel the problem would be in a way simpler. The Jewish community or the Jewish state welcomes all Jews. Their belief as to religious questions is irrelevant to their rights of citizenship. But our problem is different. We are not a secular state but a <u>religious</u> organization and certainly the word "religious" cannot be stretched to include atheism. But we do not exclude them from the Jewish <u>community.</u> They are expected to participate in Jewish charities, etc. But our UAHC group is specifically a religious group. We also have secular Jewish contacts in which we maintain a brotherly relationship to all Jews including them. But

now they ask membership in our religuous organization. We cannot give it to them.

As for those who are already members of the Union, what shall be our relationship to them? There comes to mind a recent Orthodox responsa-book in which the question was asked whether a Yeshiva scholar may accept being a teacher in a Conservative religious school. The answer is, yes, if he is able to win them over to Orthodoxy. We might say that this should be our attitude to those humanistic societies that are already members of the Union. We do not expel them and we do not shun them. We hope that we, by our relationship can win them over to the true worship of God.

As for non-membership of humanist groups that went to join the Union, I would have a simple test. If they will accept the Union Prayerbook as the text used in their assemblies, we are willing to extend our Jewish brotherhood tentatively and hopefully to accept them too.

Perhaps the fairest solution of the problem would be as follows: You, as the head of the Union ask the department of theology of the Hebrew Union College to decide whether the doctrine of Humanism is to be accepted as legitimate branch of our Jewish religion. The Union will then abide by this authoritative decision.

Sincerely,

Sol Freehof

Solomon B. Freehof

SBF:mgf

Founded in 1889

אגוד הרבנים המתקדמים

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

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Office of the President:
Rabbi Samuel E. Karff
Temple Beth Israel
5600 N. Braeswood Blvd.
Houston, TX 77096

Archives file W/others

February 20, 1990
25 Shevat 5750

Dear Alex:

Concerning your inquiry on the "Society for Humanistic Judaism" let me respond as follows:

If the prospectus or statement of principles explicitly rules out the worship of God, then I would not favor the congregation's membership in the UAHC.

All Jews are, of course, welcome to join synagogues regardless of the state of their God-faith. Judaism is congenial to those who struggle with God and, of course, there is considerable theological leverage in God concepts. But to organize a synagogue on the premise that the three-dimensional covenant (God, Torah and Israel) is no longer our norm is to go beyond the boundaries of institutional legitimacy.

That at least is my inital response to your question.

With every good wish, I am

Warmly,

Samuel E. Karff

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President
UAHC
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021

This letter was sent "personal and confidential" to the following:

Dr. Eugene C. Mihaly
HUC-JIR
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Rabbi Jack Bemporad
Temple Israel
140 Central Avenue
Lawrence, LI, N.Y. 11559

Dr. Solomon B. Freehof
Rodef Shalom Congregation
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Rodef Shalom Congregation
4905 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pa 15213

Rabbi Jack Stern
Westchester Reform Temple
255 Mamaroneck Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Rec'd

Hacha
Sondheim

February 9, 1990
14 Shevat 5750

Dr. Eugene C. Mihaly
HUC-JIR
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

I am making inquiry of a private nature and ask your counsel. It is a matter which relates to the "Society For Humanistic Judaism."

You know all about the Society and the agnosticism on which it is predicated. I really don't know how large that Society is, nor how many rabbis are committed to its precepts and the advancement of its work. Some individual rabbis leading Reform congregations may well be members of the Society, but no congregation defining itself in that Society's terms has sought affiliation with the UAHC.

I recently heard from our Regional Director that one of these congregations is presently exploring the possibility of affiliating with the Union. I refer to Congregation Beth Adam, "The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism". This, then is the essence of my inquiry. What, in your judgment, should the Union's response be?

I eagerly await your evaluation and opinion in this connection.

With warm regards I am,

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

Date February 5, 1990

To Rabbi James L. Simon

Copies bcc: Arthur Grant

Subject PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

The first time I saw your memo of January 25 in regard to Beth Adam, the Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, was the copy attached to David Hachen's response to you. This is a fascinating subject and I hope you will share with my any and all responses you get from regional directors which do not indicate they have copies me. I will be very interested in the comments you receive.

Beyond this in-house query, I believe we are dealing with a situation which may well arise often in the future. Thus, I agree that we should study it now. However, I want to go beyond the regional directors, or even our own staff, to seek comments from a wider group of colleagues, including those who are deeply involved in Responsa.

Thus, I am going to share the query with about eight or nine highly regarded Reform rabbis to ascertain their insight. I will provide the langugate of our Constitution and By-Laws but believe that in studying the query at this time we need not be overly concerned with that language.

Jim, when you receive such fascinating problems in the future, please share them with me. This subject is very interesting and merits our serious study.

On an entirely different subject...if you are forced to honor Thal, the name would have to be spelled correctly even for a girl and I don't opt for Lennarda....Leonerda smacks of nerd and we can't have that! So what's wrong with Alexander, Alex or Alix, Alexandra for even Alexsis!

Love to you from Rhea too.....and to Rebecca too.

P.S. Jim, I want to have the Staff Cabinet deal with this initial and then it will go to the Officers of the Union. If you have any responses which are not shared with me please be sure to copy me. Many thanks.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi James L. Simon Date 1/25/90

To Regional Directors

Copies

Subject Beth Adam - The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

During the last year, I have had conversations off and on with Rabbi Bob Barr, the Rabbi of Beth Adam, the Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. Last weekend, on a trip to Cincinnati, I met with the board to have tentative and exploratory discussions concerning the possibility of an application for membership in the UAHC. Obviously, this is a most interest- ing and sensitive matter, and there are many issues yet to be explored as discussed but I felt that early on in the process it might be advisable to drop each of you a note to find out if you have any strong thoughts, ideas or suggestions with respect to this proposed application.

Even though in the last four years we have talked with and worked with many prospective congregations in the region, there are some very interesting ideological questions that must be explored by both sides in the near future. I am writing to inquire if you have had any specific contact or experience with a similar congregation or if you yourself have any ideas or guidance for me with respect to the way in which this process can and should be handled.

I am not exactly sure how everything is going to turn out and it may indeed be that in the months to come that it appears that this is not something that is going to come to fruition, but I would like to make sure that I am very much on top of the situation. If you would be so kind as to give me a call or drop me a note and share with me some of your thoughts, ideas and experiences I would be most grateful.

Thanks for your assistance in this matter. As you know, Rebecca is standing ready to deliver our child at the end of March or early April, and accordingly the first person who sends back a written response will have the joy of knowing that we will name our child after him or her. I think it would be a shame to have to name a son of my Lennard, so I hope that the rest of you will GOYA and make contact with me quickly!

XXXOOO

JLS

or daughter (Leonarda? Leoneeda?)

MIDWEST COUNCIL, UAHC
10425 Old Olive Street Road
Suite 205
St. Louis, MO 63141
314-997-7566

MEMORANDUM

#13

NORTHEAST LAKES COUNCIL, UAHC
25550 Chagrin Blvd. - Suite #108
Cleveland, Ohio 44122
Phone: 216-831-6722
Regional Rabbi Dr David S Hachen

Date January 30, 1990

From Rabbi David S. Hachen, Regional Rabbi

To Rabbi James L. Simon

Copy for information of Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Subject Beth Adam

Dear Jim:

Please don't name the baby after me!

Twenty years ago, when I first came into the region, I visited with Sherwin Wine in Detroit. He did not say anything about his congregation joining the Union, and I did not bring up the subject. I think we both understood that the whole matter was problematic. Later, I learned that Rabbi Leon Fram had serious reservations about Sherwin's congregation, and was strongly opposed to their becoming a member of the Union. However, the subject was never brought to a head. The sample Constitution and By-Laws for congregations affiliated with the UAHC states in Article II that "The purpose of this congregation is ..... to develop a relationship to God." The Constitution of the Union, in its Preamble, indicates that "Congregations in the UAHC affirm their faithful attachment to Judaism ..... under the protection of benign Providence." It would be my view that these two statements indicate that a congregation which clearly asserts that it believes "in humans", and not in God, has no place in the Union. Alex might take a different view, but "thems" my thoughts.

Love from home to home.

As ever,

Dave

Beth Adam aint Beth El !

MEMORANDUM

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