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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1991

Letters to the Editor

Jewish Converts Should Be Cherished

The statement that "Reform Jews now recognize as Jews the children of Jewish fathers married to gentiles" is only partially correct. Children of non-Jewish mothers married to Jewish fathers are not automatically recognized as Jews within Reform Judaism. They must be raised as Jews with attendant religious training such as bar mitzvah or bas mitzvah and participation in other rites of passage.

What may not have been apparent from the article is how the Reform movement is addressing intermarriage through its "Outreach" program, based on the principle, "We reject intermarriage—but not the intermarried." It is an effort to welcome intermarried families into the synagogue. We offer their children religious training and provide ways for non-Jewish spouses to take part in the life of the congregation and create a Jewish atmosphere in the home. Conversion is of course welcomed, and "Introduction to Judaism courses" are given in scores of synagogues.

Like it or not, intermarriage is a fact of

life. Efforts to proscribe intermarriage along the fines followed by Rabbi Moline have not worked. As you observed, Jewish identity on the North American continent is no longer externally imposed by the larger society. Judaism today must be actively chosen, not only by converts—Jews by choice—but also by Jews by birth, who must discover and develop new ties that bind them to the faith of their ancestors.

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER
President
Union of American Hebrew
Congregations

New York

5 Herrick Place Durham, NC 27707 December 2, 1992

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

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

Thank you so much for your kind response to my letter concerning Christmas. I confess, I trembled when the letter arrived and had to wait before reading it, the fear of censure was so strong. (Confronting authority always frightens me.)

I write again because your answer, while thoughtful, did not answer my question, can you celebrate the secular aspects of Christmas and still be a good member of the Jewish community? Indeed, your response restated what my own rabbi, John Friedman, says—that Christmas is only a Christian holiday, that Jewish children will grow confused if they celebrate it, that participating outside my own home may provide some solace and would be, if not desirable, at least understandable, and finally that I have built a Jewish life. Rabbi Friedman also stated that once you convert to Judaism, you cannot formally "unchoose" it, a question I would like addressed by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations itself. (We know the practical reality, that people leave a religious path every day, generally by taking an alternate one, but as I stated in my letter, returning to Protestant Christianity is not my desire.)

The leaders of the Reform Jewish Community, of whom you are foremost, have not, I feel strongly, satisfactorily dealt with this issue by holding fast to the response outlined above. Christmas and Christmas trees are a reality among a sizable segment of the Jewish community. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (published by the Council of Jewish Federations) reported that since 1985, 52% of all marriages of born Jews are to non-Jews. communities of less than 10,000 Jews (similar to mine in Durham, North Carolina), 52% of Jews surveyed reported sometimes or always having a Christmas tree; the figure for larger communities was 35%. Furthermore, Professor Egon Mayer's recent study, "Jewishness Among the Intermarried," reported that in the households of Jews married to converts (Jews by Choice), nearly 40% had a Christmas tree. Surprisingly, this group enrolled a larger percentage of children in formal Jewish education (67%) than either born-Jewish couples (60%) or born Jews married to non-Jews (9%). Clearly, there are a large number of intermarried families who both raise their children as Jews and celebrate Christmas. Yet the synagogue's official response to such families is, "You can't do that." Clearly, Rabbi, many of them do.

When authorities condemn what a significant portion of a group finds important, something is bound to give. The Catholic Church's relentless ban on birth control, for example, drove many church members to ignore the ban, undermining the church's relevance and authority. Others left the Church altogether. What the Catholic Church's policy did not do was end the practice of birth control. Will this happen to Reform Judaism when it censures intermarried couples attempting to raise children as Jews while celebrating one parent's beloved childhood holiday? Wendy, a Jewish friend of mine, nearly hit our rabbi when he told her flat out that she shouldn't let her children celebrate Christmas with their non-Jewish grandparents. His counsel to sacrifice family closeness to ideological purity appalled her. (She also lacked the courage to tell him that she herself had grown up with Christmas.)

Last December Judea Reform held a young people's discussion of Christmas in which the rabbi inevitably stated that Jews were not supposed to take part in it. Some children were going to celebrate the holiday with their families anyway, in spite of the rabbi's counsel. What emotional choice did the rabbi's pronouncement leave them? Guilt? Alienation from the synagogue? Anger at their parents? (This is my fourteen-year-old's reaction.) The answer cannot be a happy one, either for them or for Judaism. Such counsel is especially troubling when you consider that Jewish children seldom hear outright condemnation in the synagogue of such frequently devastating actions as divorce, premarital sex, or abortion. But time and energy is spent trying to root out a day families share happily. It makes me wonder--what is our priority?

One question is, why shouldn't Jews celebrate the secular traditions of Christmas? You answer that we should not because the day is "a Christian holiday based on a major event in Christianity and can well be described as a holy day." Certainly, I agree that the holiday's origins (though not necessarily its customs) are based on a primary event in Christian history and that the day is, for many Christians, a holy one. Yet since the nineteenth century, the holiday has also taken on a second, less sectarian, more universal meaning, expressed in the secular customs of Santa Claus, the Christmas tree, even the story of Ebeneezer Scrooge. Christmas has jumped the fence of religious boundaries. It is almost as if the day is two separate holidays, with two sets of customs, two sets of stories.

To illustrate: It is possible, even common, for Gentiles to enjoy a Merry Christmas without a single overt reference to Jesus: no creche beneath the tree, no midnight church services, no "Silent Night" on the stereo, no story of the Magi read aloud. This was the Christmas in my house. My adopted father was an atheist; he and my adopted mother never attended church. At Christmas we gathered as a family, set out sweets, read "A Visit from St. Nicholas," or watched "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" or Alastair Sim as Mr. Scrooge, listened to "Up on the Housetop" or "Silver Bells" on the stereo. In fact, during the three teenage years

that I attended the Pentecostal Church, my family's indifference to the religious side of Christmas quite got my goat. Didn't they see the day was supposed to be about Jesus's birth? But for them, it wasn't.

A co-worker who attends an Independent Baptist Church in Georgia reports that last year a big fight ensured over the Christmas tree. Some members protested placing this "pagan" symbol in the sanctuary. The beleagered minister finally compromised by setting the tree in the far-less-sacred foyer. When I taught junior high school, the most determined Christian students I had were the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose parents wouldn't let them celebrate Christmas at all, let alone have a Christmas tree. How ironic that many devout Christians reject the day or the tree as un-Christian while we Jews stamp our foot and demand that they are!

In fact, Rabbi Schindler, it might be argued that Christmas now takes up such a large space in our culture precisely because it is <u>not</u> religious. In a <u>New York Times</u> article (sorry, I've misplaced the date), "Christmas Debate: To Celebrate or Not," by Brenda Lane Richardson, the author cites the stories of three non-Christian families who do: one Buddist, one Moslem, one Jewish. None observed the day as a remembrance of Jesus's birth. The author took care to explain that the families follow their own religious practices. The Moslem wife still wore the veil, the men prayed daily at the mosque. Mrs. Higashi, a Buddist, explained that for her Christmas was "more than just a religious holiday. It is a custom of the United States." Such a culturally broad embrace of Easter, a true religious holiday, is unimaginable. But Christmas seems to make room for anyone. Santa asks if you've been good--not if you've been Christian, Moslem, Buddist, or Jewish...

Perhaps the most telling confirmation of the non-religious side of Christmas comes from a passage in The Hannukah Book by the dedicated Jewish artist and craftswoman, Mae Shafter Rockland, who wrote the book in part to counterbalance for Jewish children the pervasiveness of Christmas in our culture. Writing that cookies are a popular holiday food around the world, she mentions "Sinterklaasjes, which even Orthodox Jewish children in Holland find in the wooden shoes they set out on St. Nicholas Night twenty days before Christmas." (My emphasis.) In Holland, St. Nicholas Night incorporates many of the customs I call a secular Christmas. The fact that even Orthodox Jewish children are permitted to participate in these festivities highlights their non-religious nature. her diary, even Anne Frank notes the pleasure St. Nicholas Night brought her in her hideout.) Yet because the religious and secular customs coincide temporally in our culture, we are expected to forego them all. Rabbi, if I wanted a tree for Santa Claus Night in early December, would the community feel the same threat it does now? Or would we see more clearly Christmas's dual nature? (In fact, When Santa was first imported by the Dutch into New Amsterdam, his day was December 6.)

Another reason frequently cited for not celebrating Christmas is that as Jews we do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, so to honor his birthday is inappropriate. Please note that I do not suggest that Jews go to church or praise the birth of Jesus. If we converts retained a religious tie to Christmas, it is doubtful that we would convert to Judaism. While the story of the Nativity is a beautiful one for Christians, I am made uneasy by its ramifications for Jews. I don't want to put up a creche or sit down to read my son the story of the Magi. Is it not also possible that we in the Jewish community emphasize the religious side of Christmas because we worry about the Christian community's reaction if we say we don't care about it?

A third argument given is that children will become confused about who they are if they celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas. Do we honestly believe that one day outweigh what we do the rest of the year? Would we credit for a moment the notion that a Christian child who attends a Baptist or Catholic Sunday School, learns that Jesus is the savior of the world, is exhorted to seek salvation, would for a moment consider himself Jewish if he happened to light Hanukkah candles with his father or grandfather? This idea is as preposterous as its opposite—that Jewish children, given Jewish values the rest of the year, will slip the traces merely because they have a Christmas tree.

This argument reminds me of a Sunday School teacher my older sons Dylan and Gabe had years ago, a young Jewish student from Duke who cared enough about his heritage that he worked with kids in Judea Reform's religious school. Yet, he confessed to the kids, his mother was Catholic and he grew up celebrating Christmas—he really liked it—but he knew he was a Jew.

Our youngest son Noah is eight. He has grown up with more Christmas than any of his brothers: a stocking, a few presents, making Christmas and Hanukkah cookies, and hearing lots of stories. Where is his heart? We read a new book the other night, "The Berenstain Bears' Christmas Tree, " which is illustrated at the beginning with a scene of the whole town. We spent a few minutes looking for menorahs or Stars of David in the windows, and Noah was diappointed that there weren't any. (We'll probably draw them in, as we've done before.) He came home excited because when he asked his music teacher if they could sing Jewish songs as well as Christmas ones, she said "Yes." In a letter to a new pen pal, practically his first sentence was, "I am Jewish." In services he always wants to touch the Torah. He already has plans for his bar mitzvah. He may enjoy Christmas, but he is excited about being Jewish. Would a tree decorated with dreidls and topped by a Star of David destroy that feeling? I don't think so.

Besides, which is worse for a child — The "confusion" of two happy celebrations, or the anger and resentments sparked when parents fight over the propriety of celebrating Christmas or watching one parent suffer for lack of it?

My Gentile friends are often astounded when I describe the fights Frank and I have waged over a Christmas tree, especially that he once thundered, "It's me or the damned tree!" "But the tree's not religious!" they protest, rightly divining its nature, but not comprehending in the least the stumbling block it is for my husband. As I mentioned, when Frank proposed, his only religious demand was that we never celebrate Christmas. He is hardly alone in his anathema. Just recently another co-worker related the story of her Gentile friend married to a Jewish man, stunned by the reality that, while her husband offers nothing in its place, he is adamant about not letting their children have Christmas.

Frank and others have confessed the pain of being the kid who didn't celebrate Christmas, the one who was different. It was awkward explaining that you didn't celebrate Christmas and why. It was annoying that other people didn't know about Hanukkah or other Jewish holidays. Jewish kids sometimes felt the pain of longing for a forbidden pleasure (which was also a heartache for their parents to deal with). In Frank's case, his parents derided Jews who celebrated Christmas or gave into that contemptable mishmash, a "Hanukkah Bush." Such people were assimilationist, weak. Not proper Jews. As a result, Jewish kids either gave in when they grew up to the desire for Christmas, often moving away from the Jewish community (like Frank's sister) or (like Frank) coped so well with the pain that doing without Christmas became a badge of loyalty. The day was a great divider.

In her controversial article published in the New York Times in December, 1978, "Christmas Comes to a Jewish Home," Anne Roiphe, now fiction editor of Tikkun, describes her grandfather as a man who would never enter a museum because he felt there would be "so many pictures of Jesus on the walls that he would be forced to see the image of the babe in whose name his town was pillaged, his parents killed, his temple burned, and he and his sisters driven penniless to a foreign shore." What, she wonders, would he and her other Jewish ancestors think if they knew she and her children celebrated Christmas? At that point in her life, Ms. Roiphe was not an observant Jew; later she underwent a kind of conversion in which her love of the Jewish community was rekindled. One of her first acts, out of a spirit of guilt and betrayal of those ancestors, was to put away the Christmas she grew up with and loved. Her poignant case illustrates that Christmas is not a religious issue so much as one of ethnic loyalty. "My Buby and Zaidy would be horrified" is the real fear.

Other touching examples abound. Young Theodore Herzl's budding Jewish loyalty made him ashamed of his assimilated parents' Christmas festivities. Even Rabbi Friedman once confessed to me how horrified he would feel if, as a grown up, his son Josh had a Christmas tree. He didn't equate this with his son becoming a Christian but with no longer caring about his family's origins or his people. My husband also seems to fight Christmas, not because he thinks it

means we've turned Christian, but because he dreads the censure of his parents and because it seems unforgiveably disloyal.

In effect, shunning Christmas often becomes the terminal expression of Jewish loyalty. One of the saddest stories I ever read was "Why I Believe in Santa Claus," by Maurice Zolotow (Redbook, December 1987). As a young boy, Mr. Zolotow longer for Santa Claus to appear at his house, which the great elf never did. Mr. Zolotow's family was Jewish but had given up all ties to the synagogue, the Jewish community, and Jewish holidays. The only way the father consciously retained his ethnic identity was by refusing to let his children celebrate Christmas. Denying the day answered the question, "How do you know you're still a Jew?" "I don't celebrate Christmas."

Keeping Christmas out of one's life, then, has little to do with religious belief, but much to do with loyalty--to a younger self, to family, to the community.

Certainly the feeling of wanting to be true is powerful, understandable, laudable. No one wants to dishonor the pain suffered by Jews before us, at the hands of Christians and others and coincidentally at Christmastime. But we who grew up with this holiday cannot have the same emotional reaction, cannot see it primarily as a day of exclusion and pain. On the contrary, we face the very real pain of parents and grandparents who, often accepting our change of religion, with equanimity, are more than a little hurt as we shun the beloved family holiday. For us, relinquishing the non-religious aspects of Christmas fosters, not feelings of loyalty toward the community, but anger, resentment, a deep sense of loss. Our pain is one reason why, between husband and wife, this issue is often resolved with kindness by celebrating both holidays. It explains the 40% Christmas-tree rate among intermarried couples, who are also sending their children to synagogue. Yet our leaders continue to couch their arguments against Christmas almost exclusively in religious terms. Is this because they fear that the real argument -- ethnic loyalty -- is one we recognize as best left to the individual conscience?

Frank says, "Why is a Christmas tree such a big deal? It's only a custom from your childhood." Rabbi Schindler, I cannot tell you why Santa Claus or the tree are so important to me, or why Dickens' Christmas Carol, re-read every year, moves me to tears. (Our local expert on this book, by the way, who enacts Scrooge on stage every season, is a Jewish professor named Elliott Engel...) It has nothing to do with Christianity (except for bunnies on sale, Easter barely ripples my awareness). When I think back on my childhood, one moment stands out as the exemplar of quiet peace and joy. We lived in Grants Pass, Oregon, out in the country. To my embarrassment, my father had stolen a pine tree from beside the local railroad tracks, which ran along the mountain in front of our house. On Christmas Eve, when everyone else was asleep, I stole into the darkened livingroom and stood in front of the Christmas tree, watching the colored lights and my reflection shimmer and twinkle in the glass ornaments,

enveloped by the fragrance of the tree and its transcendent beauty, perhaps dreaming of the day I would be a mother and do this for my child. I stood for a very long time. Now it makes me think of your phrase, shalom bayit, peace in the house. It hurts my heart to think I am never supposed to do this again.

When the Catholic Church spread throughout Europe, it faced the survival of pagan customs among new converts. Some sages realized that forcing people to give up dearly beloved customs would only drive them away from the church, so they wisely permitted the customs we now associate with Christmas, such as decorating with evergreens, to be incorporated into the Christian holidays. The stories explaining the customs, however, were changed to give them a Christian twist. This eased the transition for new converts and helped ensure the Church's eventual success.

For all that it was derided, the scorned Hanukkah bush of the 1950s was also an attempt to take an attractive custom and give it a Jewish emphasis, incorporating something people longed for by giving it a meaning within the community. The Christmas tree I daydream of, Rabbi, has menorahs, Macabees, grapes, candles, dreidls, Noah's arks, miniature bagels hanging from its branches (last year I even bought a German glass ornament of a pickle—Claussen's Kosher Dills, naturally), recalling the song, "It is a tree of life to them that hold fast to it..." To transform that beloved childhood custom to a statement of what my life is today—can that not be seen as a sign of love for the Jewish community rather than a rejection of it?

The real question seems to be, not should Jews celebrate the secular Christmas, but what does it mean to be a Jew? Do we want keeping the Christmas tree at arms' length to be the defining issue? Or is it more significant to take a child to synagogue, teach about the Torah, Jewish history, values, and customs, to participate in tzedakah, honor parents and grandparents by telling family stories, to point with pride to Jews who have accomplished much, to foster belief in the God who, as Harold Kushner writes, has chosen people "to be His language"? Perhaps because I didn't grow up Jewish, the differences between the Jewish community and the Christian one (or rather, non-Jewish one) seem so numerous that to believe they could be obliterated by a mere Christmas tree seems astonishing.

Reform Judaism began in the early nineteenth century because for many Jews the realities of contemporary life clashed uncomfortably with the strictures of Orthodoxy. Faced with a choice of too-restricted lives or giving up Jewish identity, these pioneers chose a third option: redefining and enlarging what it meant to be a Jew. Young radicals ate ham sandwiches on the synagogue steps to protest what they saw as the outmoded laws of kashrut, horrifying their elders. The radicals kicked up a fuss, not because they no longer wished to be Jews, but precisely because they did. They needed Judaism to enlarge its definition of what they could do and still remain good Jews. Reform Judaism continues to thoughtfully

change in response to the needs of the community. Witness the recent admission of women to the rabbinate, and also in response to the increasing number of intermarriages, the ruling that Jewish descent can travel from the father as well as the mother.

This is the situation that many of us (converts and others) are in today. We need the synagogue, the official community, to change. But we are problematic because we are anomolous. Years ago who could have predicted a group of people willing to participate in the community and carry on its values while clinging to what has been seen as the archetypal Christian holiday? After all, celebrating Christmas was once a way of saying, "I no longer care about the Jewish community." But that is not necessarily what it means among Jews and converts today. For my own part, my feelings for Judaism have been strong enough that, not only have I taught Sunday School and brought my three eldest sons to their b'nai mitzvot, but I've also considered becoming a bat mitzvah. Yet guilt--because I know that Christmas will always be important to my heart and which my community officially condemns--keeps me from taking further steps within the Jewish tradition. The 30-50% of Jewish households who keep Christmas need to hear something from the synagogue other than "You shouldn't do that."

How should the synagogue resolve this issue? It seems both wise and compassionate to recognize that Christmas may have a beloved secular as well as sectarian meaning, that it is an important holiday for some Jews who nevertheless wish to remain in and participate in the community. Perhaps the best answer is this: "While Christmas is an important religious holiday for many Christians, we also recognize that it has another meaning for many regardless of religion. As Jews we do not observe the birth of Christ, though we recognize and honor its significance for Christians, but about the secular customs of the holiday we make no judgment. It is up to each Jew to decide."

Such a response would allow intermarried families to peacefully eelebrate the holidays with both sets of grandparents; take the pressure off Jewish kids who feel denied or guilty around Christmas; remove the rabbi from the role of grinch and allow him or her to concentrate on real moral issues such as homelessness; and ease the hearts of all husbands and wives who have ever felt themselves at war over this issue.

(The fear is, what will happen if we cross the line, if Christmas no longer is verboten? After all, it's not a <u>Jewish</u> holiday. As Americans, we also enjoy Valentines, Fourth of July, Halloween, and Thanksgiving without worrying that they aren't Jewish, although we take a certain pride in the Sukkot-inspiration of the last one. Didn't people once fear that giving up the laws of kashrut would make them less Jewish? Though kashrut no longer is obligatory, it is honored in folkways. How many Jews do you know who serve pork? Even us Southern Jews would never dream of toting that regional delicacy, the sausage biscuit, into the synagogue. Christmas will

not take over the community any more than pork did.)

Occasionally I find myself in a church, usually at a wedding or a memorial service, sitting in the too-quiet atmosphere, praises to Jesus ringing in my ears, and I think: this is not me, this is not my place. Not enough chatter, for one thing, no oneg, and the attitude toward the Most High is more self-concerned ("What will God do for me?") than I find appealing. Even having Christmas back would not be sufficient; I don't want to do without menorahs or latkes or dreidls either. On occasion my frustration over this issue has reached such a pitch that I've imagined leaving the Jewish community. But such a vision also leaves me with a profound sense of loss. I've learned too much. I've been part of it too long. If you yanked the Yiddish from my tongue, half the time I wouldn't know what to say. I can never again be the simple Gentile girl I was when I married my husband. I feel absolutely torn, Rabbi Schindler, for December without Christmas is a heartache, but life without Judaism would be a heartache too. Like the angry young Jew protesting the laws of kashrut on the synagogue steps, I come to you once more, the head of my community, to say, "Please, look again at what Christmas does and does not signify. Seek, if you can, some way to give my heart -- and the hearts of others like me--ease."

Sincerely,

Coventry Kessler

Coventry Resseer

cc: Rabbi John Friedman

ce. Ome

5 Herrick Place Durham, NC 27707 January 10, 1994

Religious Practices Committee Union of American Hebrew Congregations 838 5th Avenue New York City, NY 10021

Dear Committee Members:

Last year I wrote to Rabbi Schindler twice on the subject of Jews celebrating a secular Christmas. A copy of our correspondence and my conversion certificate are enclosed.

I converted to Judaism in May 1974, three years after I married my Jewish husband. Although he did not ask me to convert, Frank proposed under the condition that I promise we would never celebrate Christmas. As I explained to Rabbi Schindler, for many years I kept that promise. Gradually, however, it became clear that ignoring my childhood holiday was turning December into an unmitigated misery.

The story of my dilemma is explained in the letters. But wherever I sought relief from organized Judaism, the response was that Christmas is inappropriate for Jews. Rabbi Schindler's final answer was not couched in religious terms but that since he was a Jew, Christmas was not part of his home or family origins.

Rabbi Schindler's answer confirmed my opinion that, for the most part, Jewish identity is less a matter of religious belief than it is of ethnic and family loyalty. After much soul-searching, I believe I can no longer identify as a member of the Jewish community. None of my reasons has to do with adopting another religious belief.

I. Judaism is not mine in the sense that it was not my family's. I cannot look back at a buby and zaidy who emigrated from Russia or Lithuania, recite harrowing tales of escape, or list sorrowful losses in the Holocaust. I have no Jewish family tradition to carry out. Indeed, emphasizing the Jewish origins of my married family has meant ignoring and slighting my own. For the past two years I've researched my own rather ordinary WASP background, discovering among other things a great-grandfather who was a Baptist minister of Scottish descent who emigrated from Canada in the 1860s. Not only do I lack emotional ties to Jewish ancestors, but claiming to be Jewish, with the ethnic origins it implies, somehow deflects a family history I'm ready to embrace.

- 2. After twenty years of attending synagogue, teaching Sunday School, working in the temple library, and baking challah for onegs, I am still essentially a stranger. Much of the service remains foreign. Some prayers are familiar by sound, but I must search each time to find out what they mean. The melodies are beautiful but the words a mystery. Since I am a highly verbal person, being cut off from the meaning merely reinforces how alien I feel. By contrast, last summer when I sat through a service in my great-grandfather's church, it was as understandable and familiar as my old gloves--in spite of the fact that I neither identify as a Christian nor intend to join a church. I was not a stranger there the way I continue to be in synagogue.
- 3. I feel no personal stake in the fate of Israel. (Unlike my parents-in-law, who visit whenever possible and fret over its future.) Indeed I disapprove of the long-time treatment of the Palestinians, although the new accords seem a hopeful sign. I have no special wish to visit Israel on my own behalf, and would be horrified if my children emigrated. I no longer feel a vested interest in my children remaining Jews.
- 4. Since planning and carrying out holiday activities mainly falls on the women of a family, I find myself preparing foods and rituals to commemorate a religion that, in essense, forbids me the holiday I love. You can imagine how ironic Chanukah and Passover feel. I can no longer prepare for Jewish holidays without ambivalence.
- 5. Although 50% of born Jews now marry non-Jews, most of whom grew up with Christmas, official Judaism emphasizes that this holiday should not be permitted within the Jewish home. Indeed, rather than emphasizing family harmony by meeting each member's emotional and ritual needs, it insists that Christmas be shunned, no matter what misery it causes.

Do you know what it feels like to have my beloved fifteen-year-old son berate me for wanting to celebrate Christmas? To know that in all likelihood I will never be able to share with him the holiday that, for me, still typifies family love and harmony? To remember my older son's struggle not to want Christmas and his sad games of "pretend Christmas" with his teddy bear? Gentlemen, when Frank and I married, I bowed to the argument that two holidays would "confuse" my children. I tried to be the good parent by bringing them up in one unadulterated tradition, only to find I could not follow it myself. That decision has come back to haunt me. I cannot tell you the rage I feel.

As you know, I am not alone in my dilemma. The 1990 CJF National Jewish Population Survey found that 35-50% Jewish or half-Jewish households have a Christmas tree. Those that still wish to give their children a Jewish education must play the hypocrite when attending synagogue. In December I used to hear my Sunday School kids whisper to one another, "Do you have Christmas?" Because Christmas is officially verboten, families who wish to celebrate it have no good choices. They can (1) relinquish a Jewish education for their kids, (2) force some family members to give up a dearly beloved holiday, (3) lie in the synagogue, or (4) risk the shame, alienation, or disapproval of their children. The UAHC could ameliorate this situation immediately

by declaring, "While Christmas is not a Jewish holiday, we find no harm in enjoying its secular customs." This the UAHC chooses not to do.

6. Finally, the organized community's continuing injunction against Christmas arouses my guilt as well as my anger. Why remain in a group whose standards you must necessarily violate? Better to leave and relieve the guilt.

Our rabbi, John Friedman, once informed me that a convert could not "unconvert."--I was in it for the duration. While this is obviously untrue in a practical sense--I could take up Christianity, for instance, or even "vote with my feet" --I prefer a formal acknowledgement of my resignation from Judaism, much as one would obtain a get for an unsatisfactory marriage. Is there a ceremony for this? Do the synagogue and family sit shiva? Is a former convert considered an apostate? Please be clear, however, that I am not renouncing Judaism but resigning from it as unsuitable for myself.

This step will not make everything "all better" within my family. There may be much hurt and anger. But it will help everyone understand how I honestly feel. For a long time I've flown under false colors. It may also become easier to participate in Jewish rituals if my family understands that I do so to help them celebrate, not because these rituals are mine. By the same token, perhaps my children and I will grasp the freedom to enjoy what I care about without us all feeling like we violate a terrible taboo. May we not help others celebrate their holidays, even if they are not our own?

Whether or not our family celebrations become easier, however, I wish to resign my conversion. Please let me know the procedures to do so.

Sincerely.

Coventry Kessler

(Ms.) Coventry Kessler

(Formerly Lee Kessler, as noted on the conversion document)

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler Rabbi John Friedman

Rabbi Frank Fischer, Judea Reform Congregation, Durham, NC

for DRU GREENWOOD



RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS
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November 16, 1994 13 Kislev 5755

Cantor Jill Spasser Director of Student Placement Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion 1 West 4th Street New York, NY 10012

Dear Jill:

I have your letter and the enclosed column and I can understand why you are dismayed.

Just the same, I cannot understand your unbridled anger and assertion that you are no longer "proud to be a Jew, a Reform Jew, and a Cantor in the Reform movement." Where in the article, or anywhere else for that matter, have you read that our "movement allows Southern Baptists to be counted among our Chazzanim?" The Union of American Hebrew Congregations never designated John Blizzard as a Cantor. The congregation did, and we have no coercive power over it. We can only recommend a course of action, but temples have the right to do as they choose. That is both the strength and the weakness of Reform Judaism. We are not a hierarchical church and I am glad that this is so.

Moreover, I cannot understand your designation of Dru Greenwood's response as inadequate. She states what is a fact: That the Union of American Hebrew Congregations has issued guidelines that limit non-Jewish participation in synagogue leadership roles, but that individual congregations do not necessarily abide by them. What, pray tell, is inadequate and insensitive about that answer. Remember also that the columnist merely recited a phrase from Dru's statement and her views ought to be seen in their fuller context.

Cantor Jill Spasser page 2 November 16, 1994

I think you would also do well to take a somewhat wider look, back into history at where we were then and where we are today. There was a time in American Jewish life when virtually all the choirs in Reform congregations were peopled with non-Jews and very few temples, if any, had Cantors. It is thanks and only thanks to the Union and its Commission on Jewish Music that there has been a dramatic turn in the right direction. Help us work in that direction instead of denouncing those who may have no other choice. Love and understanding rather than anger are the true marks of a good teacher.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler





HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem

SCHOOL OF SACRED MUSIC

November 9, 1994

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

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

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

Enclosed you will find a duplicate of the article which appeared in the Jewish Week, October 27-November 3.

Until now I was proud to be a Jew, a Reform Jew, and most especially, a Cantor in the Reform Movement. I was outraged to read that the movement allows Southern Baptists to be counted among our Chazzanim. The answer that Dru Greenwood gave was totally inadequate as well as insensitive.

Where is our movement going? Will it soon be enough that a Gentile who is a learned scholar, a good preacher, and a healer qualify to be a Rabbi. We MUST NOT allow our clergy to come from outside our faith. This speaks to our fellow Jews in such a poor light. This speaks to our co-clergy in abominable terms. It is incumbent upon you as our leader to refute the words and meaning of this article, both publically, as well as within the Reform community.

I trust that you will respond immediately.

Very sincerely,

Jill Spasser, Cantor

Director of Student Placement

Enc.

cc: Dru Greenwood

IN THE BEGINNING

A Real Shabbos Goy

He may be a devout Southern Baptist who directs the church choir, but John Blizzard can sing the Shema like a Sabra.

A teacher of singing and diction at Wingate College, a Baptist institution near Charlotte, N.C., Blizzard moonlights every Shabbat as a cantor at Temple Beth El, reputed to be the largest Reform synagogue in the Carolinas. "He sings the Jewish melodies like he was born to sing them," says Michael Rifkin, president of Temple Beth-El.

In fact, Blizzard claims that Israeli visitors to the temple have said that his Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew sounds too good for an American. "They can't believe that I'm not a full Jew," Blizzard chuckles.

Blizzard became a chazan about three years ago, when

the synagogue was searching for a new cantor. At the suggestion of his friend, the temple's organist, Blizzard auditioned and beat out several candidates for the job. "The congregants were very welcoming and open," he says, emphasizing he's had nothing but a positive experience working at Temple Beth El.

Blizzard "fell into" singing Hebrew liturgy while studying to be a preacher at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort-Worth, Texas. What began as substituting one night for a member of a synagogue quartet ended as a "second job. I began to enjoy it," he recalls, adding that once he moved to Charlotte in 1988, he found himself spontaneously singing Hebrew songs come Friday night.

A choir director at Charlotte's Woodlawn Baptist Church every Sunday, Blizzard maintains that his "weekend of worship" proceeds without conflict. "Some people have commented that it's



Is it Aleinu or Amazing Grace?

interesting a Christian would want to do something like this," he says. But "for me to walk through the doors of Beth El doesn't mean I have to reject Jesus."

Dru Greenwood, director of outreach for the Union of

American Hebrew Congregations, says that the idea of a non-Jewish cantor "does make some people uncomfortable." But while the UAHC has issued guidelines to limit non-Jewish participation in synagogue leadership roles, individual congregations do not necessarily abide by them, particularly in areas with small Jewish populations.

For now, Blizzard continues to sing both "Amazing Grace" and "Aleinu," perfectly able to "celebrate God in both places." But he admits to occasional bouts of confusion, like when he's fervently singing a hymn in church.

"Sometimes I think, 'I better be careful or my kipa's going to fall off," says Blizzard.
"But then I think, wait a minute, I'm not wearing a kipa."

Susan Josephs

BELIN HARRIS LAMSON McCORMICK

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SOPY

October 7, 1994

Jerome H. Somers, Esq. Goodwin, Proctor & Hoar Exchange Place Boston MA 02109-2809

Re: Project 2000

Dear Jerry:

I read with great interest the 22 page "Working Document" enclosed with your September 28 letter. It is obvious that you are making excellent progress.

One area which I believe must be addressed in greater depth relates to the section, "How Will The UAHC Be Funded In The 21st Century?" You point out that growth over the past five to ten years has been fairly static (Item 65-page 20). A major concern I have is negative growth arising because of the rising rate of intermarriage among Reform Jews (62 percent, according to the 1990 national population census) and the rising rate of children being raised in homes where only one parent is Jewish. (See enclosed chart from page 6 of the Summer Newsletter of the Jewish Outreach Institute showing that in younger age groups, the majority of children are being raised in homes where only one parent is Jewish. This trend will continue to rise.) Combined with this is the fact that only one-fourth of intermarried families are raising their children and Jews, with about one-fourth raising their children as Christian, and with the rest not raising their children in either religion. Unless a majority of the children of intermarried families are raised as Jews, the demographic trends are very grave.

We have to be honest enough to admit that the UAHC and its constituent congregations have thus far failed to reach a minimum goal of having a majority of the children of intermarried families raised as Jews. This calls for major changes in the course and direction of the leadership of our Movement, and it seems to me that the Project 2000 long range planning committee must include as a central part of its vision of the 21st Century specific recommendations for changes in programs and priorities in order to achieve a goal of having a majority of intermarried families identify with the Jewish community and raise their children as Jews.

Instead of addressing this critical problem, we smugly talk about the fact that we are the growing Movement of North American Jewry, without admitting that a substantial part of our growth is coming from people raised in other branches of Judaism. We must be willing

Jerome H. Somers, Esq. October 7, 1994 Page 2

to commit far greater financial resources to this area than we have been able to do in the past. We also must be willing to make dramatic changes in the allocation of our resources.

In this letter, I will not talk about allocation and deployment of resources. However, I do want to address the issue of financial resources, and particularly raising large amounts of endowment funds. I think it is essential that we undertake an analysis of what areas of UAHC programming best lend themselves to encouraging major endowment commitments. In personal conversations with Seth Moskowitz, he has indicated that those areas most directly related to Jewish continuity and growth offer the most promise. The Project 2000 Committee ought to explore this area, taking into consideration the Report of the Strategic Planning Task Force for Jewish Continuity and Growth.

The Metropolitan Museum in New York has recently established a \$300 million fund raising goal, more than \$100 million of which has already been pledged. Substantial portions of these commitments are coming from the American Jewish community, in general, and Reform Jews, in particular.

I think that under the right leadership, with the right course and direction, there is an opportunity to have \$100 million raised for a UAHC Endowment Fund over the next five years. Alex Schindler can play a key role in this and has indicated a willingness to devote substantial efforts to help raise funds. But it will also require committed lay leadership and also a vision of the UAHC which recognizes that dramatic changes have to be made from the ways of the past in order to bring back into the UAHC hundreds of thousands of unaffiliated Jews and also achieve a critical goal of having a majority of the children of intermarried families receive a Jewish education and identify as members of the Jewish community.

I have some other ideas for substantially increasing the net income of the UAHC so that more funds will be available to expand programming, but I will save this for a subsequent letter.

Best regards.

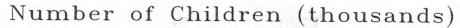
Sincerely,

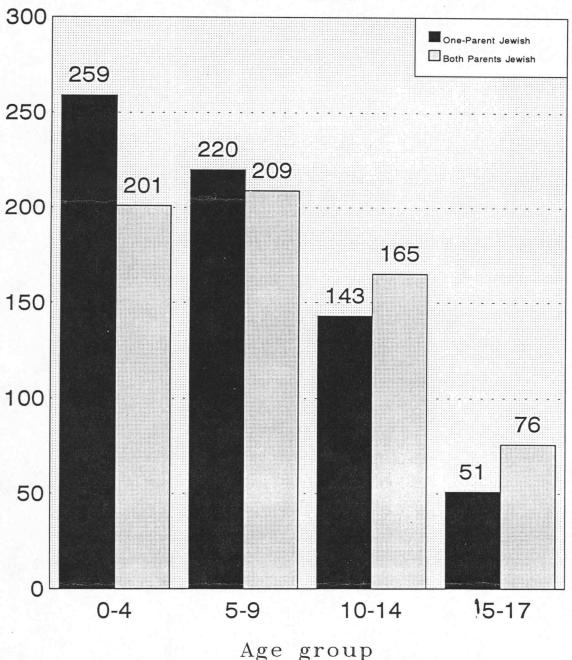
David W. Belin

DWB:cs

d:\jewish\somers.doc

c.c. Rabbi Alexander Schindler Melvin Merians Arthur Grant





This table includes only two parent households; at least one parent is a born-Jew or a Jew-by-choice; including those who are currently Jewish by religion and secular Jews with no religion. The trend described by this graph vividly shows that outreach to the intermarried must be a critical element of Jewish continuity and growth.

Data source: a forthcoming monograph by Ariela Keysar, Barry A. Kosmin and Jeffrey Scheckner, Children and Adolescents: A Study of the Next Generation of American Jews.



November 1, 1994 27 Heshvan 5755

Mr. Hal D. Schlenger 4824 Smallwood Road, #13 Columbia, SC 29223

Dear Mr. Schlenger:

On my return from meetings in Israel your marvelous letter awaited me, amidst a mountain of mail which contained the usual plaints and problems any organization receives on a regular basis. What a joy and pleasure it was to read your beautiful "success story!"

Thank you so much for sharing with me the very positive encounters you and your wife experienced with a number of Reform rabbis as well as your family, friends, and fellow congregants. You describe the kind of care, concern, understanding and welcome that is the ideal of Outreach.

As Jews we must all make choices. Those who become a part of our people through marriage must also make choices and when they determine to choose Judaism I need not tell you what that means to me! Judaism has been enriched by the many men and women who have made the commitment to be a part of our faith community and our people. And many, such as your wife, help to insure our future be becoming teachers and training our young in the way of our faith.

Please convey my warm and hearty mazal tov to your wife on her bat mitzvah. Our UAHC member-congregation directory shows Alison Schlenger as president of the Sisterhood of Tree of Life Congregation. Am I correct in presuming Alison is your wife? I do hope I will have an opportunity to meet you both some day, it would be my pleasure!

With repeated thanks and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

bee My

4824 Smallwood Rd., #13 Columbia, SC 29223 (803) 736-7669

October 12, 1994

Dr. Rabbi Alexander Schindler UAHC 838 5th Ave. New York, NY

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

Do you want to read about another success story?

On this eve of my wife's bat mitzvah, there is a happy story that brought her to this great experience.

Thanks to the understanding and insight of both mine and wife's families and Rabbi Floyd Herman in Baltimore, my then-fiancee was welcomed into the Jewish community without being told or forced to believe that her Christian up bringing was wrong. Instead, Rabbi Herman took the chance (and time) to invest in the possibility of creating a new Jewish family — instead of pushing away an interfaith couple. You might say Rabbi Herman brought two seeds to the Jewish garden of life.

After moving to New Jersey, we found Monmouth Reform Temple's Outreach chairman Bob Koslow and Rabbi Sally Preisand willing to nurture the seeds of faith. The outcome was two very active temple members and my wife of five years deciding that she wanted to formally convert to Judaism. The seeds had taken root and were growing strong!

Now five years later, with friends like Patti Stiles and the help of Rabbi Sanford Marcus, my wife is a bat mitzvah. Like a tree, things take time to grow strong and my wife is proof! As a Jew, she has blossomed. And teaching religious school, she is helping to insure the future of our religion.

The biggest success is that of the Jewish community and its leadership who knew that the religion should not be afraid to invite in others. Our religion teaches us to welcome others in to our home, to respect others and treat them as we wish to be treated.

Thank you all for letting Judaism do its thing!

Hal D. Schlenger

cc: Forum, Moment Magazine



October 13, 1994 8 Heshvan 5755

From: Edie Miller

To: Dru Greenwood

The enclosed letter has been responded to via the telephone...as a matter of fact when I spoke to Jacqueline she reminded me we had met, knew I was a friend of Fran Hyman.

She makes a valid point...rabbis say no when they won't perform the marriage and don't take it any further. Maybe they should make recommendations so the people are directed to rabbis who are note out there doing interfaith marriages for a living, charging exorbitant fees, etc. or to "rabbis"who either bought their smicha or received same from a non accredited school.

I can understand why some rabbis don't want to suggest a colleague but it seems to be better to send the to a mensch and a principled person than to merely close the door...I think this is something we should talk about..certainly on a staff level once again.

Regards.



29 Glenwood Avenue eaneck, NJ 07666

lacqueline S. Guttman

Artservices

October 2, 1994

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

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

Almost exactly one year ago I had the privilege and pleasure of hearing your address at the UAHC Biennial Conference in San Francisco, a major portion of which concerned Outreach, the enormous effort of our movement to embrace the non-Jewish spouse of a mixed marriage and to encourage that ever-increasing constituency to become Jews-by-Choice. As I recall, you suggested that we become even more zealous in our efforts to convert our non-Jewish relatives. However, a recent experience within our family indicates that the reality does not always match the ideology.

My son - a committed Jew - and his lovely, intelligent and sensitive Presbyterian fiancee are seeking a rabbi or cantor to officiate (alone) at their wedding. While I respect the convictions of those members of the clergy who decline to perform mixed marriage ceremonies, I have been dismayed and disappointed by the lack of assistance shown us in our search. It seems to me that what should be a major component of the Outreach movement is missing.

The wedding, planned for next May, will take place in Huntington, West Virginia. Unfortunately, the local Reform rabbi does not officiate at mixed marriages and could not suggest someone who does. My own rabbi, whom I like and admire, could offer no suggestions other than to say that perhaps the regional director in that area could help. He did not offer to find out who that might be. Ironically, her *minister* offered to try to locate a rabbi for them.

To my great embarrassment, the one person they did find was a cantor who, had he been available, would have charged \$1000 (plus expenses), which we have been advised is unusually high. Her reaction to this was, "If we have to pay that we will, but I'll have to keep it secret from my parents." I could not help thinking about stereotypes of money-grabbing Jews.

As a former vice-president of my synagogue, I would have appreciated some extra assistance in this matter. However, the real issue is that Reform Judaism, the movement that has dedicated itself to "opening our tent" and "welcoming the stranger" is simultaneously setting up obstacles to a young woman who has demonstrated her dedication to our son by willingly agreeing to have a Jewish wedding, a Jewish home and Jewish children. How dare we, as a movement, treat her this way? And what effect does this action (or non-action) have on any future possibility of her turning to Judaism?

This week I will telephone Mark Disick, in the hope that he can put me in touch with the regional director in the Pittsburgh, West Virginia or Ohio area. However, if you or someone in the UAHC office has any "leads" for us I would be very grateful to hear of them.

I close with one thought: perhaps a CCAR workshop is in order on how not to alienate our non-Jewish spouses - and our Jewish children - even before they walk down the aisle.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline S. Guttman

2



October 6, 1994 1 Heshvan 5755

Deborah Moskovitz 330 Watergate Drive Langhorne, PA 19053

Dear Debbie:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter and for sharing your concerns with me. While this letter will not reach you before my visit to Shir Ami tomorrow, I do hope we have a chance to meet albeit my schedule is tight. I must leave the synagogue almost immediately after services in order to catch a train.

Be that as it may, I feel your pain and it distresses me. I so wish there was something I could do to change matters but, alas, it is not in my power to do so. Our UAHC member congregations are autonomous; while we suggest ways and means to deal with situations such as yours, we cannot demand that congregations adopt our recommendations. Each and every congregation must determine the path their community is to follow in regard to interfaith families and the ritual and governing policies of the synagogue.

I am taking the liberty of sharing your letter with Dru Greenwood, Director of Outreach. She will send you some of our Outreach pamphlets and publications which will be of interest, as well as a bibliography of pertinent reading material.

Again, I do hope we have a chance to chat even if it be for a moment. With every good wish and a hearty mazal tov on your son's Bar Mitzvah, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Ms. Dru Greenwood

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

I am a non-practicing Catholic raising three Jewish sons. My first will have the honor of being called to the Torah on November 5, 1994. The months leading up to this most important date have been very stressful, not for the usual reasons. Preparations for this event have been very easy, however my part in the service will not be.

My congregation allows the non-Jewish parent up on the beema, and they may recite and English prayer. I may not however light the candles, recite a blessing over the Torah or be touched in the passing of the Torah tradition.

I believe mothers play a significant role in making the children feel Jewish. I take this responsibility very serious. I also feel if my children could witness their mother participating fully in the service, it would reaffirm my commitment to raising them Jewish.

I have attended ritual, board, and private meetings with the hope of possible change. I was given a copy of C.C.A.R. Responsa Committee-Responsum 5754.5 - Gentile Participation in Synagogue Ritual and Mark L. Winer: "Our Vision of the Future: Personal Status and K'lal Yisrael". I do not agree with their approach on how to handle intermarriages. I realize that many issues surround this topic. I am trying to understand all of them.

If you can suggest any books, articles, or organizations that support full participation or alternative answers, I will gladly purchase them. I do not wish to leave my synagogue.

I appreciate the time you have taken to read this. I look forward to meeting you at Shir Ami on Friday.

Sincerely,

Deborah Moskovitz 330 Watergate Dr.

Langhorne, PA 19053

Debbie Moskovitz

215-752-1028





September 21, **1994**

FROM:

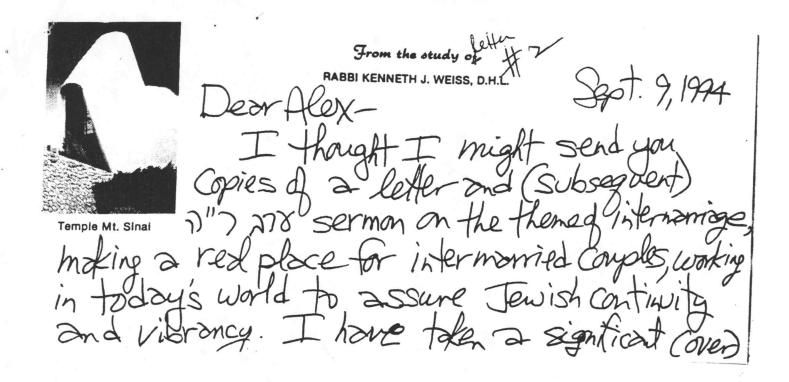
Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Dru Greenwood

COPY:

The enclosed is self explanatory. Perhaps you can make some commentary that is helpful to Ken. He seems to be a decent guy.



Step- I believe on outherlic step-so
Hot red Jewish growth becomes possible.

I'd enjoy your response, if you have
one, and please feel free to pass this on
to appropriate individuals and a commissions.

Wormest Wisles- DAIN DNIAN ONC

temple mount sinai

September 1, 1994

Toward The Survival and Enhancement of Jewish Life: A New Look at Intermarriage



Dear Friends,

For the past nine months, I have seriously considered the possibility of changing my position with respect to the dilemma of intermarriage. Several factors compel me to rethink my career-long refusal to sanctify such marriages:

- there are as many as 100 intermarried families who are active members of Temple Mt. Sinai; despite the fact that one of the two partners is not Jewish, their affiliation generally speaking is strong and their children are being (or have been) raised as Jews. Indeed, a growing number of non-Jewish spouses within our Temple Family continue to approach Rabbi Goldfarb and me with the desire to convert.
- My job continues to be to work toward the survival of the Jewish people, the enhancement of Jewish life, and the future of Judaism as a philosophy, a way of life, a civilization. Clearly, 50% or more of young Jews in America are marrying non-Jews; clearly many of these young couples can and do live authentic Jewish lives within Temple communities; clearly in the past some of these well-intentioned young couples have felt turned away by their own rabbis, having to resort to a less meaningful experience before an unknown rabbi or a civil official.
- Colleagues in nearby cities who perform intermarriages for couples who
 do agree to meet specific standards, (of belief, intent, study and
 affiliation) note that some 2/3 of these couples retain a connection with
 the Jewish community, keep a Jewish home, see to and participate in the Jewish upbringing of their children.

My position - as it is evolving - is based on the following unbreakable, unbendable principles:

- I must be certain that the home I am creating will be a Jewish home to the exclusion of any other faith; in other words a marriage performed by a rabbi is supposed to create a Jewish family.
- I will ask couples to affirm certain specific beliefs, intentions and affiliations, as well as a willingness to increase their knowledge of Judaism.
- Certain words in the wedding ceremony will be changed to reflect the reality that a non-Jew cannot "consecrate unto (him/herself a spouse) in accordance with the Law of Moses and the people of Israel."
 - The stand I am about to describe reflects the continuing, total freedom of Temple Mt. Sinai's pulpit, as established and affirmed by the Board of Temple Mt. Sinai.
 - Neither I, nor any rabbi of Temple Mt. Sinai, will do what we cannot do: some couples who come to us will meet the set criteria; others will not. On this issue and others, each of us will be bound by 1) our own

understanding of Jewish tradition, 2) the dictates of our own hearts, and 3) our sense of our own authenticity.

Temple Mt. Sinai has already moved creatively and enthusiastically into the delicate area of welcoming intermarried couples:

- we have offered complete pre-marital interviews for the past 14 years;
- when invited, we (as friends and rabbis) attend the nuptials;
- "Under One Roof" a group of Temple members who are in intermarriages has been active for two years.

My goal now is to expand that sense of welcome:

- to offer couples who accept the requisite criteria, welcome rather than rejection;
- to assure that I have a chance to be a part of their lives to offer Judaism and Temple to them in a way that someone else to whom they might have to go, can not;
- to bring new Jews (and potential Jews) into this wonderful place which will encourage their Jewish identity, offer them chances for continuing education, and provide for them many positive models of affiliation and involvement (as seen in the 520+ Jewish-Jewish and Jewish-non-Jewish homes that comprise our Temple Family);
- to increase the number of homes in El Paso in which Judaism is taught, learned, modeled, lived.

I, therefore, affirm, that for a trial period of 2 years, beginning with the date of this letter, I will perform marriages when the husband and wife commit to the following:

- establish and maintain a Jewish home;
- raise any and all children as Jews;
- join Temple prior to the marriage and maintain membership;
- prior to the ceremony, to engage in 4 to 6 months of Jewish study and active participation in Temple (classes, services, meetings with the Rabbis, etc.);
- participate in 4-6 hours of pre-marital interviewing (so as to speak to one another and me of their shared values, experiences, hopes and dreams; to enable us all to "become friends")
- affirm that the non-Jewish partner has no other religious affiliation, and that the Jewish partner is positively disposed to Judaism as the sole faith, way of life and identity in their new home.

I will not co-officiate with a non-Jewish clergy person nor in a non-Jewish place of worship.

The Board of Temple Mt. Sinai has established the following:

- that the ceremony can take place at a home, hotel or country club in El Paso or anywhere on the Temple grounds with the exception of the Zork Sanctuary and the Krupp Chapel.

Our Bimas are reserved for marriages uniting two Jews. Intermarriages begin with a suggestion, a presumption of Jewish identity. The Bima must be reserved for people who - through acts and/or verbal commitment - have affirmed their Jewishness through the act of conversion. As a baby is presumed Jewish upon birth, but then must act on that presumption through a lifetime of meaningful Jewish acts of affirmation, so may the non-Jew in an intermarried couple decide after months or years of marriage, to complete his/her connection to our people through conversion - an ultimate act of connection. Such conversion may then be followed with a reaffirmation of marital vows on the Bima.

By this change, I wish to make the following as clear as possible:

- this decision is mine alone, and should not be construed as having any bearing on the stand taken by Rabbi Goldfarb or by any future rabbi of Temple Mt. Sinai
- I do not want to be perceived as encouraging intermarriages. Quite the opposite: I will continue to urge prospective non-Jewish spouses to convert before marriage. Intermarriages are statistically speaking at great risk. Statistics show that 60-70% of intermarriages end up in divorce; less than 1/3 of the children of intermarriages consider themselves Jewish; less than 10% of these children marry Jews and virtually none of the grandchildren call themselves Jews. Observably, these statistics do not reflect our Temple community, which is comprised for the most part of stable, loving marriages and real efforts to pass Judaism on to each succeeding generation. I, thus, hope that in our supportive community we will continue to reduce the negative figures cited here by providing a variety of wholesome Jewish models and family situations that will enhance the stability of, and the Jewishness in, those interfaith families that may decide to join us.

I anticipate that this policy will be revisited and reassessed as situations change and conditions warrant, and its continuance will be based on our collective experience.

I wish to thank those who have supported me in this agonizing process. With visits, phone calls, letters and patient silence, you have encouraged and enabled me to grow. I am most grateful.

While also thanking all of you, the Temple Mt. Sinai community, I must pause to seek your assistance. If, in social conversation, this new policy is discussed, be sure to affirm strongly the factors, the principles, the conditions and the commitments discussed herein. "Rabbi Weiss is now doing intermarriages" does not accurately reflect the new reality. "Rabbi Weiss is seeking new ways to welcome and encourage those who wish to create Jewish homes, raise Jewish kids, maintain Jewish affiliation and enhance Jewish life": this statement more honestly reflects the authenticity for which I constantly strive, the purpose of the policy we at Temple are setting forth.

I will be discussing this entire issue during our upcoming High Holy Days.

I invite your comments.

Kennel Hilleis

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1991

Letters to the Editor

Jewish Converts Should Be Cherished

The statement that "Reform Jews now recognize as Jews the children of Jewish fathers married to gentiles" is only partially correct. Children of non-Jewish mothers married to Jewish fathers are not automatically recognized as Jews within Reform Judaism. They must be raised as Jews with attendant religious training such as bar mitzvah or bas mitzvah and participation in other rites of passage.

What may not have been apparent from the article is how the Reform movement is addressing intermarriage through its "Outreach" program, based on the principle, "We reject intermarriage—but not the intermarried." It is an effort to welcome intermarried families into the synagogue. We offer their children religious training and provide ways for non-Jewish spouses to take part in the life of the congregation and create a Jewish atmosphere in the home. Conversion is of course welcomed, and "Introduction to Judaism courses" are given in scores of synagogues.

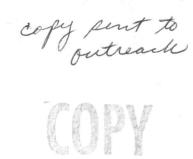
" Like it or not, intermarriage is a fact of

life. Efforts to prescribe intermarriage along the fines followed by Rabbi Moline have not worked. As you observed, Jewish identity on the North American continent is no longer externally imposed by the larger society. Judaism today must be actively chosen, not only by converts—Jews by choice—but also by Jews by birth, who must discover and develop new ties that bind them to the faith of their ancestors.

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER
President
Union of American Hebrew
Congregations

New York





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

Outreadu

September 13, 1994 8 Tishri 5755

Rabbi Norman M. Cohen Bet Shalom Congregation 201 Ninth Ave. North Hopkins, MN 55343

Dear Norman:

That was a wonderful article on the Christensen Family. I am grateful to you for sharing it with me and I will, indeed, pass it on to the Outreach Department.

I hope all goes well with you and we convey to you and those you love my very good wishes for this New Year. May it be blessed with good health, happiness and fulfillment.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



Norman M. Cohen, Rabbi

201 Ninth Avenue North Hopkins, MN 55343 (612) 933-8525 Fox (612) 933-3238

September 8, 1994

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

Dear Alex,

I thought you might be interested in seeing the publicity we received for the work we have done this last year with the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue.

Please feel free to pass this on to the Union Outreach Office and use it in any way you see fit.

Let me take this opportunity to wish you and Rhea a happy and healthy new year.

שלום Shalom,

Rabbi Norman M. Cohen

Raised Baptist, he wants sons to be good Jewish boys

When Aaron Christensen celebrated his bar mitzvah this spring at Bet Shalom synagogue in Hopkins, his greatgrandfather handed the Torah to his grandparents, who handed it to his mother, who gave it to her son "with the assistance of me," his father said proudly.

Richard Christensen is not a Jew. "I didn't handle it [the Torah]. That would be wrong. But I was part of the eceremony."

During this solemn rite of passage for a young person, which is an initiation into adulthood in the faith, the Torah, or sacred text, is passed down from generation to generation, in front of the congregation.

Richard Christensen was reared in the Baptist faith, but when his wife, Shelly, said she wanted to rear the children as Jews, he agreed.

"I just want my boys raised as good little Jewish boys and to understand there is a God and what it means to be Jewish," he said.

He doesn't think he could convert to any one faith right now, preferring to get his spiritual nourishment from all kinds of traditions.

All this means real adjustment at certain times of the year, such as Christmas. The three Christensen boys, Aaron, 13, Jacob, 9, and Zachary, 4, go with their parents to Christensen family events, but the boys know they're only going to help their dad celebrate his holidays. They understand that Christmas is not their holiday.

They have no tree or presents or the other secular trappings of the season in their own home. Richard says he doesn't particularly miss them, although he sometimes misses the singing and "pulpit-pounding sermons" he grew up with.

But he feels welcome at Bet Shalom. "The people are always so friendly. . .I don't have anybody raising their eyebrows when I hold a glass for kiddush [sanctifying the sabbath]. I wear a skull cap and nobody looks at me as if I shouldn't. There are a lot of things in the services I can't do, but nobody looks at me as if I shouldn't be there."

- Martha Sawyer Allen



Staff Photo by John Haselmann

Richard Christensen, top left, was raised Baptist; his wife, Shelly, is Jewish. They celebrated the bar mitzvah of their son, Aaron, in June.

Star Tribune



Monday

September 5/1994
Please read and recycle 1Bw

Dilemma for Jews: Family vs. culture

Rosh Hashana marks synagogue's success

By Martha Sawyer Allen Staff Writer

It was Rosh Hashana 1993, the start of the series of important holy days for Jews and their New Year, and Rabbi Norman Cohen threw out a challenge to his congregation, Bet Shalom in Hopkins:

Could they welcome non-Jewish participants (usually spouses) within the active life of the synagogue and still keep the integrity of the faith and practice? And, more important, could they do it without ruining the congregation's sense of cohesion?

As the rabbi and his congregation prepare to celebrate the

New Year this year (beginning at sundown today) they believe they have succeeded, but only after a lot of hard work. After hours of discussions last fall, the congregation voted this spring to change its bylaws to clarify that only Jews could hold certain offices and to outline how non-Jews could be involved in the community.

"And we didn't have to say a word," said Jan Schwartz, who had headed the education program. "What began as a really emotional issue last September ended up as a time of real healing from the issues."

For example, it is now clear that non-Jews can participate in some parts of the weekly services, but there are a few activities, particularly handling the sacred texts, or Torah, that they can't do. However, they can participate in many of the rituals and are welcome to do so.

Schwartz said many of the non-Jewish parents "wanted to put their energy into being a part of the greater community, but what they were giving up was also painful. What they were expected to do wasn't in any book."

While Bet Shalom's experience was more positive than some others, it represents the cutting edge for Reform congregations in the United States.

Richard
Christensen, who
grew up Baptist,
is raising his sons
as Jews. That
means real
adjustments on
holidays. Page
58.

At sundown tonight, Jews will begin celebrating what they call the High Holy Days.

Page 5B.

Bet Shalom synagogue has a membership of about 400 families, or about 1,000 people. About 20 percent of those families have one non-Jewish parent, which is common for Reform congregations.

About 30 years ago, about 10 percent of Jews in America married nonJews. Today the percentage is closer to 50 percent, according to Egon Mayer, director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the City University of New York and widely acknowledged as the leading national expert on the issue of intermarriage.

Some people believe that mixed marriages will mean the end of Judaism in America. That may sound dramatic, but American Jews are increasingly becoming assimilated into mainstream culture and many are worried.

Judaism is a strongly family-based religion. Most of the important rituals are celebrated in the home and include meals, prayers and customs with which non-Jews are not familiar. American Jews worry that their traditions and religion will be lost if they continue to marry outside the faith.

Also, for every non-Jew in the congregation who wants to feel welcomed and part of the community, there could be a Jew who feels that the identity of the community is being diluted by including non-Jews.

"Where there were real divisions, I can imagine they occurred more because of the way in which it was handled," said Rabbi Sam Gordon of Congregation Or Shalom in Vernon Hills, Ill. "Many Reform congregations have a strong commitment to having the doors open to all who want to participate in the congregation. How that gets translated while maintaining the integrity of the congregation is the challenge for many places."

Gordon has worked nationally on the issue and came to Bet Shalom last fall to lead a discussion.

But, he said, by discussing the role of the non-Jew, the role of the Jew in the congregation's life also gets discussed, which is a good thing for everyone.

Schwartz said, "Judaism takes place in the home and it's hard to describe. We're going to describe it more. We're going to study what a Jewish home is." Schwartz said that the discussions last fall were very emotional and each time Cohen talked about them to the congregation "he was inundated" with responses, some positive and some negative.

Cohen wrote his congregation in December that he believed part of the emotional level of their reaction from "fears that we all have about assimilation and weakening of Jewish life in America..."

While Mayer acknowledged these fears, he believes that American Judaism will survive and thrive. He also thinks that while Jews talk openly about assimilation, they're really worried about the fact that more and more Jews aren't active in synagogue life.

"I'm not sure I can see this as the death knell of American Judaism. The enormous challenge is to come

to terms with the American lifestyle" in which many don't take the time to participate in synagogue life (just as increasing numbers of Christians aren't active church members).

Mayer, who was born in Hungary two weeks after his parents were released from a concentration camp after World War II, said, "I'm not willing to believe that the Jewish people are suffering imminent disaster because they're living in a society which offers them more opportunity than they've ever lived in.

"It would be the height of irony and a theological joke if it turns out that Jews could survive in societies where they were killed and stoned, but when they come to this blessed country, where all the restrictions are off, they can't survive. Give me a break."

(over)



August 9,1994 2 Elul 5754

Ms. Coventry Kessler 5 Herrick Place Durham, NC 27707

Dear Ms. Kessler:

I write to acknowledge your letter of August 4 and the enclosures. There is really nothing further I can say or do beyond noting my distress over the agony you have faced as well as the final conclusion you have reached to separate yourself from our faith community.

May the years ahead bring you peace of mind.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

P.S. I have taken the liberty of sharing with Rabbi Hoffman your reply to his article on "Being a Jew at Christmastime."

August 9, 1994 2 Elul 5754

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman 19 Hillcrest Lane Rye, NY 10580-3509

Dear Larry:

Edie told me you'll call by the end of the week to set a time for us to meet. I am eager to have a chat with you and look forward to seeing you soon.

Over a period of years, I've had sporadic correspondence with Coventry Kessler of Durham, NC. The letters dealt mostly with her emotional inability to accept not having a Christmas tree in her home, albeit I believe there are many underlying, unspoken reasons for her problem.

Be that as it may, today I received the enclosed letter and her certificates of conversion, which Ms. Kessler has cut, as described in her letter. She also enclosed a response to your article on Being a Jew at Christmastime," which I had called to her attention.

There's really nothing further we can do in regard to Ms. Kessler but I thought you would be interested in her response to your article.

With warm regards I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

August 9, 1994 2 Elul 5754

Rabbi Robert A. Seigel Temple Beth Israel 6622 North Maroa Road Fresno, CA 93704-1209

Dear Bob:

Over a period of years, I've had sporadic correspondence with Coventry Kessler of Durham, NC. The letters dealt mostly with her emotional inability to accept not having a Christmas tree in her home, albeit I believe there are many underlying, unspoken reasons for her problem.

Be that as it may, today I received the enclosed letter and certificates of conversion, which Ms. Kessler has cut, as described in her letter. Since you participated in her conversion, and I can find no trace of a Rabbi Herbert Berger in our CCAR listings, I thought I would share this material with you. I don't know if you have had any contact with her over the years but you might want to make note of her action in your records.

There's really nothing we can do but I wanted to apprise you of Ms. Kessler's distress and the action she has taken on a personal level. My previous exchanges with her were to no avail so I don't believe there's a point in taking this any further.

I am also sharing this Ms. Kessler has copied, the present rabbi of Judea Reform Congregation in Durham, John Friedman, as well as our director of Outreach, Dru Greenwood.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

5 Herrick Place Durham, NC 27707 August 4, 1994 (919) 942-8731/489-4000

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

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

After a great deal of agonized thought, I hereby resign from my conversion to Judaism, which took place in May, 1974, at Beth El Synagogue, Durham, North Carolina. The reasons I stated to you in my letter of January 10. Recapitulated briefly, they are:

- 1. My family of origin is not Jewish, so I do not have the natural, familial, or ethnic ties that are clearly important to a Jewish identity.
- 2. After twenty years in the community, I am still a stranger. Prayers and songs, the heart of the liturgy, are still foreign since I do not know Hebrew or even recognize songs by heart as would a child raised in the tradition. At those moments when my heart should be most focused on the Almighty, I am left out because I do not know the words. By contrast, ordinary Protestant Christianity (in which I no longer believe) is as natural and familiar as breathing. It is mine in a way that Judaism can never be.
- 3. Jewish holidays are no longer occasions for joy but for extreme ambivalence, since, as the mother, I am expected to prepare for them while knowing my own dearly beloved holiday is forbidden.
- 4. I feel no personal stake in the fate of Israel, and in fact would be horrified if my children wished to live there. I feel no vested interest in my children remaining Jews.
- 5. The official Jewish community (i.e., rabbis and the UAHC) offers no official solution to the Christmas dilemma faced by many intermarried families other than, "Don't celebrate it." This puts me and many converts in a no-win situation: suppress what you love or betray the community.
- 6. Since Jews are not supposed to celebrate Christmas, and I clearly need to, continuing to identify myself as a Jew makes no sense. Groucho Marx once cracked that he wouldn't want to belong to any club that would have him as a member. I find it emotionally impossible to belong to a group whose cherished standard I must necessarily violate.

As I wrote before, in twenty-three years my husband and I have weathered four children, in-laws, mental illness, marginal

incomes, and thwarted career dreams. We have made it through more than our share of thin. But when I told him I planned to resign my conversion, he said, "Then we have to think about a separation."

Shalom bayit, a heen a hair, Rabbi. Where is it written in Jewish tradition that bearing children, supporting financially, standing by through illness and loss of career count for less than a pretend religious unity?

In my last letter, I asked if there was a ceremony for those who wished to resign their conversion. You responded that there was not. Yet serious occasions, even unsanctioned ones, deserve a ritual to mark their solemnity. For this reason, you will find my conversion certificate enclosed. It has been cut once diagonally, from upper left to lower right. In heraldry, I believe, the left to right diagonal signals illegitimacy, the sign that one is not a true child of the family. The diagonal also represents that the decision was not a straight one but took time and traveled across the grain. Finally, the single cut. People in a fury tear documents to shreds. The single cut clearly separates, but leaves much intact: a measure of respect, and self-respect.

I hope that my experience will raise serious questions about conversion and the experiences and expectations of converts.

Sincerely,

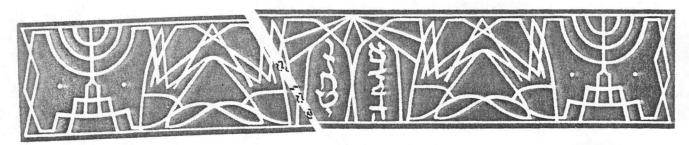
Coventry Kessler

cc: Rabbi John Friedman
Ms. Dru Greenwood

שמע ישראל יהוה אל הינו HEAR וי ISRAEL THE LORD OUR GOD

יהוה אחד

THE LORD IS ONE



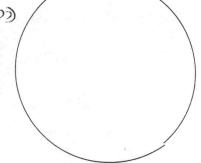
CERTIFICATE OF CONVERSION

This is to record that LEE KE'SSLER having sought to join the household of Israel by accepting the religion of Israel and promising to live by its principles and practices was received into the Jewish Faith on MAY 19, 1974 corresponding to the Hebrew date IYAR 27, 5734 at DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

Rabbi Mr Herbert De 1987 (73 DLN ?)) Rolli Rolled A. Seight So'o and population signature

Ben mechany Pison 1917

SIGNATURE



THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE AND THY GOD

19 Hillcrest Lane, Rye, NY 10580, 9/1/94

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, UAHC, 838 Fifth Avenue, Rye, NY 10580

Dear Alex,

As you may know by now, we have an appointment for one the "ten days" at which time I look forward to talking with you.

In the meantime, your letter of August 9 sits on my desk, having reached me only recently, as I was away on vacation. Thanks for sending me Ms. Kessler's letter. Her response is unusually acerbic. Actually, the Christmas article is one that regularly circulates, and equally regularly generates positive comments from readers.

Nonetheless, I felt obliged to respond to Ms,. Kessler, who is nothing if not an intelligent critic. That there is a story behind her remarks is <u>muvan me'elav!</u> But a nice letter from me affirming her as a person, denying the worst that she fears from us religious rabbi sorts, and trying to make peace without sacrificing principle (especially at this time of year) is certainly not out of place. I enclose a copy of the letter here.

Until we meet...

Kol tuv. Shanah tovah umetukah!

Larry Hoffman



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem

9/1/94

Ms. Coventry Kessler, 5 Herrick Place, Durham, NC 27707

Dear Ms. Kessler,

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

Rabbi Alexander Schindler has graciously forwarded to me your "Reply" to my article in Crosscurrents, "Being a Jew at Christmastime." I thought it a significant, thoughtful, and altogether extraordinary response, deserving of a personal note back to you. I am grateful for the time you took to write it.

In large part, the various issues you raise can be grouped into two categories. The first is a substantive difference of opinion that we may have. The best minds and most honest souls may rightfully hold different views on important issues, so it may be that we will respectfully agree to disagree here. I mean the question (as I put it) of whether "You can't be Jewish and Christian, and you can't have both Chanukah and Christmas." You object that I mistake "can't" for "shouldn't" and you are partly right. I do not mean to say that people simply can't; many obviously do. I mean they can't without simultaneously encroaching on the distinctiveness of each faith and blurring what the proponents of each one maintain as their authenticity. So when I say, "can't," I do not mean to deny the patent fact that millions of people in fact "do," just as they do all sorts of things in practice; I do mean that what they do in practice countermands in theory the very essence of what Judaism on one hand and Christianity on the other posit as their very essence.

On that point, as I say, we respectfully differ. It is, however, a second point, the one to which I now come, that disturbs me more.

I mean the obvious references you make to your own experience in which you have been dealt with painfully by others. Here I side entirely with you in decrying the incidents you describe. I regret that some people treat converts as if they are less than fully Jewish, and I in no way hold that converts should deny their past. Were you to tell me in conversation that your great-grandparents were a Baptist minister and a Christian Scientist practitioner, it would prove to be a "conversation stopper" (as you put it) only because I would ask you to tell me more about them, in honest regard for their integrity, the spiritual legacy they have left you, and the story of your

own odyssey through life in which they play an important and valued role. Also, I do not (again, contrary to your assumption), hold that converts must adopt the patronymic "Abraham," but instead, regularly support (for instance) my students who are converts to Judaism in their desire to list on their rabbinic semikhah, their name and that of their real parents, "Z son/daughter of X and Y, " even when X and/or Y are patently Christian names. I know that flies in the face of traditional Jewish norms, but I am a Reform Jew "by choice." I have only the highest regard for the spiritual background of everyone, and I never denigrate or gloss over anyone's humanity, in all its fullness.

I especially wish to disassociate myself from your unwarranted assumption that "in the quietness of [my] inner conversation, [I] feel more kinship, more tie, more innate understanding, with non-religious Jews of similar ethnic background than [I] do with most converts." That is absolutely false. In lectures around the country, I have heralded a post-ethnic age in which spiritual and ethical commitment bind us together in communities of choice.

Issues do exist between us: for instance, despite the momentary lapse of saying "antithesis" when I meant "embodiment," (if that is what happened -- I do not have the text in front of me), I portray Christmas Carol as a denunciation of rampant capitalist excess, not as its affirmation. And contrary to your categorizing my remarks as "patently self-serving," I believe they follow from my determination to pay full heed to the integrity (as I see it) of the religious definition of Christmas rather than to its cultural entanglement with capitalism. In the end, we are back again to our principled difference of opinion, for which I ask your own regard for me, equal to that which I accord to you. What you take as "self-serving" I regard as necessarily continuous with Christian theology, Christian thinkers, Christian advocacy, and Christianity itself -- I know of no interfaith dialogue partners who speak officially for either Roman Catholicism or the various historical churches within Protestantism who would disagree with my analysis. We also differ with regard to secularism -- you hold it in higher regard than I do, though we both oppose religious fundamentalism (among both Jews and Christians) that perverts what we take to be religion at its finest. You misunderstand my use of the word "myth," which I use positively, not negatively. And you err in thinking I would ever tell my children the story of Hannah, which, incidentally, rabbinic Judaism tried to squelch as I do -- it is carried first in non-Jewish sources, and then picked up (a mistake, as I see it) as an understandable Jewish response to persecution -- but I have no more use for it than you do.

I believe too -- and you may join me here -- that Judaism is in sore need of a new spiritual emphasis that will underscore its historic prophetic ethic while at the same time provide inner healing and promise to the Jews who practice it. Your instances of Jews who pursue Buddhism, for instance, are to the point here. I am also critical of whatever failures in Jewish life I encounter, and I do not shrink from castigating most synagogues for their failure to be spiritual in their very essence, not to mention in their worship. My writing on that subject is available for all to see. But I remain a determined advocate of Judaism, a proud Jew, and a believer in the Jewish Mission to work hand in hand with all humanity to perfect God's world. It is that very determination which mandates my inability to gloss over the historic differences among the world's faiths. including the categorization of Christmas as authentically Christian. But it also allows me to say, as I have here, that I extend to you my fullest regard, even as you differ from me in matters of principle; I value

you for who you are, including your background in Christianity which makes you fully the unique person you are today, and which you cannot and should not deny or denigrate.

May the new year bring you blessing and joy, and may it herald an era of peace for the world's suffering.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman

Letters to the Editor

Jewish Converts Should Be Cherished

Rabbi Jack L. Moline articulated an Orthodox Jewish view proscribing intermarriage ("Keeping the Faith: Marriage and Family No Longer Are Ties That Bind to Judaism," page one, Aug. 8). Such archaic views do not reflect well the mainstream thought of American Judaism. We are Americans first and Jews second, and thereby most of our neighbors are non-Jews. I have been attentive to Jewish theological discourse over a half-century, and know most learned rabbis state that the essence of Judaism is "love thy neighbor" and the "golden rule"—all the rest is commentary.

If we are to take to heart the essence of Judaism, loving our neighbor means loving non-Jews, because they are our neighbors unless we segregate ourselves in ghettos, suburban or otherwise. What Jehovah has taught and given to Jews as their responsibility, to know and obey his laws, will not necessarily end with intermarriage. For if we are to love our neighbor, what better way than to marry and to have children, and bring them up within a moral context of Judeo-Christian teaching? The Old Testament and the Ten Commandments are common to most Jews and gentiles.

It should be clarified that Jews can be divided in *four* significant ways, not three: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Secular. Contrary to those rabbis who require synagogues and a flock of followers to make a living, it is possible to be a Jew in the best sense of the word without participating in organized religion. The Chosen People are free to choose, and America is the Promised Land.

VICTOR BLOOM, M.D. Grosse Point Park, Mich.

Your article underscores the unintended heartlessness of placing group "needs" over individual freedom. It's wrong to tell young people that their choice of a spouse—the most important decision affecting their own happiness—must conform to the expectations of others.

Rabbi Moline is clearly not a bigot, but his position against intermarriage builds walls, not bridges. Religious leaders have a responsibility to spread messages of love, not division, among the youths who look to them for guidance. People who marry outside their faith are not rejecting their families or their faith—they are opening their hearts and lives to another human being. I don't understand how anyone can object to that.

JOHN FINOCHARO

Cincinnati

The lack of younger Jews' commitment to their religion should come as a surprise to no one, at least not any Jew. Alienation begins when youngsters are forced to go to Hebrew school three days a week. Any outside interest is summarily dismissed. For the next six years the child is taught to read (but not understand) biblical Hebrew. Understanding none of what he is reading, he learns nothing but frustration.

At age 13 the child is then put through his or her ritual of passage, a bar mitzvah or bas mitzvah, the preparation for which consists of the worst elements of fraternity hazing and boot camp, and ends with the parents giving their child a big party—which is really used as a means to elevate the social status of the parents

Later, if the youth desires to attend a Shabbat service, he or she must endure a 2½-hours-long service in which 80% of the service is conducted in Hebrew. I doubt Christians are any less sincere in their faith and yet their services last only about an hour and are conducted in English. God, in his (her, its?) omniscience obviously should understand our prayers in English, Hebrew or pig Latin.

Your contention that "Judaism isn't a particularly evangelistic religion" is a vast understatement. When my wife tried to convert she was discouraged from doing so, and many years after her conversion, some in our congregation still refer to her as a "shiksa." It seems to me that someone who voluntarily embraces Judaism is in fact the true Jew.

LOUIS E. KATZ

Poland, Ohio

The statement that "Reform Jews now recognize as Jews the children of Jewish fathers married to gentiles" is only partially correct. Children of non-Jewish mothers married to Jewish fathers are not automatically recognized as Jews within Reform Judaism. They must be raised as Jews with attendant religious training such as bar mitzvah or bas mitzvah and participation in other rites of passage.

What may not have been apparent from the article is how the Reform movement is addressing intermarriage through its "Outreach" program, based on the principle, "We reject intermarriage—but not the intermarried." It is an effort to welcome intermarried families into the synagogue. We offer their children religious training and provide ways for non-Jewish spouses to take part in the life of the congregation and create a Jewish atmosphere in the home. Conversion is of course welcomed, and "Introduction to Judaism courses" are given in scores of synagogues.

Like it or not, intermarriage is a fact of

life. Efforts to proscribe intermarriage along the lines followed by Rabbi Moline have not worked. As you observed, Jewish identity on the North American continent is no longer externally imposed by the larger society. Judaism today must be actively chosen, not only by converts—Jews by choice—but also by Jews by birth, who must discover and develop new ties that bind them to the faith of their ancestors.

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER
President
Union of American Hebrew
Congregations

New York

My compliments for a sensitive glimpse into my synagogue as it grapples with "Keeping the Faith." But you missed an important perspective. Judaism has been immeasurably enriched by the convert of conviction. Although not actively proselytizing, Judaism enjoins its born adherents to welcome the Ger Zedek, the righteous convert, as more cherished unto God than the most pious Jew born to a Jewish mother. The contributions of such proselytes, from the second-century Hebrew-Aramaic translator Onkelos to the charismatic Black Jewish professor Julius Lester, have ennobled a noble religion.

Agudas Achim Synagogue is no exception. Some of its most sensitive and committed members are converts of conviction whom we cherish and love. The challenge, therefore, is not just to stem the tide of intermarriage; it is to succeed in the free market of religious ideas and moral values. Only then will Judaism remain a magnet attracting converts of conviction and defeating the effects of assimilation.

BARUCH A. FELLNER Cantor

Agudas Achim Congregation Washington

When Stalin Got Cross, Economists Vanished

Your Aug. 8 article "Believers in One Wave Theory See U.S. in Deep Trough Soon" fairly described the long-cycle theory propounded by the late Russian economist Nikolai Kondratieff.

But Kondratieff's theories probably cost him his life. It did not please Stalin to hear that Western capitalism would inevitably emerge from the economic trough that began in 1929 and continued into the 1930s. Stalin's ideology held that the Great Depression was the death rattle of capitalism and that Soviet socialism would prevail.

For this reason, and allegations of "rightist deviation," Stalin had Kondratieff arrested in 1930. The hapless economist soon disappeared within the Gulag system, where he presumably perished in the early 1930s.

Clearly, Stalin took ideas seriously.

Kurt R. Schmeller

President

Queensingrough Community College CityCity University of New York Glen Cove, N.Y.

Nutrition Labeling Builds Strong Markets

You oppose nutritional-labeling laws because of cost and the claim that Americans are already well fed ("The Food Crusades," editorial, Aug. 12). Do you also oppose reporting of financial information by publicly traded companies because it is expensive and the U.S. is already a wealthy country?

In food stores, as on Wall Street, complete and consistently reported information facilitates comparison shopping and thereby promotes market efficiency. In both markets the benefits of full disclosure far outweigh the costs, even when most buyers of bread or stocks don't read all the fine print.

The only other reasons you give for opposing detailed labeling laws are that one advocate lost 50 pounds while another was deprived of sugar by his mother. These crude comments are spectacularly irrelevant.

ARTHUR LEWBEL
Associate Professor of Economics
Brandeis University

Waltham, Mass.

Puzzled in La Jolla

In your Aug. 9 page-one article "Bad Bets: Many Big S&L Losses Turn Out to Be Due to a Financial Gamble," reference was made to the Wayne Angell who served as a paid consultant to Franklin Savings Association from 1981-1985, and who was termed "one of the principal architects" of the complicated arbitrage-hedging strategies.

In that same story and in Paul A. Gigot's Potomac Watch column on the editorial page, I learn that Mr. Angell has been appointed to the Federal Reserve.

I admit I don't understand the financial legerdemain that resulted in at least part of the huge savings-and-loan deficit, but can someone explain to me how Mr. Angell can progress so adroitly from disaster to reward?

Alexander G. Silberstein, M.D. La Jolla, Calif.





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

June 15, 1994 6 Tammuz 5754

Bryna Franklin P.O. Box 17104 Tel-Aviv 61170 Israel

Dear Ms Franklin:

Your letter of May 30 reached our office during Rabbi Schindler's absence. He is currently away from his desk for an extended period and will not have an opportunity to review your comments until his return in mid-summer. I know he will be grateful to you for sharing your thoughts and concerns with him.

With kindest greetings, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller Assistant to the President

White

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

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

I am writing with regard to the article which appeared in the Spring 1994 issue of 'Reform Judaism' entitled "Why Jews Should Seek Converts."

I am 100% opposed! At the present time, the rate of intermarriage is more than 50% in the States, there are born Jews who want to be affiliated with a congregation and are unable to pay the dues required (as per the letters in the same issue), and there tends to be a lack of 'leadership' among the supposed leaders of the Movement.

Under the circumstances, it would seem more relevant and meaningful for the future of the Movement to use any monies available to improve educational programs at all levels, have a fund available to assist those not in a financial position to pay regular dues, (if this should be a loan or grant is another issue but the recipient should be treated with the utmost respect), more intensive leadership training workshops should be developed, and young people should be encouraged to participate in a program in Israel.

If an "Outreach Program aimed at all Americans who are unchurched and who are seeking their roots in religion" is implemented, it will justify Christians outreach to "unsynagogued Jews" which is almost two-thirds of American Jewry. How then would we have the moral right to speak out against missionaries!

It seems that one possible reason for even raising this issue at this time is to take the pressures off of our 'leaders' who seemingly did not sound the alarm in time regarding the state of Jewish religious life in the U.S.

In addition, regarding the innocuous matter of name change, there is a full page survey sheet and we are asked to fill out a form and express our view. Yet on such a fundamental issue as prostelytizing, our opinion is not asked. Is the rationale that we are not capable of making such decisions? Are the views of members of reform congregations not relevant? Is this but one more reason why so many Jews are unsynagogued?

Your comments will be appreciated.

Yours sincerely, Bryna Franklin

P.O.B. 17104

Tel-Aviv 61170 Israel

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May 24, 1994

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, President Central Conference of American Rabbis c/o Temple Emanu-El 8500 Hillcrest Road Dallas TX 75225-4204

Re: Rabbinic Officiation at Intermarriages

Dear Shelly:

In the latter part of 1993, the Jewish Outreach Institute (IOI) and seed to proup of 5. Jewish philanthropists, each of which had given at least \$5,000 to a seed to be seed. (The average gifts were over \$40,000.) One of the questions asked concerned the last of rabbine officiation at an interfaith marriage where there was a commitment to raise the children as Jews. The research showed that 74 percent of those who identified themselves as Reform Jews and 68 percent of those who identified as Conservative Jews were in favor of rabbinic officiation. This followed an earlier 1993 poll which was not limited to "philanthropists" and which showed that 71 percent of Reform Jews and 56 percent of Conservative Jews favor rabbinic officiation in these circumstances

These statistics are not surprising in light of the fact that the 1990 Jewish population census showed that approximately 62 percent of people raised Reform, 50 percent raised Conservative, and 25 percent raised Orthodox, who have married since 1985, have married individuals not born Jewish. My belief is that by the end of this decade, the intermarriage rate among Reform Jews will exceed 65 percent and may approach and possibly exceed 70 percent. This is approximately twice the rate of intermarriage that existed in 1973 at the time the CCAR last adopted a resolution concerning rabbinic officiation.

Concurrently with the rise of intermarriage, the Reform Movement has made a major change with tradition in adopting the position of patrilineal, as well as matrilineal, determination of Jewish identity, if children are raised as Jews. In addition, there has been another major change from prior tradition concerning the legitimacy of gay and lesbian rabbis, notwithstanding Jewish tradition rooted in the words of the Torah which specifically condemns homosexuality, calling it an "abomination."

Meanwhile, many young interfaith couples who are planning to marry desire to have the individual officiating at the marriage be someone with strong religious identity. These couples would much prefer a rabbi to a judge, even if the judge is Jewish. Since many, if not most, individuals perceive a wedding as a holy occasion, it is very natural for them to want to have a member of the clergy officiate. If a bi is unwilling, it opens the door for the non-Jewish partner to suggest that a minister or priest officiate.

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As you know, when in 1978 I was appointed as the first Chairman of the Joint UAHC-CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach, there was tremendous pressure for us to address the issue of rabbinic officiation. I discussed this with the CCAR Co-Chairman and with UAHC President Alex Schindler. We all agreed that because of the divisive nature of the issue and the concerns of the CCAR leadership, we should try and focus on all other aspects of outreach and postpone consideration of the issue until after the 1981 Biennial when the five Outreach resolutions were proposed for adoption. In order to do this, it was necessary to make a commitment that after the 1981 Biennial, the Task Force would address the issue of officiation.

You were a member of the Task Force and know that in 1982, a subcommittee was appointed to study the issue of rabbinic officiation. After months of study, the Task Force adopted a number of recommendations which were included in its October 1983 Closing Report. On page 8 of that Report, we wrote: "The Task Force unqualifiedly affirms the right of every rabbi to act in accordance with his/her religious conscience in the matter of officiating at interfaith marriage free from any external pressure." The Closing Report then discussed the complexity of interfaith marriage issues and made a recommendation for the appointment of a Tripartite Task Force of the UAHC, CCAR and HUC-JIR which would study all aspects of intermarriage, including officiation, and would report back within two years--with the target date being the 1985 UAHC Biennial. Unfortunately, these issues were not addressed in the report of the Tripartite Task Force at the 1985 Biennial, nor were they addressed at the 1987 Biennial. The Tripartite Task Force then dissolved. This failure of the Tripartite Task Force constitutes an unfortunate "record of inaction." Such a record undermines lay constituency confidence in the leadership of the Reform Movement.

Meanwhile, the rising rate of intermarriage constitutes a demographic revolution in the composition of our Jewish community. Increasing numbers of Jews are becoming frustrated with the failure of our Movement to discuss the issue of rabbinic officiation in the face of these changes. This is ironic because we have no fears of discussing all kinds of other controversial issues, particularly in the political realm where we spend such a great amount of plenary session time at our UAHC General Assemblies--most recently in San Francisco in 1993 where we spent over an hour debating health care reform and fetal tissue research. This compared with less than ten minutes discussing the Report and the proposed resolutions of the Strategic Planning Task Force on Jewish Continuity and Growth, which as you know I chaired and in which you played a major role in your presentation on your perspective of the synagogue.

Shelly, you and I both share a deep commitment to not just Jewish continuity, but Jewish continuity and growth. I believe that the North American Jewish community must come forward with an overall to market Judaism to interdating and intermarried families and their children as well as to unaffiliated Jews. That is the primary reason I wrote the booklet for the Reform Movement, "What Judaism Offers for You: A Reform Perspective," and the similar booklet published by the Jewish Outreach Institute, "Choosing Judaism: An Opportunity for Everyone." I have summarized some of my thoughts on the importance of having a "continuity and growth" perspective in an article published in the December 1993 issue of MOMENT Magazine, a copy of which is enclosed.

As I view these issues in the context of the demographic revolution in which we are living and from my perspective as having served as the first Chairman of the Joint Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach and the first Chairman of the Joint Commission on Outreach, plus my perspective as Chairman of the Joint Task Force on Jewish Continuity and Growth, I believe that it is time for the CCAR to consider changing its 1973 resolution on officiation. Obviously, every rabbi should be able to determine, free from any outside pressures, whether or not to officiate at an interfaith marriage. However, much has changed since 1973, and the only thing approaching a collective action on the part of the CCAR has been the 1984 so-called "Committee of 100" statement, in which you and many other CCAR leaders joined. The Committee of 100 pamphlet included language (page 10) asserting that "Rabbis who do officiate at mixed marriage

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ceremonies do so contrary to the clear guidelines of their rabbinic organization." Those guidelines were enunciated 21 years ago, when the intermarriage rate was half of what it is today. One obvious possible change is a proposal for an alternate ceremony without such traditional language as "under the laws of Moses," which was alluded to in the Committee of 100 pamphlet as one of the reasons rabbis do not officiate.

The 1973 CCAR resolution on officiation recalled the stand adopted in 1909 "that mixed marriage is contrary to the Jewish tradition and should be discouraged." In light of the rationale of "tradition," the natural question that follows is: "If it is all right for the CCAR to break with tradition and support the legitimacy of the small minority of rabbis who are gay or lesbian, notwithstanding the specific language in the Torah condemning homosexuality, should not the CCAR be sensitive to the concerns of the majority of Reform people and permit officiation at intermarriages where there is a commitment to raise the children as Jews?" Is it appropriate for a homosexual rabbi to refuse to officiate at such an intermarriage ceremony on the grounds that this "is contrary to the Jewish tradition"? What would be the response of the Committee of 100 to this question?

Related to this is another matter that has been recently brought to my attention by a CCAR member who lives in Illinois. He states that there is an unwritten rule within the CCAR, which he analogizes to the old country club unwritten rules which excluded Jews, that a rabbi who officiates at an intermarriag almost sure to be precluded from becoming President of the CCAR. He suggests that over the past twenty years, and possibly longer, no rabbi who has officiated at intermarriages has been elected as President of the CCAR, despite the fact that more than one-third of CCAR members do officiate at interfaith marriages. He also asserts the CCAR Board is disproportionately dominated by rabbis who do not officiate. I would appreciate your comments on this and also letting me know specifically who was the last rabbi elected as President of the CCAR who, prior to his election, officiated at intermarriages.

Reform Judaism has been a Movement that has been responsive to the needs and concerns of lay people. As a matter of fact, a central element of Reform philosophy appears in the opening portion of the permanent exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York captioned "Culture and Continuity." It begins with the statement that "...Jews have been able to sustain their culture by evolving a culture that was adaptable to life in many countries and to their various conditions." Later on in the exhibit, there is reference to a wonderful comment in Zohar 1.89a where it is written that "God creates new worlds constantly. In what way? By causing marriages to take place." Today, a majority are intermarriages.

Twenty years from now, I am confident that the great majority of Reform rabbis will officiate at intermarriages, where there is a commitment to raise the children as Jews. A sage Jewish philanthropist once told me that when he was faced with an issue where he was reasonably confident that ultimately the issue would be decided in a certain way, he asked the question, "If eventually, why not now?" If the intermarriage rate were 80 percent, would the CCAR then change its stand? What about 70 percent? What about 60 percent? Well, 60 percent is already here, and we are well on the road to 70 percent and, unfortunately, we will probably be over 75 percent within the next twenty years. The overwhelming majority of Reform Jews want a change now--not twenty years from now.

Shelly, I am very much aware of the fact that you choose not to officiate at an intermarriage and that you handle the matter with great sensitivity. On the other hand, just as it took a Richard Nixon to open the doors to lead a major change in United States policy toward China, I think the ideal individual to lead a reconsideration by the CCAR on this issue would be a highly respected Reform rabbinic leader who does not officiate. Obviously, I do not suggest that you or any other rabbi should change your own personal philosophy on whether to officiate or not officiate. What I do suggest is that we are living in the age of a

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demographic revolution; we are members of a Movement where laity plays a major role; and the 1973 CCAR resolution grounded on "tradition" is inconsistent with the CCAR major break from tradition in its stands on patrilineality and gay and lesbian rabbis and is further in contradiction to the views of the great majority of Reform Jews.

In closing, I would ask that you think about why I am writing this letter. It is not as Chairman of the Jewish Outreach Institute, because JOI has never adopted any position on the issue of rabbinic officiation. It is not in an official capacity as an Honorary Vice Chairman of the UAHC or as a member of its Executive Board. Rather, I write because we are living in a major demographic revolution, because the Tripartite Task Force never completed its job, because I care deeply about Jewish continuity and growth in general and about the Reform Movement and our rabbis in particular, and because I am very concerned that there is a widening gulf between the rabbinate and the lay constituency of our Movement on an important issue that affects a majority of families.

The easiest thing for me to do would be to say nothing, and to write nothing, but I do not think that this would be good for the CCAR, good for the UAHC, or good for the more than one million Reform Jews in North America. Over thousands of years, great philosophical debates have occurred throughout Jewish history. The growth and the development of the Reform Movement is an outgrowth of some of these debates. Over the past several decades major changes have occurred within the Reform Movement, in part brought about by concerns expressed by our laity. Eventually, the CCAR will change its 1973 position on the issue of rabbinic officiation, where there is a commitment to live in a Jewish household and raise any children as Jews. If eventually, why not now?

As I look to the future, I think about the promise of God to Abraham that the descendants of Abraham and Sarah would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands on the beaches. I believe that we must help God achieve these goals, seeking both growth in the numbers of Jews as well as in the depth of their Jewish knowledge and commitment. This is the spirit in which this letter is written, and I hope that you and your colleagues in the CCAR will understand this perspective as I have shared my thoughts with you. I will look forward to hearing from you. As you know I spend a major amount of time in New York and would be happy to visit with you personally or, if you think it appropriate, I would be happy to share these thoughts with the entire membership of the CCAR Board. Finally, in light of the composition of the Tripartite Task Force, I am sending copies of this letter to the professional and lay heads of the UAHC and HUC

My warm regards to you and your family.

Sincerely,

David W. Belin

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c.c. Melvin Merians, Chairman, UAHC Board of Trustees
Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President, UAHC
Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, President, Hebrew Union College
Stanley Gold, Chairman, Hebrew Union College Board

DAVID W. BELIN



Continuity and survival are current buzzwords in the Jewish community.

They are the wrong words.

mother recently brought her newborn daughter into the rabbi's study to discuss havng her named in a synagogue ceremony. For the mother, it was a joyous occasion. She was the product of a Jewish family steeped in tradition, had gone to Hebrew school, been bat-mitzvahed, spent summers at Jewish camps and a year in Israel. At nearly 35, however, she had not found a Jewish man to marry. Shortly after turning 35, she fell in love with a non-Jewish man who, for personal reasons, would not convert but agreed to join his wife to live in a lewish household and raise and educate their children as Jews.

When she talked to the rabbi about the baby-naming ceremony, the rabbi informed her that her husband would not be allowed to stand on the bimah. "But he has agreed to join with me to live in a Jewish home and provide a Jewish education for our daughter," she said. The rabbi was adamant. She resigned from the synagogue.

Would Moses, who married a non-Jew, have agreed with that rabbinic decision? Would the Prophet Isaiah, who spoke of Israel as "a light unto the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the Earth"?

Since 1985, more than 50 percent of marriages involving Jews involved a partner who was not born Jewish. By the end of this decade, I predict the figure will rise to more than 60 percent, and within the next 20 years it will approach 75 percent.

Some people argue that the only effective answer to this rising tide of intermarriage is "prevention"—Jewish education, Jewish camps, trips to Israel, a Jewish home life and other activities that encourage Jewish identification. I have seen too many young people with this kind of background intermarry.

Over 90 percent of Jewish college students interdate. Once there is that first kiss, a policy of prevention will have little effect on where the kiss leads. The policy of prevention is a noble idea that fails to understand the demographic revolution in American society characterized by massive social interchange between Jews and non-Jews.

Though obviously important, prevention alone is not enough. We must effectively reach out to intermarrieds.

At present the total annual national expenditures of the three major movements for outreach to the intermarried are as follows: Reform, \$419,000; Conservative, less than \$10,000; Orthodox, virtually none.

Allocations from local federations are in most cases abysmally low. The usual rationale by federation leadership for this decision is "priority": because the Jewish community has limited resources, we must give only secondary priority for funds to reach out to intermarried families because we will not have a very high success rate—or as high a success rate as might be achieved by reaching out to marginally committed Jews who have not intermarried.

Here, for example, is a recent statement of the head of the Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee:

"There are five questions that all advocates of outreach must wrestle with. First is the issue of priority. To what extent will programs targeted to mixed-marriage couples divert valuable resources from other programs that might be desirable in terms of sustaining Jewish identity in building strong and stable Jewish homes....Is it more important to have an outreach program to mixed-married couples or to assure that every young child, every adolescent, spend time in Israel?"

The answer is we can, and must, afford both. Moreover, we don't know how effective comprehensive outreach programs to the intermarried would be. They have never really been tried.

We have a wonderful product to sell—Judaism. A midwestern Jewish leader who emigrated from Vienna to the United States shortly before World War II put it simply: "Judaism is so unique...so wonderful, I can't understand why the whole world isn't Jewish."

Continuity and surviva the current buzzwords in the Jewish community. They are the wrong words. Their implications are negative. Just to "continue" and "survive" ignores our mission. In a world whose population will double in the next few decades, mere continuity and survival is the path of diminishing significance. Instead, we should be asking how we are going to grow and fulfill the mission of Israel.

Jews comprised over four percent of the American population 60 years ago. Today it is little more than two percent. The missionizing tradition of Judaism was so successful 2,000 years ago that there were somewhere between three and five million Jews then. Were it not for the legacy of the Edict of Constantine in the fourth century, which made conversion to Judaism a capital offense, our numbers today might be in the tens of millions. We now live in a land of freedom. The shackles of official antisemitism have been broken. We should no longer fear embracing our missionizing tradition.

Judaism—its universalism, its emphasis on personal freedom, the attrality of the family and the home, the concern for *tzedakah* and social justice, the tradition of education and study, the concept of peoplehood, the traditional Jewish covenant with God—offers a wonderful framework for welcoming

people into the religion.

We now have a remarkable opportunity to reach out to interfaith couples by encouraging identification with the Jewish community, Jewish commitment in the home, and Jewish education for their children.

Some will argue that by reaching out to the intermarried, we will be encouraging intermarriage. The fact is that intermarriage is going to take place, regardless of whether we commit ourselves to outreach. If we fail to embrace these people, we will be turning our back on more than 50 percent of our children. I have five children, all of whom received a Jewish education, all of whom were bar- or bat-mitzvahed, all of whom were confirmed, all of whom spent time in Israel, and some of whom may marry individuals who are not initially prepared to convert to Judaism. I don't want the Jewish community to turn its back on those of my children who may intermarry

The American Jewish community should spend annually for outreach programs to the intermarried a minimum of one dollar for every Jewish woman, man and child—an annual total of \$6 million. This is not a huge amount when compared with the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been raised for Holocaust museums. Surely, if we can raise that kind of money to build a museum looking to the past, we can raise a small portion of that money each year as we look to the future. From a pragmatic standpoint, this is an essential investment because we will be enlarging the base from

which we derive all of our resources.

In the summer of 1993, the Jewish Outreach Institute conducted a poll concerning attitudes of Jews about intermarriage. Ninety-five percent of Conservative Jews, 74 percent of Orthodox Jews and 96 percent of Reform Jews were in favor of special programs for intermarried couples to "become better acquainted with and attracted to Judaism." When asked whether or not they wanted "to see more resources devoted by the organized Jewish community to programs designed to help intermarried families be a part of the community," 89 percent of Conservative Jews, 42 percent of Orthodox Jews and 96 percent of Reform Jews said "yes." Although the majority of American Jews are very supportive of outreach programs to the intermarried, the resources being devoted on a national basis are minimal. As is often the case, the grass roots of American Jews are ahead of their leadership.

If we are willing to devote the necessary resources to this task, we will find that thousands of people will make a personal Jewish choice and follow the path of Ruth to conversion. And thousands more, though not necessarily agreeing to convert to Judaism, will join their Jewish spouses to have their children raised as Jews.

If we turn our backs on those couples, we will not only be hurting our own children and grandchildren, but we will be putting a dagger to the heart of Jewish continuity and growth.

David W. Belin is president of the Jewish Outreach Institute, which bridges all branches of Judaism and concentrates on reaching out to interdating and intermarried couples.

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Where I

March 30, 1994 18 Nisan 5754

Richard England 2832 Chain Bridge Road, N.W. Washington, DC 20016

Dear Dick:

Thank you for sending me a copy of the Washington Jewish Week article on Outreach. I appreciate your keeping me posted.

The article is reasonably on the mark, but of course I don't think that Outreach has gone far enough. We should be infinitely more assertive in seeking the conversion to Judaism of the non-Jewish partner of intermarriages. I also believe that Judaism has something to offer to those seekers after truth who may not at present be married to a Jew or contemplate such a marriage.

Be that as it may, the only aspect of the article I quarrel with is the author's assertion that Reform Judaism has grown largely because of our Outreach to the intermarried. We have grown by tens of thousands of families, true. Some 250 congregations have been added to our roster in the last two decades. In fact, our growth rate has been closer to 30% (which is more than the Lubavitcher Chasidm with all of their Outreach have in all the world.) But I am convinced that our burgeoning is due not only to Outreach, but also to our Social Action program which has brought a lot of young people into our congregations as well as our insistence on the full equality of women with men in the religious life.

Richard England March 30, 1994 Page 2

I hope that you and Lois are well. I wish you a happy and healthy Passover.

Hopefully, we will see each other soon.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Does outreach threaten the fabric of

JEWISH LIFE?

Different movements adopt alternate approaches to intermarriage by Na'ama Batya Lewin

n 1979 "outreach" seemed to be the solution to the problems of intermarriage. It was the only way, some claimed, to ensure religious continuity in the assimilating American Jewish community.

Eleven years ago the Reform Movement began encouraging aggressive programs directed to the non-Jewish partner in an intermarriage, and the Conservative Movement followed in 1985. (The Orthodox Movement maintained its stance of not sanctioning interfaith relationships.)

The rate of intermarriage keeps growing. Today, 52 percent of American Jews intermarry. Some of the intermar-

ried families affiliate without practicing religion and have no interest in becoming involved or observant.

Most interfaith couples do face religious issues when they start having a family and must resolve the religion of their children. Families might choose to observe a single religion at home. Others create a "dual identity" environment that incorporates both the Jewish and Gentile faith. Some couples provide alternately for Jewish and non-Jewish children.

Often these families ask to be accepted by the community as they are, without the conversion of the non-Jewish

According to a Washington Jewish Week survey, an average of 15.4 percent of those who regularly attend Reform congregations in the metropolitan Washington area are non-Jews. All area Reform congregations provide family memberships for intermarried couples, under which the non-Jewish spouse joins the synagogue. Ninety-three percent allow the non-Jewish spouse to seek representation on synagogue committees, and 40 percent allow non-Jews to be synagogue officers. Forty-three percent of Washington Conservative congregations suggest that the Jewish spouse of an intermarried couple join under a single membership, while 57 percent have arranged special family memberships. An average of 7 percent of non-Jewish spouses attend weekly Shabbat services.

Synagogues, Jewish community centers and social service agencies are trying to make intermarried couples feel more comfortable with Judaism. They believe that if interfaith families have a positive Jewish experience, they may choose to build a Jewish home or send their children to He-

brew school.

Competition among the outreach programs has become fierce. Which organization is more accepting toward these couples? Which is more flexible? Who is more successful in bringing families into the Jewish fold?

Conversion to Judaism seems no longer to be the focus of outreach. In synagogues, rabbis who find they have a growing number of non-Jews attending services regularly refrain from portraying interfaith relationships as a misfortune so as to avoid offending interfaith families. In some cases, interfaith groups have even become strong forces in dissuading non-Jewish spouses from converting.

A recent study published by the American Jewish Committee showed that even as the number of outreach programs abound, the rate of conversion has dropped. About 100,000 Jews continue to intermarry



every year. And three-fourths of the families do not raise their children as Jews.

Now many people are asking whether outreach has reached too far out.

"It is a delusion to believe that with outreach and intermarriage you can enlarge the Jewish community," insists Steven Bayme, director of the Jewish Communal Affairs Department for the American Jewish Committee.

Outreach, Bayme continues,

is a way to "teach families how to raise the kids Jewishly, how to preserve Judaism. But," he adds, "Judaism is a minority religion in America. The minority faith cannot be preserved if it is not the only religion in the home."

Rabbinic leadership in both the Reform and Conservative movements now have serious doubts about the success of outreach programs. The past president of the Reform Central Conference of American

Rabbis (CCAR), Walter Jacob, warned members in a paper presented to the top echelon of the movement - which was circulated privately outside Reform circles and provided to

the WJW - that non-Jewish spouses of interfaith couples should not be allowed to become members of Reform congregations. And Rabbi Avis Miller, chairman of the Committee for Kiruv and Giyur for the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism, recently

published a paper suggesting that Conservative rabbis should no longer welcome intermarried couples into the congrega-tion "without qualification." Miller reminded her readers that "the idea" of outreach "is to encourage not just entrance but long-term participation in an ongoing Jewish com-

In practice

Within synagogues "outreach" typically means accepting interfaith couples as eligible participants in religious life. Rather than treating Jews who intermarry as betrayers of the faith, synagogue congregations pull these couples into the community and teach them about Judaism.

By contrast, secular outreach programs are more like therapeutic "rap" sessions. Intermarried couples meet to discuss issues that come up in daily life. In Washington, the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington and the Jewish Social Service Agency have been able to attract a large number of intermarried couples because of a welcoming response to interfaith relationships. These institutions reach couples that synagogues might never see.

There are no prerequisites for joining the interfaith program at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington. Lisa Shapero, who runs the program founded just over a year ago, does not ask anything of couples who come to her classes. She doesn't question their homelife or religious intentions. Her program is run like a class in basic Judaism.

'We show people what it is like to be a Jew," says Shapero. The 28-year-old does not attempt to "persuade" participants to convert. "We try to be welcoming and not judgmental. If we don't reach

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OUTREACH

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out to people who may be potential Jews, then where can they turn?"

Erika Engelmann, who has been running interfaith workshops from the Jewish Social Service Agency of Greater Washington for almost 23 years, is expert in making interfaith couples feel comfortable. She explains that she teaches the couple hours. teaches the couple how to relate better.

"I open the doors for dialogue, '' Engelmann says. "Couples come to me to discuss issues — their own religion and heritage. I encourage them to talk about their feelings. I help the couple with communication and the skills of listening." Engelmann suggests that individuals usually bettle over an viduals usually battle over religious issues the same way they argue over buying a new couch.

When couples come for advice, Engelmann will not sug-gest that they join a synagogue or send children to Hebrew school. She will not advise family members to light Chanukah candles rather than decorating a Christmas tree.

Convert addition

The Reform movement claims to have grown by 15 percent in the past decade, largely because intermarried couples are counted as new members. Last year Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), suggested that the movement's outreach program be-come more aggressive. Schin-dler proposed that Judaism convert "non-church-going Christians" as well as non-Christians" as well as non-Jewish spouses of interfaith couples.

In 1979 Schindler first suggested that Reform Judaism should welcome interfaith welcome interfaith couples into congregations in hope that "the non-Jew would find Judaism a wonderful religion, decide to convert and bring up their child vert and bring up their child Jewish," explains Robin Far-quhar, the Washington region outreach coordinator for the UAHC.

Since that time, intermarried couples have been allowed to join Reform congregations as family members.

The UAHC has hired regional outreach directors. Farquhar is one of 14 such personnel from across the United States and Canada. "All we do is make it clear that we wel-come intermarriage," she

But a few months ago Jacob, outgoing president of the CCAR, told his colleagues in a paper presented to the UAHC Executive Board: "It is wrong to have a non-Jew leading us in prayer. If we take prayer and these words seriously, then we cannot have a Gentile mouth what they clearly do not believe."
The rabbi explained that there should be boundaries between Jew and non-Jew in the synagogue. "Outreach," he added "can never become Overreach."

Jacob argued that a non-

Jew should not be a member of a synagogue. "The synaof a synagogue. "The syn gogue is not a golf club or spa which we may share with others," he said. "The synagogue seeks to further very specific Jewish ideals and goals through a community which accepts them If individuals want to become members, they should become Jews. Our doors are always open.

Rabbi Joseph Glaser, CCAR's executive vice president who sent copies of dent who sent copies dent who sent copies abbis across the country, at-tached a cover letter stating: "I believe it is time to examine the whole phenomenon closely. Outreach, which is an essential program in times like these, nevertheless has taken on a life of its own."

The Conservative movement, which does not allow the non-Jewish spouse to be a member and forbids its clergy from performing an intermarriage, has also been reconsidering its outreach programs. Rabbi Miller of Washington's Adas Israel Congregation said in a recently published American Jewish Committee paper that Judaism's "first line of defense" must be "to emphasize the mitzvah of endogamy." The message that Jews should marry other Jews must be transmitted "with firmness but without rancor."

"The goal of outreach is

goal of outreach conversion, insists Rabbi Robert Abramson, director of education for the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. "Efforts only to make people feel comfortable do lose sight with where we are

coming from."
In 1985 the Conservative movement developed a threetiered response to inter-marriage. When prevention marriage. When prevention fails, the movement encourages the non-Jewish spouse of intermarried couple to convert. If the spouse has no interest in conversion to Ju-daism, the Conservative community provides an outreach program with the hope that the non-Jewish partner eventually choose to convert.

The non-Jewish spouse cannot become a synagogue member, join groups like a sisterhood, or perform ritual acts like aliyot to the Torahreading. But everyone is welcome to attend services and adult education programs. Some Conservative congreaddress synagogue gations mail to the entire family.

Miller acknowledges that total acceptance of Jewish spouses would be "very successful" in the short term, but she argues that it would "dilute our community with one-generation Jews who, like cut flowers, may bloom brightly for a while but do not have enough Jewish nourishment to last be-yond their own lifetime, to pass on to the next genera-tion." Calling for outreach tion." Calling for outreach that does not "sacrifice our standards," Miller suggests standards," Miller suggests that the process be renamed kiruv — the Hebrew word for bringing someone close, used in the Orthodox movement to describe efforts to increase observance among religious Jews.

The Orthodox community has no structured program for reaching out to interfaith

couples. "Anyone who is not Jewish who wishes to explore the option of becoming Jewish or studying about Juda-ism is warmly welcome," says Rabbi Joel Tessler of Beth Sholom Congregation in Potomac. "But Jewish law in no shape or form sanctions in-termarriage," he adds. "In-termarriage is seen as that which can destroy the Jewish community.

The number of interfaith relationships is comparatively low in Orthodox circles. Some surveys report that six percent of Orthodox Jews marry non-Jews. "As a result, outreach is not as immediate a problem for Orthodox rabbis as for others. Instead, Orthodox rabbis reach out to Jews who want to learn more about Judaism. That is the

pressure point.

Even so, the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), an Orthodox rabbinical organization, recently started an out-reach program. Its Commission on Intermarriage is described by the RCA as a kiruv program designed to discourage interfaith relationships. The RCA, says Rabbi Max Schreier, decided it could help prevent intermarriage if it scheduled Judaism workshops on college campuses.
"The highest rates of inter-

marriage come from college campuses," says Schreier. "We decided that was where we could make a difference." The RCA's program is designed to "show students the relevance of Jewish ideas. The result should be," he says, "that they should choose not to intermarry.

Educational approaches

All Conservative and Reform synagogues accept children of interfaith couples in their Hebrew schools on the principle that the children of interfaith families should not be rejected because of the parents' relationship. Seventy percent of Washington Conservative congregations ask that a student with a Jewish father undergo conversion before he or she reaches bar or

See OUTREACH, page 59

OUTREACH

From page 49

bat mitzvah age. Some area Reform congregations — which accept patrilineal descent — only ask that a child not attend another school that teaches a non-Jewish religion.

Does the presence of these children affect the content of the Hebrew school curriculum? Can teachers comfortably tell their students that Christmas is not a Jewish holiday if a significant number actually celebrate it with the approval of both parents? Will intermarried parents remove their children from synagogue Hebrew schools if Judaism is advocated too ardently?

One local rabbi, who asked not to be named, pointed out that clergy are not only afraid of offending these families and losing them from the Jewish community but also fear losing membership and tuition funds. "It comes down to money," the rabbi bluntly said.

Many Jewish leaders believe that intermarriage results from inadequate appreciation of Judaism in the home. Therefore, they question whether the Jewish community should spend time and money for interfaith programs that do not influence the home environment. The JCC allocates about \$60,000

annually for an interfaith program.

Executive director Lester Kaplan says that including JCC special holiday outreach programs, the figure reaches almost \$100,000 a year. JSSA sets aside about \$5,000 for its program. Critics believe that the Washington Jewish community could better spend these funds on programs such as outreach to the non-affiliated Jew, Jewish education, or assistance to Russian Jewish immigrants.

Phyllis Margolius, president of UJAF, insists that the expenditure is minimal in comparison to what is spent on other Jewish programs. Funding for outreach to interfaith couples must be considered, she says, in a broader context.

"The reality is there are a

lot of people in the community — some of whom are in all-Jewish households and others in interfaith households — who have a desire to be Jewish and pass on their Judaism." Margolius insists, "We need to open doors rather than close them. And when someone reaches out, we want to have a hand there."

"It's most important to maintain Jewish identity even among Jews who have a non-Jewish parent," says Rabbi Arthur Blecher of Congregation Beth Chai — a Humanist synagogue in Fairfax, Va. — who is one of a few Washington-area rabbis who

co-officiates at interfaith marriages. "If you tell them they are not Jewish, they will be lost. If you tell them they are Jewish, they may want to learn something more."

Traditional rabbis, says Blecher, mislead the Jewish community. They say that if parents have a Jewish home and keep kosher, their children won't intermarry.

"That," he says, "isn't true. By saying that, rabbis make the whole situation worse. When a couple's child does intermarry, the parents will feel that they have failed."

Blecher was ordained as a Conservative rabbi in 1975 at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. But he now feels that intermarried couples need not be urged to send children to Hebrew school or raise them Jewish. Before Blecher agrees to marry an interfaith couple, he schedules to meet with the parties a few times.

"I only want to make sure they are an appropriate couple. That they love each other and take the commitment seriously. I don't have any preconditions," he adds. "I don't have a hidden agenda."

Reform, Conservative and Orthodox movements, says Blecher, "are not adapting well to the decline in the importance of religion in society. Quoting Torah just isn't going to cut it in this generation."

MEMORANDUM



March 28, 1994

FROM:

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Dru Greenwood

COPY:

The enclosed is self explanatory. I don't know really whether we can do something here, at least we ought to try.





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

March 28, 1994 16 Nisan 5754

Mrs. Samuel Yochelson Apt. 824 East 4201 Cathedral Avenue Washington, DC 20016

Dear Mrs. Yochelson:

I am turning your letter over to the Director of our Outreach Division, Dru Greenwood. We do have a Regional Outreach Director in the New York area, and perhaps the "gentle, tactful," approach can be made. I really can't promise this, but in any event we will make certain that your name will not be involved in this approach.

It may well be that we won't be able to make contact without being too obvious, but certainly a try will be made.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Mrs. Samuel Yochelson

Apartment 824 East 4201 Cathedral Avenue

Washington, D.C. 20016

March 21, 1994

Pear Rabbi Schindler:

Io identify myselflam a friend of Donald and Edie Day of
Buffalo, New York. They are my closest
friends - and Donald can tell you why,
and of my deep dedication to JudaismYou will find me in who's who In the East,
who's who of American Women, etc. Clatest
editions).
Reading the latest
edition-"Spring, 1994-inspires me to ask
your ouldance and help.

Haven Conn. has an only son Ezra Mersey. a brilliant and gifted young architect. He is married to a lovely young woman who aspires to be a Metropolitan Opera singer. For me, sadly, she is Catholic - of Italian back ground - Religion has never been brought up. Do you think there is any one who might, perhaps cently tact-fully bring the delicate subject of conversion (without offending anyone) To their attention? Can this be done without bringing my name or my identity out in the open? - That might create havoc because this is delicate-I could not go to the wedding because it grieved me and I knew how deeply

it hurt my brother who is very ill - but.
he has been an enormously active person
in Jewish affairs - a scholar in his reformed
synagooge etc. in woodbridge Conw.

Here is Ezrar Carol Mersey's address; Ezra and Carol Mersey 225 Rector Place New York, N. Y. 10280

I think this is in Battery Park area-

Also, may I please have another copy of this last edition - specifying "Seek-ing Converts" It is beautiful!

Thank you with all my heart. Sincerely,

Katheyn M. Yochels on (202) - 244 - 1166

P.S. I am a senior, senior citizen.

My husband Dr. Samuel Yoch dsom,

was famous psychiatrist. Sadly, he died in

1976-His work in the criminal personality etc.

is a land-mark. Both of our children are in

who's who of America. It would mean so

much if we could be together on religion!

It troubles me - only Because I know

how much it mans to my brother etc
and to me. If they have children, it gives

us all a unity - an identity.

Thank you again I may even send you an article on Israeli art - That is my "expertise" Thank you again!





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



March 28, 1994 16 Nisan 5754

Mr. & Mrs. Donald S. Day Saperston & Day 1100 M & T Center 3 Fountain Plaza Buffalo, NY 14203

Dear Don and Edy:

A Mrs. Samuel Yochelson of Washington, DC contacted us with regard to some kind of sensitive problem in re a nephew of hers who intermarried. We will try to do what we can in this connection, although it is difficult to make contact since there is apparently no affiliation with any institution and it is difficult to drop in on someone out of the blue, as it were. Be that as it may, we will give it a try. Who can say no to someone who is so close to our Donald and Edy.

We hope that you had a joyous holiday and that both of you are well. We, and that means Rhea and I, continue to hold you in our highest affection.

Fondly,

Alexander M. Schindler

O who was

March 8, 1994 25 Adar 5754

Judy Simms 400 Hurlingham Avenue San Mateo, CA 94402

Dear Judy:

On my return from my travels, I had an opportunity to review the two proposals you were kind enough to share with me. I thank you for so doing, even as I thank you for your years of excellent work in outreach, a most critical area of our doing. I know your congregation honored you last year, and deservedly so, to give public expression of appreciation for all your efforts.

In regard to your proposal on unaffiliated Jews, you should know that even now our Committee (formerly a Task Force) on the Unaffiliated is actively looking into the issue of finances in conjunction with other barriers to affiliation for young adults. You undoubtedly are aware of our "Taste Of Judaism" program, a free, three session introduction, which is being piloted on one college campus this Spring.

As to our proselytizing in the non-Jewish world, we are really just beginning to look at the path this effort should take. As a very small beginning step, we are now teaching courses on Outreach at the New York and Cincinnati campuses of HUC-JIR, so that the future rabbis and other professionals of our movement understand their role in assertively inviting the choice of Judaism.

Beyond these early stages we still have much planning to do. I assure you that your proposals will be shared with the Outreach Commission and the Committee on the Unaffiliated.

Judy, do continue the fine work you do in Outreach. It is important to Reform Judaism. With warm regards and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS — CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

William & Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

March 7, 1994
24 Adar 5754

March 7, 1994

March 7,

MEMORANDUM

To: Rabbi Alexander Schindler

From: Dru Greenwood

I looked over the proposals that Judy Simms sent to you. (She had also sent a cc to me and to Alan Berg.)

First, as she says, she has contributed significantly to Outreach efforts over the years. She was honored by her congregation last year for all the wonderful work she has done.

Second, the two proposals are interesting in their concept, particularly in the emphasis they put on researching the techniques of others who have been doing active proselytizing more aggressively and recently than we have. The Committee on the Unaffiliated has been actively looking at the issue to money in conjunction with other barriers to affiliattion for young Jewish adults and the "Taste of Judaism" program—a free, 3-session introduction—is being piloted on one college campus this spring.

With regard to the second proposal, you might mention the courses on Outreach that are currently being taught at HUC in New York and Cincinnati. While they do not focus on the teachings of Christianity, they do emphasize the role of Jewish professionals in assertively inviting the choice of Judaism.

Finally, I would thank her for her great work and excellent suggestions as we move into a new phase of Outreach and let her Chairperson know that her proposals will be shared with the Outreach Commission Harris Gilbert and the Committee on the Unaffiliated.

Co-Chairperson Rabbi Leslie Gutterman

Vice Chairpersons Elizabeth Linkon Pamela Waechter

Director Dru Greenwood

MEMORANDUM



March 3, 1994

FROM:

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Dru Greenwood

COPY:

I received the enclosed from Judy Simms of San Mateo,
California. As you see, she indicates you are very
familiar with the work that she has been doing these past
10 years.

I would be grateful if you would read the two proposals which she has shared with me and let me have your reaction so that I can respond to Judy.

Many thanks.





RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

March 1, 1994 18 Adar 5754 By Ducker Compres

Judy Simms 400 Hurlingham Avenue San Mateo, CA 94402

Dear Ms Simms:

Just a note to advise that your letter of February 23rd was received during Rabbi Schindler's travels out of the country. He will be returning to his desk for but a few days before leaving for another trip in behalf of the UAHC. Your letter will, of course, be brought to his attention and I know that he will read your material with great interest and provide his comments and suggestions at the earliest possible time.

With kindest greetings, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller Assistant to the President

400 Hurlingham Ave. San Mateo, CA 94402

February 23, 1994

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler President, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 838 Fifth Ave. New York, NY. 10012

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

Having been involved very deeply with Outreach since you first called for such a program back in 1979, I was intrigued with your most recent call in its continuing evolution . I recall that at that time you planted the seeds for what you have now openly proposed in your speech at the Biennial this last year here in San Francisco; that of proselytizing not only the secular Jew but also extending it to the Non-Jewish populous, or to use your own words. "the unchurched".

Before I put my thoughts on paper as to "the approach" on both fronts, I would like to give you a short background of myself. I am a "naturalized" Jew. My husband, Ben, and I are members of Peninsula Temple Beth-El in San Mateo and have been for 25+ years. All our four children went through Religious school and confirmation here. Our two sons had their B'nei Mitzvot - one by Rabbi Sanford Rosen and the other by Rabbi Peter Rubinstein. I got involved in Outreach as early as 1981. We developed and piloted many programs some of which became integrated into the national program of the UAHC' Commissions on Jewish Reform Outreach which was under the directorship of Lydia Kukoff. Dru Greenwood who took over Lydia's post is very familiar with the work we have done over the passed ten years. We have willingly shared all our knowledge with the various branches of Judaism through our membership on the Council on Inter-Faith Families, established by the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation's Department of Community Development. About a year ago, I retired from Outreach. Although we do assist when needed in the transition, we felt it time for new blood to be infused. It takes dedication and continual energy to make Outreach functional and successful. Outreach is taking on renewed emphasis at our synagogue, under the guidance of our senior Rabbi, Alan Berg.

Attached are two proposals I have written on the approaches I believe should be studied and evaluated on the aforementioned subject.

- a) Proselytizing in the secular/unaffiliated Jewish world
- b) Jewish Proselytizing of the non-Jewish world

I look forward to your comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Judy Simms

INTRODUCTION: (One person's view of History)

One can see similarities in what transpired at the end of the 18th century and on into the 19th century, and today. With the explosion of the Age of Enlightenment, the doors to the European ghettos were opened and the Jewish community was exposed to the provocative writings and philosophical thoughts of such notables and Kant, Rousseau, Nietzsche The battle to retain the Jewish religious soul and community was on.

Towards the latter part of the 20th century we have experienced once again an explosion as great or even greater than that particular period in history. It is the Age of Global Communications and Technology. Through the electronic media, the instant availability of all forms of information available to everyone around the world is awesome and often overwhelming and confusing. It is no wonder then that we are having to constantly restructure our approach to ourselves first in order to survive, before we are able to approach the non-Jewish populous. The ever increasing numbers in our midst of marginal Jews, many of whom we have lost to indifference or secularism, are screaming at us. We are having to find new ways of showing this segment of our Jewish family the value of the heritage they have thrown aside for something more immediate and intriguing for the moment, often easier to emotionally and socially handle. This is the Era of Choices ad infinitum (e.g. already at our doorstep, 500 TV Channels to choose from!). Through all this, Judaism is having to retrench and compete in order to fight for the Jewish soul.

THE APPROACH

A) Proselytizing in the Secular/Unaffiliated Jewish World

The "how-to's" are many with prototypes staring us in the face every day. Observe the techniques of the small extremist/fanatical religious groups operating abundantly on our college campuses. These people know the subject they are going after (for our purpose, a marginal Jew). They have studied the Jewish philosophy and belief system, and know well their approach to proselytizing. Observe the Jews for Jesus technique (soft sell). I suggest that one should look at the tools and techniques of various groups that are successful. Learning what works helps us develop our own strategy, one of which I would like to talk about.

How does one go about reaching the minds of our young Jewish population - the Jews of tomorrow? By establishing beachheads on campuses using a pod system. To start with, secular Jews or Jews who do not identify any longer with their heritage and who declare themselves as agnostic or atheists, will immediately shy away from anything that smells Jewish i.e. religious personage, synagogue, Hillel House, Jewish organizations(donations!). Many of these Jews are turned off by the aspect they have convinced themselves is typically Jewish, that of money. Talk to many and they will tell you that is all synagogues and Jewish organizations are about and that they cannot afford it! To reach these people at campus level it will take another contemporary also on campus who is Jewish; that has been trained through a In-Reach course offered by the UAHC at their respective synagogue on how the approach such Jews once they are themselves in college. The teaching of such a course can be started as early as Junior and Senior grades of High school levels. Such techniques as the following are good initial points of contact. Invitations to dinner, a quiet get-together, going to a game with others of the same genre, are some of the ways one can use

break ground. From there in a non pressured unobtrusive manner and with time, develop a friendship to where one can draw out the person and make him/her start questioning themselves as to who they are and what they stand for. Often one can point out to them that much of who they are is Jewish. It is the attempt to start a thought process within that person which will carry on a lifetime. It is the "Wake-Up Call". However, the way to success lies with the training and strength of the Wake-Up Caller's own Jewish knowledge and belief. It may sound a hard road to attempt, however, we must start in a small way - yes, ONE person can make a difference through the ripple effect. I don't believe a grand scheme or battalion sized programs will have the same effect as the non pressure, one-on-one approach. It can pyramid through time. It is a program using lay persons, contemporaries, of those one is attempting to reach. Developing pods of Jewish In-reach on our college and university campuses is the right place to start in my view. Most students are vulnerable at that age and ready to explore new ideas and other "-isms" they are suddenly finding themselves exposed to. How can one measure this kind of program's success or failure - not for years! To use an oft used but relevant expression - to save one Jewish life is to save a world. In our society we have paralegal, paramedic, para-rabbinic persons - why not have a Jewish lay para-Inreach corps??

B) Jewish Proselytizing the Non-Jewish World

Before getting into the Jewish approach of proselytizing the non-Jew or unchurched, it is important to make the following observation. Whereas the Christian clergy have a profound knowledge of the Old Testament (part of the Christian Bible), which are also the Jewish Holy Scriptures, most of our clergy not having been exposed to it, know little or nothing about the Christian Bible's New Testament, unless they have individually come to know it due to personal curiosity In today's world, one cannot even think of proselytizing without having a minimal foundation of it since most of the population on this continent come from a Christian heritage. Therefore, before attempting to enter this work, our clergy have to also have a strong knowledge of Christian theology so they know something about who they are approaching in order to be able to debate the issues as they are presented. Above all they have to be able to correct in a logical manner the many misconceptions about Judaism which are built in to the Christian dogma. Some of our clergy are quite lost in such instances as during an ecumenical debate, because they do not have the knowledge or idea of the source being used by the Christian, in the debate. I realize that learning or reading someone else's Holy Scriptures runs counter to Judaism. We are going to have to abandon that philosophy if we are to actively enter and engage the non-Jewish world. Rabbis whom I think of has having a sound background in Christian theology are among the likes of Rabbi Davies, resident Swig Chair of Jewish Studies at the Jesuit University of San Francisco. There are other Rabbis who out of their own interest in order to keep abreast of the competitive religious marketplace, are knowledgeable about Christianity (e.g. Rabbi Peter Rubinstein of Central Synagogue for instance). These are the kinds of persons who could well assist in developing a required course to be taught to all Rabbinical students. Eventually, I believe one will also have to include a course on Moslem studies. Today, in this challenging era, our clergy have to be armed with as much knowledge as they can absorb in order to help them stave off the growing loss of numbers within the Jewish population. One has to be able to go on the attack in order to defend. The Christian world is doing the same thing in order to capture the Non-Christian partner in a mixed Jewish marriage. We are missing the boat! Their welcome to the Jewish partner in the church community is no less warm, attractive and inviting as ours may be to the Non-Jew in the

synagogue. The big edge they have is their knowledge of Jewish Scriptures through the Old Testament, often used as a drawing card.

The next question is - should we soft sell or hard sell Judaism? I believe that soft sell, such as the Mormon approach is the least offensive, yet the most productive. Have you ever seen any of the ads they run on TV. on Sunday mornings? They are about the values of Family, Customs, Morality and Ethics - one only knows that "this moment has been brought to you by Christ's Church of Latter Day Saints, the Mormon Church." at the closing of the ad. In that 30 second spot they have given us a small peek into their world. The Jewish community could have something along those lines in order to expose and teach the non-Jewish public about who we are. We should require all our synagogues to become as involved as possible in their respective secular communities, doing mitzvot and not hesitating to mention that such ongoing acts are required of Jews during their lifetime. I believe that at the inception of becoming visibly active in the non-Jewish world, we are going to have to do some studying ourselves first, so that we can learn to talk about with pride (yes, even brag) about who we are, culturally, philosophically, and religiously. We have to learn how to dismantle the negative Jewish myths entrenched in the Non-Jewish World. But most critical to the success of this venture is to first learn and know about whom we want to approach and address.

SUMMARY:

Before tackling any of these programs, we are first going to have to learn a great deal about those we are attempting to reach, in order to act. It is my earnest view, that the approaches I have presented are some of the ways one is going to be able to start achieving the goals Rabbi Schindler first called for in 1979 and upon which he has further amplified by calling for their renewal and expansion, during the 1993 U.A..H.C. Biennial in San Francisco, CA.

Respectfully submitted for exploration and evaluation in the ongoing development of InReach for the 1990's.

By: Judy Simms, Member of Peninsula Temple Beth-El, San Mateo, CA 94403

400 Hurlingham Ave. San Mateo, CA 94402 Phone: 415-344-2877

CC: 1) Rabbi Alan Berg, Peninsula Temple Beth-El, San Mateo, CA 94403.

2) Dru Greenwood, Director, UAHC Commission on Jewish Outreach, NY.



Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS — CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

William & Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK , NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

18 Adar 5754

March 1, 1994

MEMORANDUM

To:

Edith J. Miller

From:

Dru Greenwood

My read on the supposed trend among rabbis with eight or more years experience is that what they've "been told" is made up. While I know of no studies that have been done to measure attitudes or practices in Outreach among rabbis, my experience is that no such generalization is possible. Efforts of Outreach are very complex and are handled by different rabbis differently. They need to be evaluated individually.

I also wonder if the comment was meant to be "eight years or <u>less</u>". I've heard complaints that the newer rabbis are less likely to officiate at intermarriages (which is not what the question asks.) Again, I believe it is individual. You might mention the Denver Outreach Internship and the Outreach class at the New York school. In both cases, we enable students to see very positive models of active Outreach and to grapple personally with the decisions they will make.

Hope this is helpful.

Chairperson Harris Gilbert

Co-Chairperson Rabbi Leslie Gutterman

Vice Chairpersons Elizabeth Linkon Pamela Waechter

Director Dru Greenwood

MEMORANDUM



February 28, 1994

FROM:

Edith J. Miller

TO:

Dru Greenwood

In a recent communication, someone made the following comment:

"It is interesting to note that in the process of searching for a new rabbi, we have been told that those with eight plus years experience tend to be more 'conservative or traditional' about not only religious practices, but in their willingness to actively participate in bringing in children of interfaith marriages, and/or the Jewish spouse.

(This is undoubtedly a mistake, it should be non-Jewish spouse.) I hope this is not the case and that your efforts will result in a swing in the opposite direction, so that new rabbis graduating today have a better grip on reality, at least as that reality exists on the West Coast."

Can you give me some data on this? Any information you can provide will be most helpful.



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





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

February 28, 1994 17 Adar 5754

Judy H. Hersher President - Congregation B'nai Israel 3600 Riverside Boulevard Sacramento, CA 95818

Dear Ms Hersher:

Your letter of February 14th has reached our office during Rabbi Schindler's absence. He is overseas for a number of meetings and will not return to his desk until next week. Be assured your letter will be brought to his immediate attention.

I know he will be thrilled by your comments concerning Judy. She is a wonderful young woman and will undoubtedly be a superb rabbi. You have very good taste!

Your comments about the difference between rabbis who have been out in the field for eight years or more and their younger colleagues are very interesting. I don't know who conveyed these comments to you, but I shall certainly try to find out what the reality is across the country. I can think of many rabbis who tend to be more "conservative or traditional" about religious practices, but that does not mean that they are unwilling to participate in bringing into Judaism children of interfaith marriages and/or the non-Jewish spouse. I am going to ask our Outreach Department if they have any information on the difference in approach to outreach among our younger rabbis and those who have been out in the field for some years.

Again, let me assure you that your letter will be brought to Rabbi Schindler's attention on his return.

With kindest greetings and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller Assistant to the President



Congregation B'nai Israel

3600 Riverside Boulevard Sacramento, California 95818 (916)446-4861

February 14, 1994

JUDY H. HERSHER

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

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

I have been meaning to respond to your letter of November 9, 1993, but with little success until today. While we have now begun the process of searching for a new senior rabbi, it is likely that two years from now we will be looking for an assistant or junior rabbi and, at that time, perhaps your daughter Judy, whose name I like, would be willing to apply.

It is interesting to note that in the process of searching for a new rabbi, we have been told that those with eight plus years experience tend to be more "conservative" or "traditional" about not only religious practices, but in their willingness to actively participate in bringing in children of interfaith marriages, and/or the Jewish spouse. I hope this is not the case and that your efforts will result in a swing in the opposite direction, so that new rabbis graduating today have a better grip on reality, at least as that reality exists on the West Coast.

Best wishes,

JUDY H. HERSHER President, B'nai Israel

JHH:pv WEST-81998

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What when the second se

March 1, 1994 18 Adar 5754

From: Edie

TO: AMS

Page 3 of enclosed release very upsetting. Dan F called Lois Goldrich at United Synagogue and she apologized for not editing release will speak to Abramson to rewrite scenario and use more care in future... we don't want to send out a release to respond, we have to work together with more care and concern for one another... an error in judgment..



Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS — CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

William & Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

February 25, 1994 Purim!!

MEMORANDUM

To:

Rabbi Alexander Schindler

From:

Dru Greenwood

cc:

Rabbi Dan Freelander

Don't know if you saw this, but I thought you'd be interested. Unfortunately, I don't think it's meant in the mode of Purim.

See particularly the marked scenario on page 3. Would you like me to call/write Jerry Epstein or anyone else? I'm sure they didn't realize how offensive such wording would be to the "Reform (intermarried)" movement.

Chairperson Harris Gilbert

Co-Chairperson Rabbi Leslie Gutterman

Vice Chairpersons Elizabeth Linkon Pamela Waechter

Director Dru Greenwood



CONTACT: LOIS GOLDRICH EXT. 2601

The Association of Conservative Congregations

FEBRUARY 9, 1994...FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TRAVELING WORKSHOPS STRESS INTERMARRIAGE PREVENTION

Insisting that intermarriage can be countered only if we take active steps to prevent it, three leaders of The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism visited targeted areas throughout the United States and Canada early this month to spread their message. Inspired by the success of last year's workshops, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, Executive Vice-President, Rabbi Robert Abramson, Director of Education, and Jules Gutin, Director of the Youth Department, once again met with educators, rabbis, youth leaders and lay leaders in major cities throughout North America.

According to Marc Sternfeld, Chairman of the Commission on the Prevention of Intermarriage, which sponsored the workshops, "taking the show on the road" has proved an effective way to reach large numbers of people on their home territory. Said Mr. Sternfeld: "The effort must be ongoing. We must continue to emphasize the fact that those who work with our youth must make an active effort to inhibit intermarriage both by speaking out against it and by giving our youngsters positive reasons to remain Jewish."

The strategy appeared to work extremely well, according to Rabbi Abramson. Far from being intimidated, participants were "extremely honest and comfortable discussing

these issues." He also noted that attendees at every session were serious in their commitment to deal directly with the subject matter.

Using demonstration lessons incorporating techniques ranging from open discussions to role playing exercises, the speakers elicited enthusiastic participation from the rabbis, lay leaders, educators and youth directors who attended the sessions. According to the speakers, the concerns and questions that arose in each city were remarkably similar. For example, one commonly asked question concerned the charge that a refusal to interdate somehow constitutes "discrimination."

"People need a forum in which they can discuss these issues openly and honestly," suggested Gutin. "They also need to know that someone has thought through these issues and is working to produce materials they can actually use in their work. It is obviously not an easy thing to speak against intermarriage in a classroom or group situation where there are children who are themselves the product of intermarriage." For this reason, participants were "extremely gratified" to find that materials addressing these difficult issues are already available and geared to the appropriate age group.

In an exercise designed to sensitize participants to the notion of "consequences," the Director of the Youth Department led attendees through a series of questions intended to convey the message that no action is taken in a vacuum; rather, every act entails a series of consequences. For example, participants were asked, first, if they would date someone from out of town and, second, what the ramifications of such a relationship would be. According to Gutin, it then became clearer to participants that interdating, as well, is not an isolated act but one that necessarily involves a whole range of consequences.

In another exercise, characterized by discussion of several open-ended hypothetical scenarios, Rabbi Epstein challenged lay leaders to talk about the issues directly rather than "leaving them solely to the professionals."

"It is vital that our lay leaders confront the challenges produced by the rising rate of intermarriage," he stated. "These scenarios are designed to raise important questions, so that our congregational leaders can begin to understand the implications of their actions and choose between alternatives as they formulate synagogue policies."

Finally, Rabbi Abramson proposed for discussion a holiday scenario in which a Reform (intermarried) family that celebrates one *seder* has to choose between observing the *seder* and celebrating Easter, which that year happens to fall on the same day. According to the presenters, definitive answers were in short supply. Rabbi Abramson also worked with participants on an interactive theater technique to empower parents to take a stand against interdating. The technique combines elements of support, rehearsal, and enabling.

Noting that there are no easy answers to any of the problems posed at the sessions, Rabbi Epstein stressed that we nevertheless must use our classrooms and our youth programs to address the issues in a proactive manner. In other words, teachers and youth directors must not be afraid to take issue with and dispute the growing conception that intermarriage is a "fact of life."

The Commission on the Prevention of Intermarriage was established in 1991 to develop programs to help strengthen Jewish identity. For further information on the workshops or on materials published by the commission, call 212-533-7800, ext. 2207.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, established in 1913, is the association of 800 Conservative congregations in North America. With 2 million members, the Conservative Movement is the largest branch of the Jewish faith.

MEMORANDUM

COPY

February 10, 1994

FROM: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO: Dru Greenwood

Enclosed, the latest issue of the United Israel Bulletin. The lead article therein is about Aime Palliere. You may recall my talking about that book at the recent Outreach Commission meeting.

Historically, it is a little bit inaccurate as far as I am concerned. In 1926 I was only a year old and couldn't possibly have written an "inspiring article" on Palliere's book. I wrote it in the early '40's, but it was the first article of mine that was ever published.

What I did not know is that Palliere was aware of that review. Note his introductory commentary to the 1947 article which included the United Israel Publication.

My father was interested in United Israel principally because it was an outreach organization intended to bring non-Jews to Judaism and to welcome them appropriately, but had some basic ideological reservations about the approach which this organization took. It was a little bit too "kooky," non-mainstream and hence, father ultimately disassociated himself from it. Still, David Horowitz, the founding guru of this organization still keeps sending me his bulletins.

Anyway, I thought you might be interested in reading this.



O when

February 3, 1994 22 Shevat 5754

Ms. Annie DeCourcy P.O. Box 391 Wolfeboro Falls, NH 03896-0391

Dear Annie DeCourcy:

Your wonderful expression of gratitude was totally unnecessary and absolutely beautiful. The thank you from the bottom of your heart was more than sufficient and means a great deal to me.

The cachepot is truly lovely and I thank you for your thoughtfulness.

Please do keep in touch and let me know how you are faring in your quest. I will be interested and also don't hesitate to write if you have any special questions to pose.

With every good wish and repeated thanks, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller
Assistant to the President

O Whowards

January 21, 1994 9 Shevat 5754

Ms. Annie DeCourcy P.O. Box 391 Wolfeboro Falls, NH 03896-0391

Dear Ms. DeCourcy:

Your letter of January 16 has reached my desk and I hasten to respond. Please be assured we want to be of assistance to you in making contact with a synagogue where you might receive guidance in pursuing your interest in Judaism.

In looking at a map I located Wolfeboro and Wolfeboro Center and assume the Falls are nearby. The closest of our synagogues is Temple B'nai Israel in Laconia but they do not have a full-time rabbi, they are served by a student on a very part-time basis. I will, however, share your letter with Student Rabbi Rochelle Sabath.

Not too far away, albeit not as close as Laconia, is Temple Beth Jacob, 67 Broadway, Concord, NH 03301. I am sharing your letter with Rabbi Ned Soltz and you may wish to write or telephone him at 603-228-8581.

We have an Outreach Coordinator in our Union's Northeast Council office in Brookline, MA, Ms. Paula Brody. She works with area congregations as well as with people who seek to learn more about our faith. I am also sharing your letter with her.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions to pose.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller
Assistant to the President

01/16/94

Annie DeCourcy P.O. Box 391 Wolfeboro Falls, N.H. 03896-0391

Union of American Hebrew Congregations 838 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10021

I am seeking a synagogue in my area that would be willing to accept at present, a non-Jew. How I live and what I wish to be are one in the same; however, I need the assistance and guidance of role models. May you be so kind as to help me.

Thank You,

Annie DeCourcy

Laconia. Rachelle Sabath

John





RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

What he was the same of the sa

January 31, 1994 19 Shevat 5754

Mr. & Mrs. Larry D. Prins 13406 Vista del Prado San Antonio, TX 78216

Dear Larry and Donna:

I admire your determination to choose Judaism and I appreciate your forbearance. Sometimes, alas, institutional needs and personal needs clash and it is difficult to resolve them.

Nonetheless, I am sending your letter to Deborah Stein, who is the Outreach consultant for Reform Judaism in Texas in the hope that she will find that alternative road to Judaism which you seek, or perhaps even be able to persuade the San Antonio Temple to make an exception in your case.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

BCd: DEBBIE STEIN
SW COUNCEL



Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregations 838 Fifth Avenue New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

We have been regular visitors at Temple Beth El in San Antonio for well over a year. We believe in Judaism. We have been living a Jewish life. In a recent sermon, the Beth El Rabbi described your "Call to Proslytize", as he heard you speak at a convention in San Francisco.

We enrolled in a conversion class at Beth El in January of 1993. We dropped out of class after two weeks for several reasons. The primary reason was that Donna has an incurable back problem. Sitting in class for two and one half hours caused intolerable pain. Secondly, in addition to sixteen weeks of classes, there is a rigorous schedule of required activities, which conflicted with my work schedule. Thirdly, there is required individual and group counseling. This may be necessary for young couples considering interfaith marriage. However, we found Judaism after a long search and our decision to "Choose Judaism" was not of a sudden nature. And finally, we felt out of place being middle aged in a class with primarily young couples.

Beth El has made it very clear that all prospective converts are required to successfully complete this course. Since this is the only Reform Temple in San Antonio, we have no other options.

Although we discontinued attending class, we have continued to study. We have read nearly all the required reading for the class (14 books) plus several others and our studies continue.

We are members of ARZA. We made a contribution to Beth El recently, which displayed our appreciation for allowing us to attend their services.

Page 2 - Rabbi Schindler

Several years ago, our only child converted to Judaism. However, he was in Houston, where the method for conversion was much less stringent.

We hope you are able to detect our sincerity. We feel Jewish, and in many ways consider ourselves Jewish, however, we would like to make it official.

Considering what we understand to be your viewpoint on conversion, we are hoping that you may be able to provide us with an alternative to consider.

We thank you for your time and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Larry D. Prins 13406 Vista del Prado San Antonio, TX. 78216

Donna R. Prins





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

January 31, 1994 19 Shevat 5754

Ms Janet Kahn c/o Temple Israel 2215 Mahan Drive Tallahassee, FL 32308

Dear Janet:

Thank you for your letter of January 14th which reached me on my return to the office.

Needless to say, I was delighted with it. Thanks to your efforts, my intuitive perception was confirmed.

I also shared your letter with the members of our Outreach Commission, or at least its Executive Committee which met this past Sunday, and they shared my enthusiasm.

I was delighted to hear from you and to receive this good news. Thank you very much for your thoughtfulness in sending it to me.

Sincerely,

. Alexander M. Schindler

January 14,1994

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler UAHC President 838 Fifth Avenue NewYork, New York 10021-7064 out of count

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

I have been actively involved in Outreach efforts for the past ten years, locally as congregational Outreach Chair for two congregations (Pensacola, FL and currently Tallahassee, FL), regionally as S.E. Regional Outreach Chair and nationally by serving on the Executive Committee of the UAHC Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach. The work is challenging and exceedingly rewarding.

In keeping with your vision proclaimed in 1978 and repeated again this year, I thought you may be interested in learning about what is happening in a rather small Jewish community in the South. Serving the adult population, Temple Israel of Tallahassee, a congregation of fewer than 350 families, has had on-going Adult Education classes, Torah study, and private studies with Rabbi Stanley Garfein for conversion purposes. On January 6, 1994, we held our first (to my knowledge) Introduction to Judaism class. Rather than serve only those already in our midst and those bound to us through intermarriage, we chose to advertise in the secular press hoping to reach unaffiliated Jews and possibly a FEW religiously non-preferenced.

We ran our advertisement for the 18-week course two times in the local newspaper and sent a flyer to members of the congregation. To us, the response was overwhelming. Thirty-eight people attended the Orientation and Registration meeting held in December and by the first class, we had sixty-two paid-up, enthusiastic registrants. Of these sixty-two, only approximately one-fourth are temple members, primarily interfaith couples. Of the remaining three quarters, over half are non-Jews and MANY have no Jewish ties (ie intermarriage). They state they've always been curious about Judaism. At least fifteen participants have already expressed an interest in conversion.

I concur our doors should not be closed, giving the impression that we are, to use your words, "an exclusive club for born Jews or that one must be married to a Jew in order to be welcomed by us". A simple advertisement stating OPEN TO THE PUBLIC may be all it takes!

Thank you for sharing your vision.

Sincerely,

Janet Kahn

cc Dru Greenwood





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10am & 6pm sday-Small Meetings Information



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Cable 33



If you are -

- · wondering about raising your children as Jews in an intermarriage
 - or considering conversion to Judaism
 - · or part of an interfaith relationship
 - · or interested in learning more about Judaism

Orientation meeting Thursday, Dec. 16th at 7:30 P.M.

Discussions on the following topics:

Jewish holiday & life cycle observances, Jewish history, theology and Hebrew Fee for this 18 week class is \$20 plus the cost of books.

For more information call Janet Kahn 385-7804 or Al Sulkes 488-9190 (days)

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3	Mail bottom portion only by December 10th.
Name(s):	Phone #:
Address:	
	Please one 🔲
☐ Hebrew	only (free) 7:00-8:00 P.M.
☐ Introdu	ction to Judaism (\$20 per person) 8:00-9:30 P.M.
☐ Both	
	Total Enclosed \$

Checks payable to Temple Israel Mail to: Temple Israel, 2215 Mahan Drive, Tal. 32308

Outreast.

January 27, 1994 15 Shevat 5754

Ms. Coventry Kessler 5 Herrick Place Durham, NC 27707

Dear Ms. Kessler:

As we do not have a UAHC Religious Practices Committee, two copies of your January 10 letter reached my desk. Please forgive this delayed response, but I have been travelling far and wide for some weeks now visiting a number of Union congregations since early January. This is my first opportunity to reply to you.

Rabbi Friedman was correct when he told you there in no ritual which provides for one to "officially" renounce their Judaism, be they a born Jew or one who has chosen to convert to our faith.

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, of Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion, our seminary, has written a very fine article on "Being a Jew at Christmas Time." A copy is enclosed herewith for your perusal.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Rabbi Frank Fisher Rabbi John Friedman

loc. Dru

Being a Jew at Christmas Time

Thank my fourth-grade teacher, Miss Schneider, for my introduction to Christmas. As public school teachers go, she was, I grant you, something of a religious fanatic (among other things, she held Gospel study classes in pupils' homes every Wednesday after school). I will never forget the day I sat on my front porch watching some twenty or so of my classmates follow Miss Schneider into the home of my neighbor and best friend just two doors down from me. Joining the class was "the thing to do," and I couldn't do it; I was Jewish. To be sure, with what can only be described as conversionary zeal, Miss Schneider tried regularly to "remedy" my religious status, a project that led my parents to remove me from her classroom by February. But in December, I was still a Miss Schneider ward. And that is where I encountered Christmas.

I was later to find out, however, that when it came to Christmas, all my teachers were more or less Miss Schneider clones. Every year, as autumn slipped steadily into winter, even the most humanly sensitive, Constitution-loving, and open-minded teachers became carried away by the spirit of what we now call, euphemistically, the "holiday season." By early November, the classroom was already being turned into a swiftly accelerating vehicle for welcoming Christmas. By late November, we had heard the Christmas story several times over. Red and green decorations floated lazily down from ceilings and doorways. A large decorated tree outfited the main hall, and a smaller one greeted visitors entering the principal's office. In art class, you painted Christmas scenes; in English class,

RABBI LAWRENCE A. HOFFMAN is professor of liturgy at the New York branch of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Among his latest works is a revision of Rabbi Morris Kertzer's classic, What Is a Jew?, an introduction to Judaism that will be released by Macmillan in the spring of 1993.

FALL 1992 357

ou composed Christmas stories; in music, you sang Christmas carols. A uge school-wide Christmas assembly, followed by a gala Christmas party, tarked the end of the first semester, but everybody returned that night to ear the school's crack choir present its annual Christmas concert.

As welcome as I was in my country, there were certain times when I susected that as a Jew I didn't quite fully belong. Heading up the list of such mes was the annual Christmas fever that swept through almost everyone knew, but passed me by. None of the Jews in my small town kept any hristmas customs in those days. The close-knit Jewish community, tiny nough to know everybody else's business, would have looked askance such a thing. Having a Christmas tree, for instance, would have been lewed as but one step short of apostasy. In larger communities though, small minority of Jews did decorate their own trees, hang stockings and ive gifts. It seemed the American (if not the Jewish) thing to do.

It was, and still is, no picnic explaining to your children that Jews don't elebrate Christmas. They stare at you in disbelief. Everyone keeps Christmas, they plead. It is the topic of every television program, the display in very store window. The Radio City Music Hall features its annual Christmas spectacle and the Metropolitan Museum of Art displays Christmas tifacts. What do you mean, We don't celebrate Christmas? Does that make s the Grinch? maybe Scrooge?

When my children were young, a well-meaning baby-sitter looking to be eative helped each child assemble a tiny Christmas tree, made of colored aper, cellophane, and fallen branches collected from the wintry outdoors. he children beamed at us with glee when we came home. What does a ıbbi's family do with a pair of ready-made, personally constructed Christias trees? Certainly not call them Chanukah bushes and compound the n of syncretism, doing injustice both to Judaism and to Christianity at ne same time (fine irony to the "Chanukah bush," given the fact that hanukah arose as a festival celebrating the Hasmonean fight to keep Juaism free of foreign religious influence). Patiently, quietly, and with all ne love we could muster, we explained to our children that as much as we dored the work of their hands, the trees had to go. We were Jews; Christnas trees were for Christians; it would be wrong for us to have them rrong because it was false to Judaism, and wrong because it made light f Christmas. Chanukah was important for Jews; Christmas was sacred for hristians. But you can't be both Jewish and Christian, and you can't have oth Chanukah and Christmas. It is one or the other.

Another year, Nick, our neighbor across the way, came to the door announce his plans to show up in everybody's living room some-

where around midnight, dressed in his Santa Claus suit. Did we want to be included in the list of stops? The kids would love it, he assured us. We thanked him, but reminded him we were Jews. He knew that, but explained that lots of Jews would be on his list. What does a religious commitment to Judaism have to do with keeping or not keeping Christmas? For that matter, what does Christmas have to do with Christianity? For Nick, as for his Jewish takers, Christmas is just a fun time with music, parties, and wishes for world peace. Go argue with that. Scrooge indeed!

For Jews like me who take Judaism seriously, however, that is not what Christmas is. It is a feast on the Christian calendar celebrating the incarnation of the son of God. I take seriously the religious significance Christmas has (or should have) for Christians. Since I'm not a Christian, it is self-evident to me that I cannot observe the occasion, not in good conscience, anyway, even though life would be a lot simpler if I could.

Historians tell us that Christmas was not always the cultural fulcrum that balances Christian life. There was a time when Christians knew that the paschal mystery of death and resurrection was the center of Christian faith. It was Easter that really mattered, not Christmas. Only in the consumerconscious nineteenth century did Christmas overtake Easter, becoming the centerpiece of popular piety. Madison Avenue marketed the change, and then colluded with the entertainment industry to boost Christmas to its current calendrical prominence.

To be sure, my Jewish festival of Chanukah, which falls about the same time as Christmas, is now being hyped as a sort of Jewish equivalent — as in "Chanukah bushes." It doesn't matter when Chanukah falls. Since it is pegged to the Hebrew calendar, it may occur any time from late November to late December. Regardless of which it is, people wish me a "happy holiday" around December 25, as if real holidays ought to happen then.

I have lit Chanukah candles happily and dutifully for almost half a century; some of my fondest family memories consist of standing with my arms around my children as we sang Chanukah songs in the flickering candlelight. But the religious part of me regrets the fact that fewer and fewer Jews observe the High Holy Days, Shabbat, and even Passover (which used to weigh in as everyone's favorite), while more and more identify Judaism as a gift-giving cult centered on Chanukah. In any event, the Chanukah hype won't work. It may sell merchandise, and even inspire Peter, Paul, and Mary to write "Light One Candle" — a terrific song, by the way — but it won't make Chanukah into a Jewish version of Christmas, and it won't address the alienation of so many Jews who genuinely like the Christmas they see and feel all around them: a Christmas that they cannot share.

Where I live, Christmas starts officially at the end of November, with Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. Cities outside New York schedule their own parades then, but Macy's version typifies the genre. It takes no semiotic genius to get the message. The parade route winds down Broadway following its own "Yellow Brick Road" to the shopping mecca on Herald Square. Bringing up the rear, but leading the way for the folk who follow the official parade route is Santa Claus, who will soon reappear daily at malls around the country promising goodies to good little children.

I am no Scrooge. I like Santa Claus too. I like the Christmas music — even the bad music — that surrounds the Santa ritual; I like the crisp winter weather, and the bell ringers, and all the rest of the paraphernalia that make most people look forward to December 25. I like my neighbors' wreaths and their Christmas trees, and the mistletoe, and above all, the genuinely religious Christmas carols that you can hardly hear any more because they are being replaced by soppy songs that melt down the Christian message of this holy day as quickly as snow in a heat wave. Great music is great music, after all; I enjoy it.

It is, in fact, my liking (or not liking) of Christmas that constitutes the key to the role of Christmas in American culture. By contrast, I neither like nor dislike Easter, just as I have no opinion of, say, Ramadan. As a Jew, I naturally evaluate my own holy days, but I generally feel compulsion to appraise the sacred calendar of others. Christmas is an exception to this rule. American mores expect me, even as a non-Christian, to welcome Christmas as a positive good in my life. Not to appreciate the Christmas spirit is considered a cultural sin. An examination of that sin will tell us a good deal about what Christmas has become.

have in mind three manifestations of Christmas in popular culture. The first two are modern-day fairy tales depicting the ultimate triumph of good over evil: the Broadway hit, Annie, and what, as I write, is being billed as "the summer movie of all time," Batman Returns. To say that both have been box-office bonanzas is to be guilty of understatement. They obviously touch something very deep in our collective cultural psyche.

In both, Christmas appears as a symbol of the myth of American virtue. The Batman theme is simple and direct: the forces of good arrayed against the forces of evil. Unlike real life, however, from beginning to end, and no matter how bad things appear in the middle, not a soul in the movie theater has any doubt about who the final victor will be. It is only a matter of time until Batman wins and Penguin loses. And at the end, the protagonist lives

happily ever after. That is the nature of fairy tales. They portray things as we wish they were, not as they are. They may be absolutely ghoulish in the hideous trials to which the heroes are exposed, but in the end, Cinderella marries the prince, Little Red Riding Hood escapes the wolf, Hansel and Gretel don't get baked in the oven, and Batman restores order to Gotham city.

What makes Batman interesting for our purposes is the fact that the hero's triumph is portrayed against the backdrop of Christmas. The entire movie is set in the Christmas season. In his last line of the film, Batman links his own success at foiling the Penguin with the underlying theme of Christmas. "Merry Christmas," he says, and good will toward men — and women." Christmas thus functions as a cultural trope for the way we wish things were, or better yet, the way we like to pretend things are. In the actual world bad things actually do happen to good people; real-life Penguins do prowl our land. The good-will quotient measured in the absence of ethnic, racial, and religious rivalries is rather low right now. But the myth of Christmas allows us to put aside untidy evidence from newspaper head-lines and to believe instead that all's right in Gotham. Christmas stands symbolically for a secular version of redemption: Jesus doesn't save; Batman does. If evil has been eradicated it must be Christmas, goes the logic, as in fact it is in Batman Returns.

The evidence from Annie is even more transparent. Annie is an orphan, who is adopted by Daddy Warbucks. Along the way, evil raises its ugly head in the shape of the manager of the orphanage and her brother, who virtually kidnap Annie by posing as her parents. But in the end, their scheme fails, and Annie returns to her wealthy benefactor. As in Batman, Annie too has been written so that it culminates in Christmas. In the very last scene, not only Annie, but all the other orphans celebrate a lavish party in Daddy Warbucks' mansion. If Batman is the myth of good conquering evil in general, Annie is the application of that myth to American values in particular. Daddy Warbucks is a self-made man, a shining example of what hard work and business enterprise will get you. Never mind the fact that he made his money as a war profiteer — the play passes silently over the significance of his name, "Warbucks." The point is that Warbucks made it on his own. He hobnobs with FDR and the White House crowd, gets J. Edgar Hoover to unleash the FBI in his search for Annie, and lives the life of luxury that is the stuff of the American dream. But the message of Annie is precisely that those dreams can come true, if only we are hard-working and virtuous. Annie, after all, escapes the orphanage.

Again, we are dealing with pure myth. In real life, almost no one is self-

made any more. When Annie came out, it is true, Wall Street millionaires abounded, and law firms were hiring first-year graduates at astronomical sums. But most of America was getting poorer, not richer. Homelessness on a scale unknown since the Great Depression was about to become the norm for millions. Nonetheless, Annie told us confidently that even the poorest orphan could become a Warbucks heir. American capitalism triumphed once again.

In Annie, Christmas functions artistically not simply as the embodiment of moral victory but as a potent symbol for material success. The last scene focuses on munificent gift-giving. There is absolutely nothing spiritual about the day. No one sings Silent Night, let alone Adeste Fideles; the birth of the savior is the farthest thought from anyone's mind. Christmas, pure and simple, is nothing but the myth of endless American wealth born of capitalist entrepreneurship. The myth of secular redemption has reached its pinnacle here.

Add to Batman and Annie the third piece of evidence: Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol. Dickens wrote his masterpiece precisely at the time that Christmas was becoming the cultural focus of the secular year. England had prospered from the Industrial Revolution, where, once again, the myth of capitalism was wrapped up in the tinsel of Christmas packaging. In reality, the terrors of the time are readily evident from almost every page of every book that Dickens wrote. But not here. The capitalist myth merges with Christmas as secular redemption allows Tiny Tim and his family to be saved from poverty (not from sin) and celebrate (a feast, not a sacrament) with Christmas plenty donated by none other than Scrooge himself. In his prerepentant days, Scrooge is the very antithesis of the capitalist ideal. He is a rich man like Daddy Warbucks, but he hoards his wealth and despises the poor. Naturally, he disdains Christmas too. But in the end, he is converted. Christmas is the symbol for good will in general, gift-giving in particular, and the triumph of the capitalist ethic as a general good for one and all.

I now understand my own Christmas dilemma. Christmas has been secularized, "capitalized," and mythologized. As most people keep it, and certainly as popular culture presents it, it is the myth of the America we all pretend we inhabit: a place where Penguins are foiled, Annies are adopted, and even the poorest among us celebrate the wealth that comes from good old-fashioned hard work and industry. Not to observe Christmas is to blow the whistle on the myth, to expose such naked realities as a trickle-down economy where nothing trickles down, in a country rife with social ills and economic deprivation.

he problem is that even in its secularized form, Christmas is not religiously neutral. It is still Christian. So as a Jew, I am in a bind. I am naturally attracted to Christmas as mythic wish-fulfillment, marked by smiling Santas, festive parties, and gifts for everyone. At its secular best, it is at least one day in the year when we remember what we still might be: peaceful people infused with good will toward all, and a generous country, where everyone has a dinner to sit down to - heady stuff! But my conscience rebels against adopting what is still, for me, a Christian feast with a Christian message. There may be two Christmases here, the age-old religious celebration and the modern secular one. But they are not easily separated. Religious Christians may well be uneasy about the triumph of the secular variety, but at least they don't have to worry about sliding back and forth between the secular and religious landscapes. They can enjoy the American myth that the secular holiday presents and simultaneously observe the religious event for which Christmas was formulated in the first place. That is a luxury I cannot afford.

On the other hand, I, along with most other Jews I know, have come to terms with our Christmas dilemma. By no means do I yearn to celebrate Christmas. As the public pomp and ceremony become somewhat overwhelming, I slip into the role of a visitor to a foreign culture. I appreciate, even enjoy, much of the Christmas ambience; I share my Christian neighbors' happiness, as they share mine when my own holy days roll around. The academic part of me wonders how the religious message of Christmas got so overwhelmed by its secular mythology, and the religious part of me feels a little sorry that it happened that way. There are Jews who keep a Passover seder, but with no idea that the event has any religious significance beyond the family's getting together. There is nothing wrong with family gatherings, but the life of faith is impoverished if the Passover meal is no longer rooted in the religious verities that have animated it through the centuries. I imagine the same must be true of Christmas for Christians. There is nothing wrong with sleigh bells, Bing Crosby, and Christmas pudding, but I should hope Christians would want more than just that, and as Christmas becomes more and more secularized, I am not sure they get it.

In the end, the problem of Christmas is not mine any more than Christmas itself is. The real Christmas challenge belongs to Christians: how to take Christmas out of the secularized public domain and move it back to the religious sphere once again.



December 14, 1994 11 Tevet 5755

Rabbi Samuel M. Silver Temple Sinai 2475 West Atlantic Avenue Delray Beach, FL 33445

Dear Sam:

On my return from the Union's recent Board meeting and attendant engagements, I found your note awaiting me. Thank you for sharing your letter to the editor and also for writing about my father, z.l., in your Post piece. I do appreciate your thoughtfulness.

There are so many critical programs to be undertaken by the Union we simply can't move forward to do each and every one. Thus, inserting an ad in the New York Times inviting non-Jews to consider Judaism is out of our league, we don't have the funds required to undertake such a project properly.

This does not mean that I have given up on our wider mission. Perhaps you haven't heard about our Taste of Judaism pilot project (see description enclosed). The funds for this do not come out of our congregational dues but are privately raised and the pilot project is not too costly because it involve advertising only in local and regional papers.

I love your "only" \$40,000. for a page in the New York Times! Would you like to underwrite such an ad? Or perhaps you know of an "angel" who would like to fund such an ad. Given the climate in our congregations and the effort being made to alter the MUM Dues Program (and incidentally your own congregational president signed the petition being circulated), it would not sit well to expend such a large amount for reaching out to non-Jews. We have much too much yet to be fulfilled in serving our congregants and reaching out to unaffiliated Jews!

Rabbi Samuel M. Silver December 14, 1994 Page -2-

Thanks for inviting me to Delray Beach. My calendar is already booked into 1996 at this time so I can't even discuss the possibility of a visit to Temple Sinai.

Fond regards from house to house.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Encl.

RABBI SAMUEL M. SILVER 2475 W ATLANTIC AVE LRAY BEACH, FLORIDA 3344 407-276-6161



Letter to the Editor

Dear Friend,

The piece by James T. Moore in your 29th of May issue was fascinating.

A non-Jew, he lauds Jewish people and seems to be sighing something to the effect, "Oh, I wish I had been born Jewish!"

Chances are that Mr. Moore is of the opinion that he can't turn Jewish. Or he probably believes that he wouldn't be welcomed should he opt to go Jewish.

Chances are that many Jews are of the view that

Judaism is not open to newcomers.

Actually, Judaism is hospitable to those who seek to join up. And the truth is that every year some 2,000 people, men and women, opt to go Jewish.

Chances are that many Jews are of the view that Judaism is not open to newcomers. Actually, Judaism is hospitable to those who seek to join up. And the truth is that every year some 2,000 people, men and women, opt to go Jewish.

For the most part, the converts have been motivated by matrimony.

They become maritally linked to Jews and decide that one home is just big enough for one faith and then they decide to become Jewish.

Some of the synagogue leaders, B'nai Briths, Federations, Hadassahs and other Jewish organization are people who began life as gentiles and then voluntarily decided to adopt Judaism.

As a result of this phenomenon, I had a dream. In my dream I created something called Gentiles for Moses, an obvious counterpoint to Jews for Jesus.

In my dream I visualized a full page ad in newspapers, with legends like this:

Do you believe that Jesus was born of a virgin? Do you believe that Jesus was resurrected?

Do you believe that Jesus exorcised demons?

Do you believe that the death of Jesus brought forgiveness to all those who believe in his divinity?

Do you believe in Original Sin?

If so, you are an adherent of a fine, monotheistic faith called Christianity. If you have some doubts about these beliefs, but would like to cling to monotheism, you might want to consider an alternative: Judaism. Judaism is hospitable to newcomers. We don't recruit, but we are happy to accept those who are seeking spiritual anchorage and haven't found it

Sometime after I had that dream, I learned that the leader of the American Reform Movement, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, had proposed at a huge convention of his people that it is time for Jews to reach out for converts.

He made it clear that the tactics of some of the Christian missionaries weren't part of his plan. He is raising millions of dollars for a fund to make it known to non-Jews that Judaism is willing to enfold them, if they are seeking some satisfactory faith

I wonder whether you who read this newspaper have any reactions to my dream and to Rabbi Schindler's proposal. If so, let me hear from you.

– Rabbi Samuel V. Silver Temple Sinai of Palm Beach County 2475 West Atlantic Avenue Delray Beach, FL 33445; 407-276-6161.

DFAR ALEX,

ANY PRORESS IN YOUR FFFORTO RAISE FUNDS TO INVITE GENTILES TO CONVERT?

My idea is that there ought to be a full page ad in the NY Times inviting gentiles to consider going Jewish.

The Times tells me that a page costs only \$40,000.

Then the ad could be replicated with and with news releases sent throughout the country.

I like my name: Gentiles for Moses, because it's an in-the-face thrust at Jews for Jesus.

I take tt you don't read Gabe Coben's Jewish Post.. Some months ago I had the pleasure of doing a piece in my digest of the Yiddish press of your father, of blessed memory.

Are you coming to Florida? I'd like to have youin my pulpit for a drush or a pulpit dialogue. Regards from bouse to house. Yours,





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

Outrand

December 14, 1994 11 Tevet 5755

Mr. Jerome Kapner 2365 Harbour Oaks Drive Longboat Key, FL 34228

Dear Jerry:

Just a note to let you know how good it was to see you and especially to see you looking so well.

I also read the attached materials which came from Joanna Luria Mintzer, the daughter of your lovely companion.

Though I agree with the general principle that it is best to raise a child in one faith (was it not Ignatius Loyola who said, "Give me a child before the age of 6 and you can have him for the rest of his life?"), nonetheless, I have the most serious reservations about the concept of a pledge. That is exceedingly troubling to me.

As I understand it, the issue in this particular congregation has been referred to its Religious School Committee for reworking - - not the policy that children should be raised in one religion, but the policy about how this issue is discussed and conveyed to others with a somewhat greater sensitivity than the present policy prescribes.

Again, let me say how nice it was to be with you. Rhea joins me in sending you both our warm good wishes.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

MEMORANDUM

December 12, 1994

FROM:

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Dru Greenwood

COPY:

I would be interested in your views on the enclosed matter. While I agree with the basic premise that a child is best raised in one faith, I feel a bit queezy about the pledge and how it was worded.

Please return this to me when you have read it.

fronts ()

alex. As we discussed, I agree with your assessment.

Joanna's statement about The opportunity ariel has
to "live The dialogue from The marrow out" is particularly troubling to me. You should know That
The policy is based in The religious sensor committee
for reworking - not The policy That children should be
raised in the religion, but the policy about how its'

Union of American Hebrew Congregations discussed and

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



JEROME KAPNER

2365 HARBOUR OAKS DRIVE LONGBOAT KEY, FLORIDA 34228

Dec. 6,1994

Dear Alex:

I found the attached very upsetting. Joanna Luria Mintzer is the daughter of Hortense Mintzer, my companion since Ruth died.

I don't expect any action from you or the office, but I feel you should know how one congregation attempts to solve the assimilation problem.

Joanna Luria Mintzer (she has not taken the name of her husband, Don Ferrell), has a number of degrees, the highest being Master of Arts from Newton Theological Seminary. She had been working towards Master of Divinity, but it was not awarded to her because her thesis was on the Holocaust. She had Elie Weisel as a patron during those years and has retained her deep interest in the Holocaust ever since.

She was a principal speaker in Holland at a convention of an international organization involved in the Holocaust, a year ago and this year was invited back to speak in Germany.

I mention this to point out that this is not an ordinary person. She will undoubtedly find some Congregation in the area, for she does want her daughter to be versed in the Jewish faith.

It seems a shame that we may lose people like this.

cinend

Joanna Luria Mintzer Donald R. Ferrell 130 Gates Ave. Montclair, NJ 07042 201-744-7130

July 29, 1994

Dear Steve,

As you know we have just recently become new members of the synagogue. We were sincerely looking forward to enrolling our daughter Ariel Ferrell, who is 8 years old, and entering third grade, in Ner Tamid's Jewish religious school. As you know Don is an ordained Protestant clergy and a pastoral associate at the First Congregational Church of Montclair, where he occasionally preaches. Of course Ariel and I both attend Church on occasion and Ariel participates in the informal children's program when she is present.

Consequently, after seriously studying the goals, policies and plans within the School Brochure, (which we only just now received) we found that we could not in good conscience sign the three point pledge which stipulates that no child may be a student in Ner Tamid's program if he or she is attending any other school where non-Jewish religious instruction is given. This came as a deeply disturbing and shocking philosophical position that neither Don nor I can endorse given our deeply felt and lived professional and personal commitment to inter-faith dialogue and education. We were all the more stunned that you, given your years of dedicated work in the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue and community out-reach, would espouse, what seems to us, such a narrow and exclusionary principle vis-a-vis the education of so many children now being raised in inter-faith families. We have difficulty understanding how being educated in the history, faith and tradition of two of the world's great religions could be seen as a detriment to a solidly grounded Jewish education. On the contrary we see it as as an extraordinarily deepening opportunity and challenge and even privilege to live the dialogue from the marrow out, so to speak!

We would very much like to discuss this issue with you in the profound hope that it is not only negotiable but that it is a policy whose purpose is highly suspect. Perhaps no one else has raised the question before? But clearly for us, it presents a major stumbling block to our ultimately feeling at home within the Ner Tamid community. I do hope we can reach an understanding.

We will call you from Vermont where we will be vacationing starting Sunday July 31. We understand that you are on vacation until August 2. Also the Adult education committee asked me to speak with you about Michael Kogan, head of the Religion Department at Montclair State, as a possible resource for a scholar in residence for the Temple. I also suggested Eva Fleischner whom I know you know and also Susannah Heschel would be another possible resource. At any rate, we came eager and ready to share our selves with Temple Ner Tamid and I am deeply disappointed to think that our daughter with her unique and, what we firmly believe is an extraordinarily rich and multi-layered religious education, would be deprived of what Ner

We look forward to deepening the dialogue with you as we have done in Sincerely, the past.

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 $\mathcal{W}^{\mathcal{C}}$

copy - Cantor Siskin

Joanna Luria Mintzer 130 Gates Ave. Montclair, NJ 07042 201-744-7130

July 28, 1994

Dear Cantor Siskin,

We are new members of Temple Ner Tamid. Enclosed please find the religious school registration form for our daughter Ariel Ferrell. She is 8 years old and will be entering third grade at The Montclair Kimberley Academy this fall, 1994. She is very bright and a quick study; but she has had no previous formal Jewish religious school education, and very little exposure

to written Hebrew. She will be a beginner.

Our home religious life is built upon an inter-faith marriage: I am Jewish and a theologian and my husband is an ordained Protestant clergy, an associate pastor of the First Congregational Church of Montclair and a practicing Jungian psycho-analyst. Jewish-Christian dialogue plays a vital and central role in both our professional and personal lives and Ariel breathes it in. She is not attending any Christian religious education school on a regular or formal basis, but she does, on occasion, go to Church with my husband as do I, especially to hear him preach. We have enclosed a copy of a letter we sent to Rabbi Kushner regarding Ner Tamid's policy of prohibiting any child from attending Jewish religious school if he or she also receives a non-Jewish formal religious education. As we explained to the Rabbi we can not in good conscience endorse such a policy.

Clearly we need to discuss this serious matter with both of you in depth. If our position violates your understanding of the rules of attendance at Temple Ner Tamid's school, we would appreciate hearing from you and/or Rabbi Kushner to discuss this further. We would be deeply regretful if we had

to withdraw Ariel from school and cancel our membership.

Havet bland

We sincerely hope that we can reach some genuine understanding and agreement such that we can look forward to Ariel enjoying a constructive, stimulating and satisfying Jewish education under your supervision.

Sincerely,

copy - Rabbi Kushner

Joanna Luria Mintzer 130 Gates Avenue, Montclair, New Jersey 07042

9-23-94

Dear Steve,

After painful consideration and and I have decided that Ariel's attendance at Ner Tamil's Religious School would not be in her best interest. We deeply appreciate the fire and energy yours the werepers of Nour Board Hong Po our conserns. We asperially appreciate very omplex and emotionally involved no m benefre phiesesses tent discussion. We felt your germine accounted out note our decreous offert to accommodate no write not sourting the integrity of your position. more for now est su platametration one one inver turps now raylf me overpex the undicital obsessed of the offer people present which was clearly threated When some baffed wirestroom transled by our perspecture, we want brush pind tent of personal sold to that find of unanous attitude while she will be unanous to

DEAR JOANNA & DOWNEEDLESS TO SAY, I'M SORRY WE WERE
UNABLE TO WORK THINGS OUT, YOUR
LETTERS INDICATE A MEASURE of DISATRONTMENT DUD FOR THAT I BIT TRULY
RECRETIFUL, UN PORTUNATELY, WE CANNOT
BE ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE. THE
SYNDOGROUE, IN ON EXPRESSION OF ITS
IDENTITY, MUST CREATE DEFINED BOUNDARIES.
I DO, INDIESD, WISH YOU MUCH GOOD FORTUME

IN YOUR PURSUIT. MAY GOD WITHOUTER

YOUR HOME. Stell

Joanna Luria Mintzer 130 Gates Ave. Montclair, NI 07042 201-744-7130

November 14, 1994

Dear Jerry,

Enclosed you will find copies of the written correspondence that went between Temple Ner Tamid of Bloomfield NJ and our family regarding their written policy of prohibiting Jewish instruction to children who are also attending formal non-Jewish education elsewhere. In our particular case, even living with a parent who is an ordained clergy and theological authority in Protestant Christianity would constitute "formal" education since Don could not refrain from being who he is, living his faith and speaking to Ariel of it. Given that both of us are theologians whose lives, both personal and professional, center around the free and vital exchange of ideas concerning God and faith and things essential to Judaism and Christianity, Ariel would and is of course continuously exposed to and engaged in dialogue with us(in so far as an 8 year old can participate). We of course believe it only enriches her sense of religious depth and the multi-valent vitality of the symbolic life that points to but can not ultimately name the Ineffable.

Temple Ner Tamid is a Reform Synagogue, which is struggling to deal with a 15% inter-faith family population. Their Rabbi, Steven Kushner is active in Jewish-Christian dialogue efforts, which is how we came to know him over 10 years ago. As I was looking at Temples, I thought his would offer an open, dialogical and dynamic sense of community and would be a congenial place for our daughter Ariel to get a solid Jewish education. Needless to say, I was shocked and greatly disturbed to experience the shadow side of their outwardly enthusiastic Jewish community. We unfortunately discovered that there was no room or will or energy to engage in dialogue of any kind regarding how an inter-faith family can best live the ambiguity of their realities, the places of mutuality as well as the substantial differences, which are of necessity threatening, challenging, and emotionally as well as intellectually disarming. Although Steve seemed to be somewhat open to the initial exchange, he did warn us that he thought his Cantor, who is the director of the education program, would have no tolerance for our situation or for inter-faith matters in general. He also warned us that he felt the Board

would not be open to much dialogue. The policy was set.

Temple Ner Tamid understands itself to be creatively dealing with the problem of inter-marriage by strongly encouraging the non-Jewish partner to relinquish all religious intention, and give over to the Jewish partner all religious authority in raising the child. They have on their board a woman whose job it is to act as a liaison between the partners and the Temple to ease the pain of relinquishment. She is a trained social worker! They firmly believe that a child who is raised "as both" bares an impossible burden, a confused identity, and can not successfully hold the two faiths in dialogue. They even went so far as to say it was tantamount to child abuse to force upon a child such a burden which they naturally assumed was rife with conflict and antinomy and family dissention. This of course is not true in our particular case. They believe that the parents must chose at the outset, the child's religion, be it Jewish or Christian, and follow one or the other. The rabbi will not preside over the marriage of a Jew and gentile even if they both want a

Jewish wedding. The philosophy of the Temple is "We are in the business of making Jews. Give us your child and we will make a Jew of her!" Their educational program is intense indoctrination and there is no room for dialogue nor is it their theological or philosophical understanding that any other faith has religious authority or standing or a truth position! This was repeated firmly in front of Don as we met with the Rabbi, Steve Kushner and six members of his board for an hour and half in September of this year.

Of the seven Temple board members present, the Rabbi and to a certain extent, the vice-president of the Board, were the only ones who tried to keep an open mind. The rest of those present grew more and more vehemently opposed to the possibility of Ariel being educated in their program if Don were

an active religious authority in her life.

As you know Don is an extremely liberal thinker who is more sensitive than most to Jewish concerns, who has devoted his intellectual inquiry to the study and teaching and the rewriting of Christian thinking and Christian texts to excise all unconscious, implied and stated Christian anti-semitism and teachings of contempt. He is both a student and teacher of the Holocaust, devoted to preaching and teaching in the Christian community to alerting his fellow Christians to their guilt and responsibility for Christian anti-semitism in the world. As a trained psycho-analyst he is extremely sensitive to the unconscious issues that contaminate the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, and to the family dynamics that can arise in an inter-faith marriage.

At the close of the meeting, the Rabbi stated that they could not control what went on in the privacy of our own home, nor was it their province to do so, consequently they would trust us not to send Ariel to a formal church school while she was enrolled in the Temple's school, if we would sign the pledge to that effect. In that case she would be welcome in their school. However, it was clear to both Don and me, that the feeling of the other board members, including the Cantor, was that the way we were choosing to educate Ariel was anathema to Jewish tradition and to the fostering of a true Jew and that Ariel's presence in the school would present a very threatening reality to them and the other students and set a very bad precedent. We did not in the least feel welcome in that community. So we chose to withdraw Ariel from the school and our family from the Temple in general, which we came to experience as highly fundamentalist, doctrinaire and completely out of touch with the pluralistic reality in which we all live, as if to be knowledgeable about any other faith other than Judaism would or could somehow dilute one's Jewish identity.

This is only a brief summary of that meeting and its consequences for us. For me it was deeply upsetting. I was truly surprised by the gross intolerance of the community policy and the underlying attitude of arrogance and ignorance and intellectual laziness. Beneath that of course lies something more tragic: the terrible sense of endangerment and threat that they feel in relation to the Gentile world. This is a Jewish problem. But exiling an interfaith family because they want their child to experience and know the reality of both worlds is not a creative means of "making Jews". I fear I have not made the whole thing clear enough for someone who does not know Don and me intimately. Perhaps you can fill in the blanks. I am certainly available to discuss this further if need be.

Warmly,

Jannes



December 24, 1992 29 Kislev 5753

Ms. Coventry Kessler 5 Herrick Place Durham, NC 27707

Dear Ms. Kessler:

My travels have been extensive, as you know, and this is my first opportunity to reply to your letter of December 2. I regret the delay.

You are seeking a judgment from me which is not mine to make. Neither I nor any fellow human being can rule that one is a "good or bad Jew." That determination is God's to make.

As for the Christmas tree, it IS a symbol and as such has special meaning to non-Jews. As a Jew, the symbols in my home are those of the Jewish people and while I can enjoy some of the festivities and trimmings of Christmas with non-Jewish friends, they are not a part of my home or family traditions.

With kindest greetings and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Rabbi John Friedman





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

December 9, 1992 14 Kislev 5753

Ms Coventry Kessler 5 Herrick Place Durham, NC 27707

Dear Ms Kessler:

Your letter of December 2nd has reached our office during Rabbi Schindler's absence. He is in Florida for the meeting of UAHC Board of Trustees and will be remaining in the Florida area for some speaking engagements following the Board meeting. Thus, he has not yet seen your letter, but it will be brought to his attention immediately on his return and I am certain you will hear from him at the earliest possible moment.

With kindest greetings, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller Assistant to the President

cc: Rabbi John Friedman

A.M. SKIER AGENCY 209 MAIN AVENUE HAWLEY, PA 18428 (717) 226-4571 OR (800) 245-2666

Hove to answer O where

November 2, 1992 6 Heshvan 5753

Ms. Coventry Kessler 5 Herrick Place Durham, NC 27707

Dear Ms Kessler:

Please forgive this delayed response to your thoughtful and beautifully written letter of October 21. The dilemma you pose is not one which can be answered effortlessly; as you have anguished over it for these many years, please know that gave it a great deal of serious thought before seeking to respond.

Yes, there are aspects of Christmas which are truly universal and perhaps even secular. But it is a Christian holiday based on a major event in Christianity and can well be described as a holy day. And here, I must note that I have never approved of comparing Christmas and Hanukkah nor do I condone the view that they compete with each other. They happen to fall at the same period of time and both have a theme of "light." But, they are religious celebrations, based on widely differing events, and as dear as Christmas is to our Christian friends and neighbors, so Hanukkah is dear to the Jewish people. I might also note that I do not countenance Christmas trees and decorations in a Jewish Certainly children in the home receive a mixed message from such decorations, even youngsters such as your Dylan and Gabe who have been brought up in a Jewish home, educated in the synagogue, and called to the Torah as B'nai Mitzvah.

I do, of course, appreciate your attachment to the Christmas tree and your looking upon it as a non-religious symbol. I feel for you and sympathize with your sense of loss at not having a tree in your home. Nonetheless, it does symbolize a Christian religious holiday and, in fact, there are many Christians who feel that some of the festive aspects of this holiday, such as the tree, decorations, wreaths, etc. take away from the true religious aspects of this special day.

Ms. Coventry Kessler November 2, 1992 Page -2-

Be that as it may, you have chosen Judaism and it is obvious that in addition to creating a lovely Jewish home you have taken an important place in the life of your synagogue and community.

Since your husband is so strong in his opposition to a Christmas tree and/or celebration in your home, I would think you might seek to respond to your heart's desire and well understood emotional ties to childhood joys by finding other means of marking this day. After all, an important aspect of Judaism is Sholom Bayit, peace in the home. Do you have Christian friends in Durham? Nearby? You might plan to spend time with them on Christmas, or even before by helping them decorate their tree and sharing in their celebration and festivities.

Your letter was thoughtful and I do feel your pain, but I hope that you will find a way to recall childhood joys in a venue other than your own Jewish home.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Rabbi John Friedman

bcc: Dru Greenwood

5 Herrick Place Durham, NC 27707 October 21, 1992

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

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

I hope you can help me with a problem that, although it should be small in the scheme of things, has caused a great deal of anguish over the past 13 years.

When my husband, who is Jewish, proposed to me in 1970, he did so on the condition that we never celebrate Christmas. With a deep twinge--for I dearly loved that holiday--but no argument, I said yes: because I was crazy about my husband-to-be, because my twin infant sons needed a father (which Frank was willing to be), because I was totally alienated from my Protestant Christian background and knew I would not return.

After we married, Frank, the boys, and I celebrated the Jewish holidays. Then several years later, with no prompting from my husband, I converted to Judaism. Although the religion appealed to meand still does—I also wanted to honor Frank's parents because they had been so generous in accepting me and my sons. I rationalized the conversion to myself by saying, "I might as well since I can't have Christmas."

For most of the year I was happy to be part of a Jewish household, taking our sons to the synagogue, teaching the Yiddish I had learned from my mother-in-law, telling them stories I knew, reading Jewish authors, helping them become proud of their Jewish heritage. The day Dylan and Gabe became b'nai mitzvot was one of incredible happiness for Frank and me.

Yet as the years progressed, I also found it harder and harder to skip over this holiday I loved so much from my childhood. Each December I grew more and more depressed and ended up so resenting Chanukah—the competing holiday—that I once sneaked half my children's Chanukah books out to a dumpster and ripped them to shreds. December became agony.

A kind Hillel rabbi emphasized that it was not wise to celebrate Christmas in our home--it would "confuse" our boys--but perhaps I could go home to my family. This was complicated because my parents were dead and my only brother lived across the country. Finally, after much pleading with my husband, he agreed that I could do a few things with the boys--hang stockings, give a few presents--provided that the holiday did not take over Chanukah. On one point he was adamant: there would be no Christmas tree.

This unorthodox solution worked well for a time. It left me much happier within the synagogue where I subsequently taught Sunday School for several years. I quieted any qualms about the supposed religious inconsistency by realizing that Christmas in my house had never been a religious holiday, celebrating it made me feel much better, and finally I felt deep in my heart that it is such a grand, kind, Dickensian day that anyone who wants to should be able to enjoy it. And it helped to know, although in synagogue you only whisper about it, that there were other Jewish families enjoying Christmas too. Christmas stayed a minor event in our house; we indeed had no tree and my husband made it a point not to participate. At the same time, we did as much as ever for Chanukah and the other Jewish aspects of our lives.

But my husband grew less and less gracious about our agreement as time passed. At the same time I grew furious that we couldn't have a Christmas tree, which precipitated our big blow-up. As anyone who grew up with Christmas can tell you, the Christmas tree is Christmas, and having the day without one is like Passover without a Sedar. asked for a tree. Frank threatened to leave if I got one. I had to choose: him or a Christmas tree. Christmas Eve that year was so painful that I vowed never again to spend it under the same roof with my husband. At the same time, I felt guilty, wanting something that made my husband so unhappy. The following year I saved up the money and visited my family--and spent a lot of time missing my husband and kids. Last year, in the flush of excitement over our middle son's bar mitzvah, I thought I could just slip past Christmas and ignore it, then found myself hysterical on Christmas Eve, running away from home for the evening, quite worrying both Frank and my parents-in-law. Frank and I then realized that the situation had grown so painful that we had to get help before another Christmas arrived; we are now seeing a therapist to see if we can work out a solution.

The reason I write to you is this. Frank feels that Christmas is the archetypal Christian holiday and a tree its archetypal symbol. In part he defines himself as a Jew by his refusal to celebrate the day. He has other reasons too, such as being embarrassed in front of his parents, who always derided Jews with Christmas trees, and the more common rationalization, that it will confuse children about who they are. But what it boils down to is this: Jews shouldn't celebrate Christmas. And since I converted, I am bound by this obligation.

Rabbi, after I married Frank, I did my best for many years to give up Christmas. And I have participated in Jewish life more than many converts, studied much, even at one point considered pursuing graduate work in Jewish studies. Standing in synagogue, singing in my cracked Hebrew, at times fills me with joy and peace. But I also know that Christmas and Christmas trees will never go away for me.

So, Rabbi Schindler, I ask you and the UAHC, since you set policy for Reform Jews, is it true that you cannot be a good Jew if you celebrate the secular Christmas? Our rabbi, John Friedman of Judea Reform Congregation, Durham, assures me that once you convert to

Judaism, you cannot unconvert. But what is the point in identifying as a Jew if I must see myself as a bad one? If being a good Jew requires abstaining from Santa Claus and decorated pine trees, perhaps I must reconsider my conversion and renounce it. As you no doubt are aware, a large number of Jews (who participate in Jewish life), especially in small communities in the South, also have Christmas and a tree, but it is something they only admit to other Jews in whispers and with great guilt. If it is true that celebrating a secular Christmas does not necessarily make you a bad Jew, then I wish that fact acknowledged so that I and others like me no longer must live under a burden of guilt and secrecy. But to say I must remain a part of the Jewish community yet see myself as a failed member of it is intolerable.

Please do not engage in pilpul, begging the definition of what is good, what community means, what is wisest for the children, or reiterate the religious nature of Christmas, or even declare that every person must rely on God's guidance for what is good, but answer me forthrightly and directly, as one who shapes policy for Reform Jews: Can you celebrate a secular Christmas and still be a good Jew?

Thank you for your kindness in listening and considering my question.

Sincerely,

Coventry Ressler

cc: Rabbi John Friedman



Con

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

December 29, 1993 15 Tevet 5754

Mr. Peter Howard Ohio State University Room 935 Taylor Tower 50 Curl Drive Columbus, OH 43210

Dear Peter:

Thank you so much for sending me a copy of your Outreach Program Analysis prepared for the Ohio State University Forensic Speech and Debate Team. I was very much intrigued by your presentation. I certainly didn't know that. I was following the Jeremiad pattern. I had never even heard of this rhetorical device and so mine wasn't a conscious effort. It came quite naturally to me, as it were.

But it was effective as you perceived. The Outreach program is well established by now and has gained a momentum all its own which requires no further fueling from me.

In a sense, I suppose, I was fortunate in that the times were right for such an Outreach effort. Nonetheless, I suppose I ought to accept credit for perceiving it to be a proper time and delivering a message (marginally noted, against the advice of my senior staff) that I had long felt to be important.

Again, my thanks for your helpfulness.

Cordially,

Alexander M. Schindler

CC: MELVIN MERIANS LARRY BUSH DRU GREENWOOD

From the desk of Peter Howard

December 22, 1993

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

Dear Rabbi,

I am a member of the Ohio State University Forensics Speech and Debate team and a former active member of NFTY. As a member of the speech team, I compete in tournaments in a multitude of events. One of the events is Rhetorical Criticism. For this speech, I decided to analyze the Reform Jewish Outreach Movement. Now that the Forensics season is underway, I have completed a first draft of the speech and taken it to a tournament. I received second place in the event, and as a result, I qualified the speech for the National Forensics Association national tournament in April.

My speech on Outreach takes the form of a Rhetorical Criticism. Rhet Crit (as we call it) is an event in which the speaker has ten minutes in which to deliver a speech that critically analyzes a rhetorical artifact and draws several conclusions based upon the analysis. The analysis is done within the framework of a published, known rhetorical method. I chose your address to the UAHC board of trustees on December 2, 1978 as my artifact and I analyzed it within the context of the Jeremiad, a rhetorical form that is used within the speech. From this analysis I was able to draw several conclusions about the speech and the form.

I have enclosed both a copy of my speech and a further description of the event in the form of an excerpt from the Ohio State Forensics Team Handbook. Please feel free to read both at your leisure. I would be grateful for any feedback from you.

Thank you.

Peter Howard

Rhetorical Criticism by Peter Howard

In the 1970's sitcom "Bridgette loves Bernie", young newlyweds struggled with the problem of interfaith marriage. As a reaction to the pressure from their parents and communities. Bridgette loses faith in Catholicism and Bernie no longer practices Judaism. This situation is no mere fiction. The American Jewish Community has been faced with the prospect of losing many of its members through assimilation and intermarriage. To combat this loss of members, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) delivered a call to action to the UAHC board of trustees on December 2, 1978. In the speech, Schindler sought to bring those who were on the verge of losing their Jewish identity through intermarriage, neglect, or apathy back into the Jewish community. Schindler's speech merits our analysis today because the Outreach movement for which the speech served as an impetus is now a large, important and new direction for the American Jewish community. As such the speech represents a significant rhetorical event. To examine Schindler's speech, we will use Kurt Ritter's American Political Rhetoric and the Jeremiad Tradition: Presidential Nomination Acceptance Addresses, 1960-1976, as found in the Fall 1980 Central State Speech Journal. Ritter's method suits this analysis because Schindler is confronted with a situation in which only a rededication to the Jewish faith would save the community-- a situation that called for a jeremiadic rhetorical response.

In order to see how the Jeremiad is used, we must first examine Ritter's method. Next, we will apply it to Rabbi Schindler's speech, and finally we will be able to draw some critical conclusions about the speech and jeremiadic rhetoric.

The Jeremiad is one of strongest rhetorical forms in American communication. In his book The American Jeremiad, Sacvan Bercovitch traces the original Jeremiad to Puritan sermons. The very name of the jeremiadic form is a reflection of the frequent use of the prophet Jeremiah in these sermons which were prolific in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. As America developed, the jeremiad evolved into a rhetorical form that used the religious qualities of the American dream to emphasize political calls to action.

Ritter describes the modern jeremiad as having five sequential elements. The first is the development of a sense of crises or impending doom by the rhetor. Second, the rhetor will expound upon a common value or principle and link the crisis facing the audience to a failure to uphold this principle. Third, this crisis will be portrayed as a test of character, a test of the belief in the common value. Fourth, the rhetor will call upon the audience to examine and revitalize its commitment to the principles it has violated. The crisis is depicted as a failure of individuals, while the system is glorified as the solution. Finally, the rhetor will end with a dramatic call to action that transmits a sense of urgency. Urgent adaptation of values outlined is painted as the only means of survival. If successful, jeremiadic rhetoric fosters revivalist movements to rededicate the populace to common values that traditionally defined the community.

These five elements of the Jeremiad are enacted in Schindler's speech. He begins by establishing a sense of crisis, the first element of the jeremiad. Painting the picture of intermarriage and how it is a threat to the survival of the Jewish people, he signals that the tide of intermarriage is a threat to the future of American Judaism. He says: "The tide is running against us. This is the reality we must face." He continues by citing statistics that show how one out of

three Jews intermarries. Schindler draws upon the emotional tie to fears of persecution and loss of community to make the threat even more substantial.

Next, Schindler continues by examining the roots of the intermarriage problem. Reflecting Ritter's second element, departure from values, he identifies traditional values that have not been upheld. He addresses Jewish education as one value that could be improved upon. However, he does not focus here. Instead, he finds the problem in the Jewish community's response to the intermarriages themselves. Alienating the non-Jewish partner in a mixed marriage is the prime reason that intermarried couples turn away from the Jewish community. Schindler says: "By not opening up our arms to these new spouses, as we should to every member of the Jewish community, we loose both the new spouse and the born Jew." This is a failure to uphold the value of acceptance of others into the community, a value that had traditionally been strong.

Enacting the third element of a jeremiad, test of character, Schindler paints the struggle as a test of character to the Reform movement. Despite the negative effects of intermarriage to the Jewish community, Schindler says that it is not an impossible obstacle to overcome. He challenges the very fabric of Reform Jewish thinking, its creative unfolding of the Halacha, traditional Jewish law. Schindler asserts: "If we put our best minds to it, we will find many other ways which can bolster our efforts in this realm." This is a test of character to the Reform movement.

The fourth element of the jeremiad, revitalization, is enacted as Schindler puts forth a plan to revitalize the Reform movement. To stem the "tide running against us", Rabbi Schindler articulates a two pronged appeal to Jewish values. First, he asks each individual to "...begin by removing the 'not wanted' signs from our hearts," and welcome intermarried couples into the

community. Returning to the ancient value of acceptance of a non-Jewish spouse is one way to proceed. Then he calls for the creation of Outreach, a revival of the Reform Jewish value of innovation and creative problem solving. The Reform movement was created in response to the dilemma of reckoning the American lifestyle with a Jewish lifestyle. Applying this heritage to the modern problem invokes the values of the past to solve the problem of today.

Finally, the fifth jeremiadic element of a call to action is present in Schindler's conclusion. He requests that the board of trustees pass his resolution on Outreach and invokes an urgent call to action. Extolling the traditional values of Judaism, Schindler shows how the past provides a archetype for today's actions. Just as the Maccabees and Jews of Roman times actively engaged in activities similar to the proposed Outreach program, so to must the Jews of today actively court those who wish to become Jewish in order to maintain their numbers. Schindler closes by stating that "...we... possess the water which can slake the thirst" and demanding that we "...offer it freely, proudly--for our well-being and for the sake of those who earnestly seek what is ours to give." If the Jewish community will act on its collective values, it will survive.

Having applied Ritter's method to Rabbi Schindler's speech, we can now draw several critical conclusions about the speech and jeremiadic rhetoric.

First, we can see that Schindler was successful in his use of the jeremiadic form. This speech resulted in the creation of the Outreach program within the Reform Movement. Outreach has become a national commission which has a presence in 53% of reform synagogues in America, with 90% of all synagogues having had at least one outreach program in 1990, according to the Outreach census of 1991. The census also concludes "It is clear that in the thirteen years of its existence Reform Jewish Outreach has made a substantial impact."

Schindler's jeremiad led to the establishment of a part of the reform movement- its Outreach program- that is growing every day and will be an integral part of the community for years to come.

Next, we can see that the jeremiad, though of Puritan origin, is not confined to Christian use. Sacvan Bercovitch effectively chronicles the adaptation of the Jeremiad from the Puritan to the political pulpit. This study shows that the jeremiadic form also translates across religious traditions. Schindler uses the jeremiad successfully within traditional Jewish messages. The jeremiad has potential for any such tradition.

Finally, this understanding gives insight into the jeremiadic form. This study suggests that what makes the jeremiad effective is not its origins in or reliance upon the Puritan vision turned American dream. Judaism is not derivative of either. Rather, the jeremiad's effect is realized through tapping into any community's sense of self. In other words, we can see that the Jeremiad is a form that transcends culture, but its contents must be culture specific. As diverse ethnic groups struggle to maintain their culture in a society that views itself as a melting pot the jeremiad will be an increasingly visible rhetorical strategy. However, as our diversity is embraced, the "American jeremiad" may be diminished in importance and effectiveness.

Having looked at Rabbi Schindler's speech to the UAHC board of trustees on December 2, 1978 using Kurt Ritter's method of jeremiadic form, we have been able to draw conclusions about schindler's success and about the jeremiad, a rhetorical form that transcends its Puritan origins and crosses cultural boundaries. If Bridgette and Bernie had had access to an Outreach program, Bridgette might have been accepted by Bernie's parents regardless of her faith, and

Bernie may have remained strong in his Jewish faith. Thanks to Outreach, *this* is no longer fiction.

RHETORICAL CRITICISM

What is Rhetorical Criticism As a Forensics Event?

Rhet Crit as a forensic event is entirely different from Rhet Crit as an art form, a research technique, or a scholarly pursuit. Why? Quite simply, because you are not only criticizing something, you are delivering that criticism aloud to an audience--some of whom will be ranking and rating you at the end of the round. This means that

not only must you demonstrate scholarly effort, you must also demonstrate good speaking skills and, most importantly, <u>you must demonstrate that you have analyzed your audience</u> just as you would for any other speech.

The question then becomes, what is your audience looking for when you deliver your Rhet Crit? Two big things:

1. TERRIFIC TOPIC CHOICE.

You wouldn't do a Prose cutting that wasn't entertaining (well, you might, but for the sake of argument let's say you wouldn't) and you wouldn't choose an Informative topic that wasn't interesting. Nor would you pick out a Duo that was overused. Likewise, you should choose as a Rhet Crit topic something that will be entertaining and/or interesting for the audience to learn about that they haven't learned about before.

But there's more. You wouldn't choose a Persuasion topic that wasn't important. Therefore, you must choose a Rhet Crit subject that has value. What are the criteria for determining the importance of a Rhet Crit topic?

- A. Historical Importance. A speech that changes history is a good topic for Rhet Crit.
- B. Theoretical Importance. A speech that, by studying it, tells us more than we knew before about the process of persuasion, is a good topic for Rhet Crit.

Finally, you must choose a topic that is <u>rhetorical</u>. Remember, now, that anything can be considered rhetorical but that classically the word "rhetoric" referred to spoken discourse. There are lots of people at tournaments who will cheer you when you announce that you are criticizing the rhetorical impact of Carol Burnett's plastic surgery on the theatre going public, but there will be those who won't. From an audience analysis standpoint, for now the big money seems to be on the nondiscursive forms of rhetoric.

2. MARVELOUS METHOD.

When you eat Chicken McNuggets and say they're lousy, you are perceived by others as having studied either chicken in general or McNuggets in particular

- 1. Name of the method and its author.
- 2. Brief explanation of the method. Must be clear and concise.
- 3. Justification for using this method.
 - a. THIS IS CRITICAL.
 - b. What is the fit between the act and the method that makes it useful?
- D. Preview speech structure.
 - Will almost always be:
 - a. explanation of the method
 - b. application of the method to the act
 - c. critical conclusions based on the application of the method to the act.

II. Body

- A. Explain the components of the method and as clearly and as briefly as you can.
- B. Apply each part of the method to the artifact. Each component of the method should be clearly demonstrated and supported with quotations and paraphrasing from the act being studied.
 - C. Criticism. You have a wealth of options. Tailor to the speech.
 - 1. How does the act measure up to the standard (method)?
 - 2. How did this affect the impact of the act?
 - a. historical impact
 - b. rhetorical impact
- 3. What critical lessons can we learn about this rhetorical act from this analysis?
- 4. What critical lessons can we learn about this type of rhetorical act?
 - 5. What critical lessons can we learn about this particular method of analysis?
- 6. What critical lessons can we learn about a society that responds to this kind of rhetoric in this way?
- 7. What critical lessons can we learn about rhetorical criticism/theory?

These are just some of the possibilities depending on your purpose.

III. Conclusion

- A. Summary of speech
- B. Refocus on purpose and essential critical conclusions.
- C. Clincher--ties back in some way to the attention getter.

and as having formed a basis for judging those McNuggets. When you criticize rhetoric, however, you are not perceived by your audience as being a learned rhetorical theorist. You are perceived instead as an amateur, an undergraduate student who is competing in a forensics event. Therefore, you are not expected just to proclaim a rhetorical event wonderful or hideous based on your own standards of excellence. Rather, you are expected to utilize a method, or critical tool developed by someone with a Ph. D. to help you analyze and evaluate the speech.

There are lots of methods, some of which are covered in a later section of this handout. The important thing is that you justify the method you have selected. It would not be appropriate to criticize Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech (done to death) using a theory designed solely to evaluate speeches of ancient Roman orators.

It is no surprise, given all of the above, that the most often asked questions among Rhet Critters at the first tournament of the year are: 1) "What's your method?" and 2) "Why are you using that?"

Here are the National Forensic Association rules for Rhet Crit:

"Each contestant will deliver an original critical analysis of any significant rhetorical artifact. The speaker should limit quotation from and summary and paraphrase of the analyzed artifact to a minimum. Any legitimate critical method is permissible as long as it serves to open up the artifact for the audience. Notes, not manuscript, are permitted. Time limit: 10 minutes maximum." (We do not use notes.)

General Outline for Rhetorical Criticism

- I. Introduction
 - A. Attention getter.
 - B. Statement of the artifact to be criticized
 - 1. Who did it?
 - 2. When? What date? In what historical context?
 - 3. Who was the audience?
 - a. Physical--people who actually witnessed the event.
 - b. Rhetorical--people whom the rhetor was trying to
- influence.
- c. Their disposition toward the topic/occasion/speaker.
- 4. What was the purpose of the speech?
- 5. Why is it important to criticize this communication event?
 - a. Historical importance.
 - b. Rhetorical importance.
- C. Statement of the method to be used to criticize the act.



December 29, 1993

FROM:

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Larry Bush

The enclosed may amuse you. Obviously, I wasn't conscious, in delivering my original Outreach speech, that I was following a rhetorical form typical of the Puritan sermons of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

December 29, 1993

LUTT

FROM:

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Dru Greenwood

The enclosed may amuse you. Obviously, I wasn't conscious, in delivering my original Outreach speech, that I was following a rhetorical form typical of the Puritan sermons of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.



December 29, 1993

FROM:

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Melvin Merians

The enclosed may amuse you. Obviously, I wasn't conscious, in delivering my original Outreach speech, that I was following a rhetorical form typical of the Puritan sermons of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.





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

Cukend

December 28, 1993 14 Tevet 5754

Rabbi David S. Goldstein Touro Synagogue 1501 General Pershing Street New Orleans, LA 70175

Dear David:

Someone sent me a copy of the column you wrote on "Conversions to Judaism: We Need Much More Of It."

Thank you so much for your supportive words. I am profoundly grateful.

Hopefully, life is treating you well. I continue to hear good things concerning you from my friends in New Orleans.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS - CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

William & Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

December 27, 1993

MEMORANDUM

To: Arlene Chernow, Rabbi Janet Marder, Rabbi Lennard Thal

From: Dru Greenwood

As you can see from the enclosed correspondence, Alex and I have been in correspondence with Herbert Rubin about Outreach. There is a possibility of funding. Alex suggested that if any of you were planning to be in Tucson before March that you might want to meet with Mr. Rubin to discuss our Outreach program. If that works out, please let me know. Many thanks.

ec. to lydia

Chairperson
Harris Gilbert
Co-Chairperson
Rapp: Leslie Gutterman

Vice Chairpersons Elizabeth Linkon Pameia Waechter

Director
Dru Greenwood



Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS - CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

William & Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

December 27, 1993 13 Tevet 5754

Mr.Herbert Rubin 4890 North Territory Ave. Tucson, AZ 85715

Dear Mr. Rubin:

Rabbi Schindler just told me about his conversation with you concerning Outreach and the possibilities for extending our reach even farther.

I have asked Arlene Chernow, who is our Outreach staff member in the Pacific Southwest, to send you some materials on regional Outreach efforts, so that you can see the kinds of exciting programs that are currently being provided by Reform congregations.

Again, I look forward to speaking with you when you return to New York in March.

All the best for a happy and healthy 1994.

Sincerely,

Dru Greenwood

Ju Fleinwood

Chairperson
Harris Gilbert
Co-Chairperson
Rapp. Lesiie Gutterman

Vice Chairpersons Elizabeth Linkon Pameia Waechter

Director Dru Greenwood

December 7, 1993

FROM:

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Dru Greenwood

The enclosed is self explanatory. Please note his penultimate paragraph in which he wants to learn some more of what we do in the realm of Outreach. Please send him a brief note with some enclosures. In the meantime, I am having Lydia Neumann try to get a line on Rubin - just possibly he might be able to help us. Since he spends most of the winters in Tucson, he well may be able to do something, or at least he may have friends who are capable of helping us.

Thanks for everything.







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

December 7, 1993 23 Kislev 5754

Mr. Herbert Rubin 4809 North Territory Avenue Tucson, AZ 85715

Dear Mr. Rubin:

Thank you for your encouraging letter which is all the more welcome because of the many brick bats which are flying my way also.

I do not consider your numeric projection as "incredible". This precisely the kind of dream that I dream, and in one way or another, I have been pushing forward with my idea over the years. You might look at the current copy of Reform Judaism in which one of our officers, David Belin of De Moines, Iowa, postulates a like projection. (In case you do not have the latest copy of Reform Judaism on hand, I enclose it herewith).

I am also sending a copy of your letter to Dru Greenwood, our Director of Outreach so that she can tell you what we have been doing over the years and what some of our projects still in waiting, are.

I hope that once you are back in New York, you will take occasion to stop in and say hello. Unfortunately, I don't plan to be in Tucson. About the closest I will come is to Scottsdale sometime in the second week of March.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

encl.

cc: Dru Greenwood

11/25/93

TO: RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

FROM: HERBERT RUBIN

DEAR RABBI,

MY WIFE AND I WERE DELIGHTED TO READ IN THE SUNDAY TIMES ABOUT YOUR REACH OUT PROGRAM. IT'S ABOUT TIME.

SINCE ADULTHOOD, IT HAS BEEN MY CONVICTION THAT THE JEWISH RELIGION HAS WONDERFUL ASPECTS TO IT, THAT ITS TRADITIONS AND ESSENTIAL HUMANITY HAS A GREAT DEAL TO OFFER NOT ONLY TO PEOPLE RAISED IN THE FAITH, BUT TO INDIVIDUALS IN GENERAL.

IN MY VIEW, EVERY RELIGIOUS GROUP NEEDS NEW BLOOD IN ORDER TO THRIVE. VIRTUALLY ALL RELIGIONS PROSTELIZE; JUDAISM BEING A NOTABLE EXCEPTION, AND FOOLISHLY SO. JUDAISM HAS A GREAT DEAL TO OFFER IN TERMS OF PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND GOD, AND MOST PARTICULARLY ITS EMPHASIS ON THE HEAR AND NOW RATHER THAN THE HEREAFTER.

IT CERTAINLY HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME, AND DESERVES TO BE A PART OF THE LIVES OF A GREATER NUMBER OF OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS.

FURTHERMORE, THE COUNTLESS TRAGEDIES SUFFERED BY JEWS THROUGH THE AGES WOULD IN ALL LIKELIHOOD NOT HAVE OCCURRED, OR TAKEN PLACE ON A MUCH LESS FREQUENT AND SMALLER SCALE IF THERE WERE, SAY, 140,000,000 JEWS IN THIS WORLD INSTEAD OF 14,000,000.

WHAT'S 140,000,000 PEOPLE IN A WORLD OF BILLIONS? REALLY NOT THAT MANY. BUT THE POWER OF SUCH NUMBERS. THE APPLICATION OF SUCH TALENT AND DEDICATION WOULD NOT ONLY CHANGE FUTURE JEWISH HISTORY, IT WOULD IN ALL LIKELIHOOD PRECLUDE THE SUFFERING THAT HAS ACCOMPANIED JEWS THROUGH THE PAST TWO MILLENNIUMS.

IF YOU CONSIDER THE NUMBER I'VE POSTULATED AS INCREDIBLE, THEN I POINT TO THE GROWTH OF THE MORMONS WHO IN 150 YEARS HAVE ACHIEVED NUMBERS EQUAL TO OR GREATER THAN OUR FAITH WHICH HAS EXISTED FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN KNOWING MORE ABOUT YOUR IDEAS, AND HOPE YOU WILL CONTACT ME.

ALTHOUGH MY HOME IS IN N.Y., I WILL BE AT THE ARIZONA ADDRESS FOR MOST OF THE WINTER.

SINCERELY.

HERBERT RUBIN

4809 NORTH TERRITORY AVE.

TUCSON, AZ. 85715

602 299 1096





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

November 23, 1993 9 Kislev 5754

Rabbi Jonathan H. Gerard Temple Israel P.O. Box 254 Dover, NH 03820

Dear Jonathan:

About the best alternative to "conversion," that we could come up with is the phrase "Jews by choice". In essence, that is what is involved here. People chose to be Jews. To some extent, I suppose, this is applicable even to born Jews since they, too, in this day and age can either chose to be active Jews or choose to opt out without deserting the Jewish people.

As far as the Cohen-Zevin volume is concerned, I really know little about it. Accordingly, I am going to send a copy of your letter to Dan Syme in the hope that he can enlighten you.

Please give my warm good wishes to your father and by all means talk your 17 year old into becoming a rabbi. One of my daughters is at HUC and nothing is more wonderful than to see than one of our children who has internalized those values which we strive to give them in the choice of his or her profession.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

CC: RABBI DAN SYME

TEMPLE ISRAEL

P.O. Box 254

Dover, New Hampshire 03820

Rabbi Jonathan H. Gerard

(603) 742-3976

November 17, 1993

Dear Alex,

Last week my Confirmation class discussion wound its way to a consideration of your call for a more active role in encouraging converts to Judaism from among the "unchurched." (I appreciated the corrective letters in this week's Forward. They had not done your talk justice.) Anyway, my students raised a problem with the term "conversion." "How can you call it conversion when the person had no religion to convert from?" asked one student. "What would you prefer to call it?" I asked. We could not find a word we could unite around enthusiastically, but the kids thought "assignation" preferable to "conversion". (How about "promotion"?) Well, you are better with words than everyone this side of Abraham Joshua Heschel, so I leave it to you to consider whether some alternative term is desireable.

By the way, I am again using the UAHC's *Adventures in Living Judaism* pamphlet series, written by Martin Cohen and Zevin. You published only parts 1 (Identity) and 2 (Survival)—but never did 3 (Values). Martin Cohen tells me that it sits in a warehouse on Long Island (whatever that means). Do you know anything about this? Is there any way I could get a copy of it, even in galley form, to use experimentally? I've been dying to see it since Martin first told me about it—but he is somewhat vague about who "owns" it. I've tried to get some information from Seymour Rossel, but he has none.

Anyway, happy turkey. I hope all is well with your family. We are well. My father found a new career in his retirement (storytelling), but is now beginning to slow down more significantly. (He'll be 70 Dec. 3.) After ten years here in Dover the congregation and I are in the process of negotiating a continuing contract, but that will mean their coming to terms with giving me some health coverage and RPB contribution. We'll see. My 17 year old Daniel says he wants to be a rabbi. I think he'd be a good one.

Sincerely,

A member of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations "Who is wise? One who learns from all people." --- Pirke Avot

November 23, 1993



FROM:

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Rabbi Daniel B. Syme

Please note Jonathan's letter.

Please enlighten him. My own memory on this score is only vague.



O Wheeler

November 9, 1993

From: Rabbi Alexander N. Schindler

To: Dru Greenwood

The enclosed correspondence from Rabbi Henry Cohen and my response are self-explanatory. I enclose his course outline and would be grateful for your review and reaction to the possibility of a new book, "Why Not Judaism?"

Thanks.





RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

* PRESIDENT | 838 FIFTH AVENUE | NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

November 9. 1993 25 Heshvan 5754

Rabbi Henry Cohen
Beth David Reform Congregation
P.O. Box 287
Gladwyne PA 19035

Dear Henry:

It was good hearing from you and I am intrigued by the thought that you might wish to do a sequel to <u>Why</u> <u>Judaism</u> to be entitled <u>Why Not Judaism</u>? I ◆appreciate your having shared with me the course outline which would serve as an outline for the text.

I will study the outline and discuss it with our Outreach and Publications Divisions. Needless to note, I will certainly get back to you before too long. Right now, I am still trying to get caught up with the post-Biennial responsibilities and the flood of correspondence which my call for proselytizing has brought forth.

I am delighted that you are enjoying your position as Rabbi Emeritus, you certainly are managing to keep busy and that is great.

Rhea joins me in sending fondest regards from house to house.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



Nov. 1, 1993

Rabbi Alexander Schindler President, Union of American Hebrew Cong. 838 Fifth Ave. New York, NY, 10021

Dear Alex:

I've been folowing the NY Times report of your Convention talk on OUTreach, and I was impressed by your interview on NPR. This prompts me to let you know that, now that I am emeritized, and will in January be teaching the Intro course for Outreach in Philadelphia, I am considering writing a kind of sequel to the out-of-print Why Judaism that will make a more convincing case that could be called: WHY NOT JUDAISM???

To give you an idea of my approach, I am enclosing an outline of the course(which could be the outline of a text), as well as a talk I plan to give in San Juan in February. (My one and only disciple is Bradd Boxman who has invited me(along with other colleagues) to be scholar-in-residence in St. Thomas with a side-trip to San Juan.)

I mentioned my tentative plans to Stuart Benick, who suggested I let Dru Greenwood know of my proposal, to see if the national office of Outreach might have some interest in what I am doing. So, I am enclosing copies to them.

I hope you will send me your reaction.

I am enjoying my emeritization. I've done the required courses....now for the electives....

All the best...

Lowey

MEMORANDUM

November 4, 1993

COPY

FROM:

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

TO:

Dru Greenwood

Please note what Burt Greenspon has to say about Outreach.

He obviously doesn't know what we are about and perhaps
you could enlighten him by sending him a note.





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

November 4, 1993 20 Heshvan 5754

Burton E. Greenspon, Esq. 419 Wood Acres Drive East Amherst, NY 14051

Dear Mr. Greenspon:

I am grateful for your letter of October 29th and the many good thoughts which you have to offer. I would really urge you to get acquainted with some of the programs which we have developed, which alas, are not carried out in every single congregation. But the resources are there. At least some of the things which you recommend have been implemented.

I urge you particularly to get in touch with Dru Greenwood so that she can tell you what we have done and what we are doing in the Outreach area. Dru is our Director of Outreach and she can be reached here at the Union, although I am going to send her a copy of your letter - even as I am going to share it with the Education program so that they might learn from and be stimulated by some of your thoughts.

I am also going to ask Dru Greenwood to get in touch with you just to tell you what we have done to "spread our successful concepts about."

Again, my thanks for your thoughtfulness.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Dru Greenwood

ON OUTREACH

I was surprised to learn that 85% of American Jews belong to a synagogue at one time or another and yet only 30% hold memberships at any one point in time. An awful lot of people pass through without being touched. That troubles me. Emotionally, we are not reaching these people. In the business world if you can't maintain the loyalty of your customer base, you go out of business.

Before this weekend I had never heard outreach touted affirmatively. The idea of suggesting that one consider converting to Judaism is a bit of anathema to us all. When my congregation started Stepping Stones last year, the rules were firm. No one could participate if they were members at another synagogue or church. We wanted to persuade all of the local synagogues to participate...and we were afraid to offend. Maybe we should reevaluate our position?

There were a startling number and variety of outreach programs being implemented all across the country. When we find some winners, I hope someone will spread the successful concepts about. It is also clear to me that we ought to do more focus group analysis. We simply ought to ask people in these programs what works and what does not.

As you can see, the weekend left me somewhat overstimulated. I hope I have reciprocated in some small measure for the memories I took away with me.

Sincerely.

Cd: DRU RREEN WOOD

BURTON E. GREENSPON, ESQ.

419 WOOD ACRES DRIVE EAST AMHERST, NEW YORK 14051

October 29, 1993

Rabbi Alexander Schindler Union of American Reform Congregations 838 Fifth Avenue New York, New York 10021-12121

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

I had the privilege to attend the biennial just concluded. I offer the following thoughts in grateful appreciation for the experience.

On Continuing Education

I think that most Jews presume that learning is good. In each congregation there is a small chug (or potential for its formation) of intellectually self-motivated people. Like the "wise" child at the seder, they always know the right question to ask. But what of the child too slow to ask? How do we reach out to him?

Some ideas, a few of which have already been implemented in various congregations:

1. Back to Basics- When it comes to Judaism, all too many of us are either functionally illiterate or only marginally educated. In my youth we were taught broad universal truths. Services were in English and largely nonparticipatory. Yamulkas were forbidden. After confirmation, Reform Jews became occasional Jews, relying on the High Holidays and Zionism for Jewish identity and returning to the Temple life when and if the children needed a religious school.

I believe that there are adult Jews who can be inspired to become Jewish-by-choice. However, to close the sale we must recognize that they are embarrassed by a genuine lack of knowledge and are fearful of being intimidated by more knowledgeable participants. We should not be reluctant to recruit people to learn. A Cleveland congregation advertised its Back to Basics program in the Temple bulletin and the response was dismal. The same ad was placed in the local secular newspaper and found a strong

response. Obviously, if you're not involved in Judalsm, you're not likely to read the Temple topics and even if you did you would assume that the message was addressed to those who are "involved".

We must remember the first rule of modern communications theory. Is the message being received and understood? If not, you can't expect any kind of response. I strongly believe that these types of programs need to be expanded.

- 2. Parent Learning Tract As you know, Stepping Stones has a parent track. Can we find a way to apply the principle to the existing hebrew school experience? If the parents are motivated enough to pay for hebrew school, maybe they can be persuaded to join in, especially if its part of the required curriculum. The boy scouts require parents to help make the model cars. The little league requires parents to stripe the field. Why are we so timid?
- 3. The Keva Program This program sounds like it may have some real potential. However, I would recommend shifting the staff's focus from validation of credentials to creation and distribution of materials. I like the teacher track concept because it sets a goal and we Americans like definitive goals. There is an additional benefit in that the pupil becomes the teacher and the cycle of learning continues. Philosophically, this is very appealing. It also helps create resources we don't have in great abundance right now. However, the congregations could use some course ideas and materials. The central office should act as a clearing house of information amongst the congregations. I would leave the validation of credit hours up to the congregations.
- 4. Process vs. Product The process of being educated is in large measure more important than the product, especially if you recognize that you're on a road that ends only at the grave. The process... this experience creates the bonding to peers, to community and to Judaism. However, some suggestions with respect to products that worked elsewhere would be helpful to all of us. Personally, I believe that some degree of Kavanah must be generated to inspire one to put in the effort needed to "get" the Keva. I favor projects which mix the concepts. For example, study the Megillah, write a parody and produce the production. A similar effort can be made with respect to a Shabbot service.





RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

*PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

September 14, 1993 28 Elul 5753

Mrs. Lewis C. Hecht 2612 Lynnhurst Drive Vestal, NY 13850

Dear Jean:

Thank you for your very thoughtful letter. You've raised many serious issues to which I'd like to respond personally.

Your description of the Jewish home you and your husband created for your daughters is very moving. They surely carry with them a deep love and active knowledge of their Jewish heritage that will remain with them always. You gave them a precious gift.

Just as the UAHC camp and youth group programs, powerful as they are in building Jewish identity, do not provide an inoculation against intermarriage, neither can Outreach carry that burden. Outreach was never designed to stem the tide of intermarriage. Rather it was intended to reach out to those who are intermarried and invite them to make Jewish choices for themselves and their families. Those Jewish choices include conversion to Judaism, which is an outcome that Outreach encourages. Have you seen the enclosed pamphlet prepared just last year by the Outreach Commission?

The fact is that we live in a larger American society where interfaith marriage has become common among all religious groups and where conversion is a path chosen less often than in the past in all religions. Living in an open society as we do, where the individual's freedom to choose is valued, we can no longer compel such decisions as choice of career or choice of mate. I think we would not have it any other way.

September 14, 1993 Mrs. L.C. Hecht Page 2

The purpose of Outreach is to open the treasures of Judaism and Jewish life to those who wish to explore it and claim it for their own. We welcome non-Jewish spouses because our tradition calls us to welcome the stranger who dwells among us. The desire of an individual to become a Jew is nurtured by that closeness and we see more and more non-Jews converting to Judaism several years after marriage. Although it may be that a strong program of Outreach may weaken the prohibition against intermarriage, the alternative would be far worse, driving away many who otherwise would join us.

The vast majority of young Jews who intermarry today do not do so as a rejection of their Jewish heritage, but out of love for their partner. We have a responsibility to reach out to them in love. Outreach, far from weakening Jewish identity, seeks always to strengthen and support it in the Jewish partner, the not-yet-Jewish partner and in their children as well.

All good wishes for a shanah tovah.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

2612 Lynnhurst Drive Westal, New York 13850 September 2, 1993
Schindler of American Hebrew Congregations

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

Dear Rabbi:

As we are preparing to send in our registration for the biennial, I decided to write to you about something that has been concerning me for some time. As the immediate past president of Temple Concord in Binghamton and a member of the Pennsylvania Council board, I have seen first-hand the impact that Outreach has had on our congregations. After looking at all sides of the issue, I am beginning to have serious doubts about the program for several reasons.

First, I do not think that Outreach has done anything to stem the rate of mixed marriage, but it does seem to have caused the rate of conversion to drop. We have made non-Jewish spouses feel so welcome, that there is no longer any needed for them to convert.

Second, as our children are growing up in congregations surrounded by the Outreach program, I believe they are now getting a message that says that a mixed marriage is acceptable, because we will help you to fit into our congregation regardless of your selection of spouse. They never hear that marriage to a non-Jew is not what we want for them.

I believe that in our efforts to be liberal Reform Jews, we have neglected to inculcate our children with the idea that a mixed marriage is not what we want for them. When we send our kids off to top-notch liberal colleges and universities, we have them prepared for everything, except for the task of selecting a spouse. I believe that my husband and I did more than most in trying to give our daughters a strong Jewish identity. Both Amy and Sara attended Camp Harlem and Camp Kutz. They were active NFTY participants, and Amy went on the 6-week NFTY Israel trip, while Sara is in Israel now in the NFTY College Academic Year program. Despite all this, Amy is engaged to a wonderful young man who is not Jewish.

After much soul-searching, I have decided that the thing we did wrong was not to bring them up in an environment where it was just known that marriage to a Jew was what was expected of them. We feel that this would violate our liberal views. I am not naive enough to believe that a change of attitude by Jewish parents will end the mixed marriages all around us; however, I believe it would stem the tidal wave confronting us.

As you prepare your remarks for the biennial, I think that this issue has to be addressed. We have to balance the Outreach program against the need for strengthening our Jewish identity so that we will still be a viable community in another two generations.

Best wishes to you and your family in the coming year, and I look forward to hearing you in San Francisco.

Very truly yours,

Jean M. Hecht (Mrs. Lewis C.)

Jean m. Hecht

Quhrant.

May 18, 1993 27 Iyar 5753

Dr. Egon Mayer, Director Center for Jewish Studies 33 West 42nd Street, Box 465 New York, NY 10036-8099

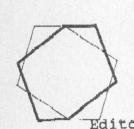
Dear Egon:

Your letter is great! Thank you for writing and for sharing your comments with me, I much appreciate your having written as you did. I hope the Times prints the letter!

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander NM. Schindler



The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York

Center for Jewish Studies / Box 465 Graduate Center: 33 Wust 42 Street, New York, N.Y. 10036-8099 Editor

The New York Times 229 West 43rd Street New York, N.Y. 10036 Send ce Serond c.

May 18, 1993

Dear Editor:

The Jewish holiday of Shavuoth, which begins the evening of May 25th honors the memory of the legendary Ruth the Moabite, that paragon of all converts to Judaism. In light of this occasion, it is only fitting that two factual errors in your otherwise sensitive portrayal of Jewish converts and conversion ("Embracing Judaism as Personal Choice: Members of Minority Groups Convert," May 17th) be corrected.

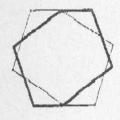
The article suggests that most converts choose to become Jewish through the Orthodox or Conservative branches of Judaism. In fact, according to the findings of the 1990 National Jewish Population survey, cited in the same article, most conversions (44%) take place under Reform Jewish auspices, 30% under the auspices of the Conservative movement and 21% under the auspices of the Orthodox. The great majority of those converting under any of the branches join Reform congregations.

None of this should be surprising, since it is only the Reform movement which has had an organized program for attracting and educating converts to Judaism. Reform Judaism has been doing this since the establishment of its outreach program in 1978.

Further, the article erroneously asserts, "The lengths of these (conversion) course vary from three months for Reform conversion to more than a year for Orthodox conversion," implying that what distinguishes these programs is educational rigor. In fact, the critical emphasis of Orthodox conversions is on ritual correctness not educational rigor. Orthodox conversions can and do take place within days or just a few months of a prospective convert's expression of intention — provided that one finds the right rabbi. While it is fair to say that Orthodox and Conservative conversions usually take longer, this is often due to the absence of consensus in those movements as to what constitutes an appropriate course of training for a convert to Judaism and who will take responsibility for it.

Egon Mayer, Ph. b.

Director, Jewish Outreach Institute



The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York

Center for Jewish Studies / Box 465 Graduate Center: 33 West 42 Street, New York, N.Y. 10036-8099 212 642-2180

FAX 212 642-1988

light letter, tappear,

SENT TO: Rabbi Alex Schindler
SENT FROM: Egon. Mayer
DATE: 5/18/93
MESSAGE: This is self explanatory For your files Again

Outros

April 27, 1993 6 Iyar 5753

TO: Rabbi Allen I. Freeling, University Synagogue

From: Edith J. Miller, Assistant to the President

cc: Rabbi Daniel B. Syme

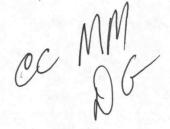
Thank you for sharing University Synagogue's policy statement on the role of non-Jews in the synagogue. It was received during Rabbi Schindler's absence from the city and so I write to acknowledge receipt of your memo. Needless to note, it will be brought to his attention when he returns to his desk next week.

This is a subject which is being discussed in many quarters and is of great interest. I have shared a copy of the policy statement with our Director of Outreach, Dru Greenwood, for the Outreach Commission is particularly interested in this subject. I have also shared it with the Chairman of the Board, Melvin Merians.

Thanks for your thoughtfulness in bringing this document to our attention.

Warm regards.





MEMORANDUM

TO : Rabbis Alexander Schindler, Daniel Syme, Joseph Glaser

and Rabbi Lennard Thal

FROM : Rabbi Allen I. Freehling

RE : Participation of Non-Jews in Synagogue Life - an adopted

policy statement

DATE: April 20, 1993

For a number of years, especially because the number of non-Jewish congregants here continues to increase, I have asked our Board of Trustees to formulate a policy regarding areas in which these members may and may not participate, so we'll not be in a position of dashing expectations sometime in the future. Generally, the elected leadership chose to remain silent on the issue.

Then, when the Summer 1992 issue of REFORM JUDAISM was published, Cantor Frailich decided to take the initiative by drafting a policy statement. (I believe that he deserves much credit for involving himself in this vital subject with such sensitivity)! After he and I had an opportunity to refine it, the matter was brought before our Board for debate and adoption a month ago. Now it is a stated policy which the entire Synagogue Family may use as a guideline.

Realizing that every congregation faces questions such as those which prompted us to take these positions, the president of our Synagogue, Jim Banks, agreed with me that we ought to share this document with you. Perhaps it might serve as a prototype for our peers to consider when adopting their own policy in this vital area of congregational life themselves.

This comes with our warmest best wishes, as ever.

Fondly

Allen I. Freehling, Ph.D., D.D.

Rabbi

Enc

A POLICY REGARDING THE PARTICIPATION OF NON-JEWS IN SYNAGOGUE LIFE

Original draft was submitted by Cantor Jay I. Frailich on June 17, 1992-incorporating revisions by Rabbi Freehling on the same date. After minor revisions, the policy as stated below was adopted by the Board of Trustees on March 8, 1993.

At University Synagogue, we acknowledge the fact that there is an increasing number of member families in which one of the spouses is not Jewish. The participation of non-Jews in Synagogue life raises several questions that need to be answered with sensitivity and forthrightness. The primary issues are those of membership, leadership, and ritual.

In the Summer 1992 issue of <u>Reform Judaism</u>, an article by Rabbi Nina Mizrahi entitled "Non-Jews In The Synagogue" states: "Rabbi Leslie Gutterman, co-chair of the (Union of American Hebrew Congregations) Outreach Commission asserts that congregations should set boundaries (for the participation of the non-Jewish member) in a manner that is meaningful within a context that preserves Jewish authenticity. He believes that most non-Jews understand and respect such a requirement, as they, themselves, are choosing a personal boundary by not becoming a Jew. Not to have clearly delineated policies about membership, leadership, and ritual participation sends a mixed message to Jews and non-Jews alike about who we are and how we operate."

MEMBERSHIP

The By-Laws as revised and restated on May 20, 1990 and stated below affirm our basic membership policy. There is no need to further revise this statement.

Article III

Section 1. Any person of the Jewish faith, 18 years or over, may become a member by submitting a written application and complying with dues requirements set forth in Article III, Section 4. In the case of a couple, the requirements relating to being of the Jewish faith shall be deemed satisfied if at least one of the two persons is of the Jewish faith.

LEADERSHIP

- 1. Non-Jewish members may not serve on the Synagogue's Board of Trustees nor hold Synagogue office.
- 2. Non-Jewish members may serve or "chair" any committee subject to the stipulation stated above.
- 3. Non-Jewish members may become full members of Affiliate groups.
- 4. Non-Jewish members may serve on the Boards of Affiliate groups and hold office, with the exception of the office of President.

RITUAL

With regard to non-Jews participating in ritual practice, our policy is based upon the concept of inclusiveness. Especially in life-cycle ceremonies involving children, we acknowledge the support and encouragement of the non-Jewish parent. Therefore, we provide many opportunities for ritual and liturgical involvement.

Simultaneously, there are certain ritual practices that are "covenantal." These acts imply a specific commitment to the practices and beliefs of Judaism, and they should only be performed by Jews. Our policy is guided by both of these precepts.

FOR ALL SERVICES

- 1. Non-Jews may sit on the Bema.
- 2. Non-Jews may read from certain liturgical portions during a service as determined by the Rabbi and/or the Cantor. Care should be taken that the reading is of a more "universal" nature rather than "particular."
- 3. Non-Jews may open and/or close the Holy Ark.
- 4. Non-Jews are permitted both publicly and privately to pronounce the "Hamotzi" (the blessing over bread which is the Jewish "grace" before a meal).

FOR FRIDAY NIGHTS

1. Non-Jews may read introductions to the blessings over the Shabbat candles and/or the Kiddush during Friday Evening Services, but they should not recite the blessings. When there is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrant, the non-Jewish parent may read the introduction and the child should recite the blessings.

FOR SERVICES WHEN THE TORAH IS READ (E.G. BAR/BAT MITZVAH)

- 1. Non-Jews may participate in the Hakafah the ceremony of walking the Torah around the sanctuary; however, they should not carry the Torah during this ritual.
- 2. During the "Chain of Tradition" ceremony during Bar/Bat Mitzvah Services, the Torah (representing Jewish tradition) is passed from generation to generation. When there is a non-Jewish parent or grandparent, one Jewish person representing each generation (one grandparent one parent) should participate.
- 3. Non-Jews may not be called to the Torah for an Aliyah because this is a highly significant covenantal act. (An aliyah involves being called to the Torah and reciting the Blessings that are said both before and after the Torah is read).
 - a. If desired, a non-Jew may accompany a Jewish spouse to the Torah during an Aliyah, but he/she may not recite the Blessings.
- 4. Non-Jews are not permitted to read or chant from a Torah scroll: however, they may read an English translation of the scriptural portion.
- 5. During a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service there is an opportunity for the parents of the child to speak. This applies equally to Jewish and non-Jewish parents alike without exception.

Heeding our Reform Movement's call to set boundaries, we are following the command of God, Who spoke to the Israelites just before the revelation on Mount Sinai saying: "You shall set boundaries for your people round about." (Exodus 19:12)

By doing this, we open our doors in welcome and acknowledge with love the presence of non-Jews in our Congregation, while keeping in mind the purpose of this Congregation:

1. To worship God in accordance with the faith of Judaism;

- 2. To cultivate a love and understanding of the Jewish heritage;
- 3. To stimulate a sense of kinship within the Jewish community;
- 4. To strengthen the bonds of loyalty among Jewish people everywhere; and,
- 5. To help the world acknowledge God's rule by performing acts of righteousness and lovingkindness.





RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

What I

March 2, 1993 9 Adar 5753

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman Temple Emanu-El 8500 Hillcrest Road Dallas, TX 75225-4204

Dear Shelly:

Your letter of February 11th reached me after I went off to Israel, hence my late response.

By all means, let us get together to discuss this matter. There are no issues of principle which divide us and so an agreement on details can be reached.

I felt that Walter Jacobs initial presentation was entirely too exclusionary, at least in its tone. His subsequent responses to the several questions which were raised were much more open.

But let us get together soon.

We should do everything possible to avoid a conflict between the laity and the rabbinate. That has been a goal of my striving all along, especially in re officiation.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



February 11, 1993 20 Shevat, 5753

Rabbi Alexander Schindler UAHC 838 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

Thanks so much for the warm welcome at the Executive Committee of the UAHC Board. I was privileged to be a part of the deliberations and look forward to my full participation as CCAR President.

I am writing to you because I feel that our movement is at a juncture, an essential and critical one. I cannot agree with you with regard to what you expressed at the end of the Executive Meeting on Monday. We need to continue as we have until now welcoming non-Jews married to Jews. Non-Jewish parents ought to participate in life cycle moments (naming and blessing, brit, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, etc.). But it is essential to retain some differences. To remove all differentiations and grant them full membership would be to diminish our particularism and covenant responsibilities and privileges (as Jews) in a scary way. In my mind, removing all differentiation is to reduce further the impulse toward conversion. Some become Jewish so as to become full partners in the covenant, its responsibilities and privileges. Now we would say "Don't worry" - you are fully part of us even though you have not affirmed it. Simply to retain differences in governance will not suffice. The "seyag la Torah" is being torn asunder.

I have worked with many children of mixed married families. Most were delighted that their non-Jewish parents would participate in certain ways. Their parents were honored and embraced. The children were not lessened nor diminished in any way.

I cannot ask nor will I or Temple Emanu-El permit a practicing Christian to be a full participant in the Torah service. I would be pleased to share my and our thinking on this with you. There are real differences. We must not minimize differences in order to be respectful and accepting.

Alex, you are the leader of our movement. Those of us who do not officiate at mixed marriages but try to reach out effectively and caringly to our mixed-married families are being pushed from every side. Just as many congregations now



Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman

Rabbi Alexander Schindler Page 2 of 2

request panels of only rabbis who will perform mixed-marriage ceremonies (I am sorry that no one from the UAHC staff was at the Placement Commission meeting on Tuesday) those of us who do not are coming under attack. We have been loyal to your call for outreach. Some of us now feel that in return you as the major and most respected spokesperson for our movement are pushing us to a further blurring and possible obliteration of all boundaries. If that happens, will there be any more room in our movement for us? For mixed marrieds - yes - but for us - no.

I am appealing to you. We need to counsel carefully. I know you care. I am proud to look to you as our national leader. But you must listen to our cries and appeals as well. We are now the ones being cast aside - it is only a matter of time.

In profound respect,

Sheldon Zimmerman

Rabbi

SZ:ss







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

January 5, 1993 12 Tevet 5753

Mr. Jack Rainsberger Box 7000 - NNCC 7588 Carson City, NV 89702

Dear Jack:

I can imagine how dismayed you were when you discovered what was withheld from you these many years. Please don't be too harsh in judging your forbears. Leading the life of a Jew was never easy. We were subject to constant persecution culminating, as it did, in the Nazi era when 1/3 of our people, 6 million, including women and little children, were exterminated. Your forbears wanted to protect you as it were. That, undoubtedly was their motivation.

Insofar as I am concerned, your Jewish antecedence confers on you the presumption of Jewishness, but of course that Jewishness has to be confirmed with acts of identification with the Jewish people and the study which you suggest is just about the best way of gaining that knowledge.

I am sending a copy of your letter to our Regional Director in the Pacific Southwest in the hope that he might be able to provide you with some materials and also refer you to the rabbi nearest to the community in which you live.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Rabbi Lennard Thal

December 26, 1992

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America

United Synagogue of America

Dear Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler:

I've recently discovered that my maternal grandparents were Jewish. For reasons apparently known only to themselves, they decided against practicing this faith, or even acknowledging it. My mother, again for unknown reasons, continued in this deception, keeping the truth even from me. It also seems that my paternal grandmother and my father also practiced this deception.

None of them joined, or attended, any other religious services.

I've no idea of just where this leaves me in the eyes of Judaism, none of these people left any record (birth certificates, and so on), that, I suppose they thought, could be used against them, but I find myself very angry with these people. I've never known a religious core, and at my age, 53, I'm not too sure that I'm capable of developing one. I would, however, appreciate learning more about Judaism, and would be grateful for any suggestion you'd care to give for study, or information you'd care to share.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Jack Rainsberger Box 7000 - NNCC 7588 Carson City, NV 89702 memo

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS 838 FIFTH AVE., NEW YORK,N.Y. 10021 TEL:(212) 249-0100

MISS JANE EVANS

DATE:

Leo Back did not agree that one had to be Tewish to belong to a congregational newber. He told me very strongly that anyone who desired to join one of our congregations should be welcomed as a natural sequence of saying " house shall be a house of prayer for all people

Contractor of the second

September 24, 1992 26 Elul 5752

Ms. Barbara A. Friedlander 10497 Shadyside Lane Cincinnati, Oh 45249

Dear Ms. Friedlander:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter. I admire your evident commitment and am pleased that you have given voice to your concerns.

You have articulated several different issues currently of great importance to our movement. That the face of the world is changing, in particular our Jewish world, is clear. When the intermarriage rate is 50%, two-thirds of new marriages involving a Jew are intermarriages. While we do not condone intermarriage, it is a fact of life, one to which we must respond. That is why I called for a UAHC Outreach program in 1978, to retain or bring intermarried couples and families into Judaism.

The related issue that you have raised, the role of non-Jews in temple life, now being examined by your temple, is a complex one. Given the diversity of the Reform movement and the autonomous nature of our synagogues, there is no uniform practice throughout the movement. Many Reform congregations, however, do maintain distinction in the area of ritual participation and governance between those who are Jews and those who have not chosen to become Jews. As in other area of choosing a congregation with which to affiliate, you might look into the policies of other Reform temples in your area to find one that better meets your needs.

With kindest greetings and best wishes for a sweet New Year, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

BARBARA A. FRIEDLANDER

10497 Shadyside Lane Cincinnati Ohio 45249

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

September 9, 1992

Dear Rabbi Schindler.

All purely we

I am not sure you can help me with this problem, but as the President of U.A.H.C., I am hoping you can give me some direction or understanding. My temple is currently examining issues of the non-Jew in the Temple; our Rabbi is totally accepting of any and all people to belong, and to participate fully in any aspect of Temple life regardless of whether they are actively practicing another religion at the same time. I don't understand this; how can we build a solid Jewish faith for our children to believe in when our Temples are full of non-Jews (which to me indicates an acceptance of intermarriage).

I grew up in the Reform Youth Movement. I was President of my youth group, went to Kutz, etc., and I take my belief and feelings in Judaism very seriously. Although I dated non-Jews, when it came to making the serious commitment of marriage, I married a "nice Jewish boy." Matter-of-fact, I knew my husband was for me during a Rosh Hashanah service when we were both saying the same prayers; it was part of a commonality. We now have two young sons who I want to grow up with the same ties to their faith as I have. I am extremely active in my Temple; we celebrate Jewish holidays, and my oldest son attends the Temple Nursery School, but I am frustrated.

I cannot find a Temple that feels "Jewish." How can I explain to my boys that they should believe in Judaism. and marry Jewish girls when they grow up, when next to them at Hebrew School will be children from mixed marriages - apparently proving that intermarriage does work. In a world where Jews are a minority, it was always comfortable to go to Temple and be with one's own. We certainly have friends who are not Jewish, but at times, it is comforting and familiar to be with people who share your heritage and religious beliefs, and who know what it is like to be a Jew in a Christian world; a world which now seems to have extended right into our Synagogues. My Rabbi has indicated that perhaps I should leave if I am not happy, and join a Conservative or Orthodox Shul, but to me that is no answer.

I am a Reform Jew and I want my boys to grow up in the NFTY Movement. I realize the world is changing, and for Judaism to stay alive in the '90s, it needs to be more flexible, but what will there be left if our Temples are dominated by non-Jews. There must be alternatives. I am not sure what you can do to help me, but I am hoping there are still Rabbinical leaders who believe in Jews and Judaism.

I trust this letter will be held in confidence. Thank you for listening.

Very Truly Yours,

Barbara Friedlander

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