

MS-630: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler Digital Collection, 1961-1996. Series A: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1961-1996.

> Box 10

Folder 11b

Outreach [Intermarriage], 1985-1994.

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## American Museum of Naturai History

May 23, 1988

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Direct Cinema Limited P.O. Box 69799 Los Angeles, CA 90069 attn.: Mitchell Block

Dear Mitchell:

We are very pleased to confirm that NO APPLAUSE, JUST THROW MONEY, CANNIBAL TOURS and INTERMARRIAGE: WHEN LOVE MEETS TRADITION have had the honor of being selected for the 1988 Margaret Mead Film Festival. The Festival dates this year are September 26-29.

LCA

Please be sure that prints reach the Museum before Wednesday, September 14, addressed to my attention.

Please return a signed copy of this letter to confirm the films' participation.

We often have requests from media representatives to view the films during the summer, so if you can, please send video cassette copies sometime in July.

High quality black and white still photos are very important for promotion and should be sent immediately.

Call if you have additional questions. My direct line is (212) 769-5172. You can reach Jonathan Stack or Nathaniel Johnson at (212) 769-5305: We hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Malcolm Arth, Chairman Margaret Mead Film Festival

Congratulations!

JUN 2 1988 Mead Festival Programmers

> Malcolm Arth Nathaniel Johnson Jonathan Stack

Jung 7, 1988

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

Yvonne Fink

Lydia Kukoff

You will note I am sharing this memo with Lydia and I am also sending to her a copy of your July 5 memo in regard to the TODAY SHOW program on intermarriage. Outreach is, after all, her area of concern.

You should know that NBC was in touch with the Union and had contact with Ellyn Geller, Nina Mizrahi and Lydia. The angle they were seeking for the program was distressing to all of our people and from your description they did, indeed, disregard any input from the Union. Lydia can fill you in one some of the other people who are deeply involved in Outreach and working with couples and families whose comments were also ignored.

In other words, we did what we could - they didn't listen so what yould you have us do?

MEMORANDUM

From Yvonne B. Fink

Date July 5, 1988

To Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

Copies

Subject NBC T.V.'s Today Show

For your information, in case you do not already know, on Friday July 1, 1988 there was a segment on the intermarriage of Jews on NBC's <u>Today</u> Show with Jane Pauley. The focus was the intermarriage of Michael Dukakis and his wife Kitty. There were also couples discussing their experience with intermarriage (i.e. difficulties with raising children in terms of religion, etc.)

It was stated that Rabbis of the Reform movement are the only ones that will officiate at an intermarriage (much to the objections of the Conservative and Orthodox movements). It was also stated that there is a high incidence of intermarriage among Jews, the highest being 40% among Reform Jews. Programs for the intermarried, sponsored by the Conservative Movement and the Jewish Federation, were discussed as well.

It seems to me that there is an opportunity and certainly a need to publicize the programs of the Reform movement.

Where is our public relations?

Thank You,

Yvonne B. Fink



Union of American Hebrew Congregations 838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

TO MA. DAVID DOLIN



Of Palm Beach County

2475 West Atlantic Avenue, Delray Beach, Florida 33448 Telephone: 407-276-6161

Rabbi Samuel M. Silver, D.D.

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Cantor Elaine Shapiro

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President Helyn M. Berger

9-18-90

DEAR DAVID,

The NY Times says today that you are startled that so many people favor a rabbinic participation in interfaith marriages.

Yoy would have been less startled ifyou had paid attention to the letters I've been writing you for a dozen years.

Not only have you ignored me, but so have Rabbi Schindler and Al Vorspan. For years I've been pleading with them to let give the rationale for my procedures at a Biennial. They have persistently blocked me, offering the alibis that such discussions have taken place.

They have not taken place. My own approach to the situation has never been presented to a Biennial. Actually, in the hundreds of such events I have not really performed an intermarriage, but have given a Jewish ceremony to a mixed couple. The amazing phenomenon, ignored by your committee and the UAHC is that non-Jewish partners are eager to have a Jewish ceremony.

I huse have also written and once confronted that great authority, Prof. Egon Mayer and pointed out that there's a flaw in his elaborate statistics. I have asked him to ask a question which would indicate whether the decision on the part of an intermarried couple to go Jewish is not affected if a rabbi does the officiating.

Furthermore, the great Schindler Cutreach idea tackles the problem from the wrong end. The crucial point in destances the decision making by a mixed couple is not after they are married (which is what Outreach touches upon) Committee did but when they ask a rabbi to officiate. Those who have said no have lost many of our people. Those of who say yes ja

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more thing: I don't encourage intermarriages, I caution Saleh

TO MA. DAVID BOLIN

**Temple Sinai** Of Palm Beach County

2475 West Atlantic Avenue, Delray Beach, Florida 33448 Telephone: 407-276-6161

Rabbi Samuel M. Silver, D.D.

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Cantor Elaine Shapiro

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more thing: I don't encourage intermarriages, I caution

Julneau

July 5, 1989 2 Tammuz 5749

Må. Jackie Harris 5 Windermere Way Yiewsley Middlesex UB7 8LX England

Dear Ms. Harris:

As Rabbi Schindler is out-of-the-country and not expected back at his desk for a few weeks, I am taking the liberty of responding to your letter of June 22.

I don't know if you are writing to Rabbi Schindler because you are acquainted with him or decause you have read of our Outreach Program. However, in either event, I can tell you it is not our policy to provide names of rabbis who will perform interfaith marriages or synagogues which will permit such weddings to take place within their walls. To the best of my knowledge, there are no Liberal/Progressive rabbisim Great Britain who will perform interfaith marriages. However, I do believe it would be wise for you to discuss your personal situation with such a rabbi. While I do not have a name for the rabbi in Middlesex, I suggest you contact the Middlesex New Synagogue and arrange for such ammeeting. They are located at 39 Bessborough Road, Harrow, Middlesex HAI 3BS (01-864-0133.

Let me also note that it would not help for you to see Rabbi Schindler as he personally does not perform interfaith marriages and would undoubtedly urge you to have a civil ceremony. But by all means seek to contact the rabbi in Middlesex for counsel.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller Assistant to the President

5, windermere way Viewsley Mithelesex. UB7 8LX 22nd June 1939 Deci Rath Schindler I hope that you don't mind me writing to you, but my france and I have a prottern on which use hope that you might be able to give us same help and advice. I am an orthodox Jewess and have been hought up in an orthodox Jawish household. My fiance, Andreas, is Greek Onthator. of smit in trasmom zitt th does not wish to convert to studicism, havever we would like to be married in a Synagozue and Andrew would be willing to undergo a couse of instruction and be circumcised in

order for this to take place. we have talked about marrying in a registry office, in England, which as you will appreciate is the only cause of action open to us here. However the more we talked the more we realised that a civil ceremony is not what either of us wants. we want be willing to travel anywhere in erelex for us to be married in a synagogue it it is possible and if you bished it to see us then we would arrange this the wanted both be very greatful be able to after on this matter and apologise, ance again, for traubling you. We look forward to hearing from you in the near forbore. Yours sincerely, Jacqueline Harris

EARSI SCHNDRE DR. WIENER CENT CRH CUF COIF UI NOT CONTRIBUTED I. FBPI DOULD THOLEHT TOO MGHT WAX TO LESPOND TO HIS CETTER. DAVIDETTWITE



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

> April 21, 1992 30 Nisan 5753

Julian Wiener, M.D. 3858 Redbud Road Jackson, MS 39211

Dear Julian:

- 19PL

Thank you so much for your letter. I am deeply grateful for the helping hand which you extended to us. Therefore, forgive me for not responding fully to your commentary concerning rabbinic officiation at intermarriages. That would take us too long and is best left to a personal conversation which I fervently hope we might have the opportunity to hold in the not too distant future.

Suffice it to say, for the moment, that there is no categorical answer to the question about officiation. I, myself do not officiate at intermarriages. Just the same, I invariably will attend the marriage ceremony itself and participate in some other manner. I can tell you, quite objectively, that this has never evoked any sense of rejection. All of the parties were more than understanding of my position and were deeply grateful that I demonstrated my acceptance of them by being present at their wedding ceremony and participating in some manner other than in speaking the words of the Jewish marriage formula which, is really not applicable to intermarriage situations.

But as I indicated earlier, my brief paragraph is really not sufficient for the need and I do hope we will have a chance to meet with one another in the not too distant future.

Sincerely,

-H Julian Wiener, M.D. 3858 REDBUD ROAD 13 apr 1993 Robbie alegander Schudder UAHC 838 Fifth avenue Here York, N. Y 1002 - 7064. Dear alley: Thank you for your second letter which outlined -some of the problems of Reform Judaian. I, too, are Gleased with our apoutle within over Reporm Thosement ystam constantly desturbed by the sate of religiour intermerriage. It is refreshing to hole that the VAHC is Taking steps to altroct the how Jewill Spouse, but as a flugicion I long ago hold that it is more effective to growent descare rather than treat it. If only more Reform Rabbie would cooferate by Sevforming mixed menicager would it not indecate to the couffe that Kelerne fews recogning a problem and would recogning the how proteste Storese as a Communecent les kelde encolional suffort rotteer them friendly rejection? at one time heavy Reform Vabbie loveld gerform enterhearriaged, Now these are bare ones, so the fuile spouse is termed off and the hou- gwick stone feel rejected. To mythicking there is a grevious error and is being greviously acconcered. you must realize that there are knowny Cliniction ministers religere willing to unite the loughe, this bouling their sporte to the needs of the couple. Please let we know I your thoughts and why the Robbinical Schools foster this. Thenke for ison tinel ,



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

April 25, 1991 11 Iyar 5751

Mr. Louis Schwalb 1134 Loxford Terrace Silver Spring, MD 20901

Dear Mr. Schwalb:

Thank you so much for your kind comments concerning my article in <u>Reform Judaism</u>. I am grateful to you for taking the time to write and share your thoughts.

In regard to the UAHC Outreach Program, you should know that the Union does not have a resolution on rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages. This is a matter which comes out of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the rabbinic arm of Reform Judaism. The UAHC is an organization which provides service to our member congregations in regard to their own programs and services. Rabbinic officiation is a rabbinic matter, not one about which we must take a stand as an organization.

In this connection, however, you ought to know that we have found that the manner in which a rabbi says yea or nay to officiating at an interfaith marriage makes a tremendous difference in the couple's approach to joining with the Jewish community after the wedding. While we really do not, as a movement, approve of interfaith marriages, once a couple has determined to be joined in marriage, we certainly want to do our utmost to draw them closer to us so that they and their children will be a part of the Jewish community.

Again, my thanks and my warm good wishes.

Sincerely,

LOUIS SCHWALB 1134 LOXFORD TERRACE SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND 20901

4/18/91

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Rabbe Alexade M Schudler UAHC 838 Fufth are New York, NY 10021 1 enjoyed your article on Reform Judaism 2001, Dear Rabbi which is certainly in line with caller excellent One item I am curious about. we me pushing The Outrooch program for the intermarried, sinders Inducide the program for the intermarried, sinders Indicate that the lasty believe that Rabbis should officiale at mixed marriage. Yet the Union refuses to do so Has any sirvey been undertaken to determine the numbers of Uniterious who joinet Har church because their Rabbis would not officate or The mixed marriage Has any survey been undertaken to determine the number of Sens who left to join other religious (ther of the mon. Jewish porty) or who dropped affiliation completely since they could not get a Pabli to officiate Personally I think it is a drastic mistoke to continue the present policy Succerel Louis Schundb

March 19, 1991 4 Nisan 5751 COPY

Mr. Sylvan Holstine 1755 Shawnee Road Lima, OH 45805

Dear Mr. Holstine:

I was deeply touched by your plaintive letter. Of course I share your sentiments fully. Even though we are not happy about intermarriage, may even oppose it, we do not have to reject the intermarried! On the contrary, we ought to reach out to them, involve them in synagogue life in the hope that the non-Jewish partner will eventually turn to Judaism, or at least make certain that the children of such marriages will in fact be Jews and share the destiny of the Jewish people.

Some years ago, in 1979, I initiated a program which is now called "Outreach", the purpose of which is to serve these very ends. I am asking the director of our program to send you material which might be of help to you.

Please forgive the brevity of my response. Unfortunately, I am on the road almost constantly. I have been in Israel twice during the month and I just returned from the West Coast and have to be off again tomorrow. Still, I hope that the materials which you should be receiving in due order will be of some help to you and your congregation.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Redbe Opter #1 Structures Garlton How Telephone se 1755 Shawnee Road • Lima, Ohio 45805 . Telephone (419) 229-7761 3/13/91 Rabbi a. m. Schiedler . Cin. the new york n.g. Why I am writing this letter, I will never Know! Dear Rabbi :-Larely read Jewish magazines, but upon receipt of the " Reform Judaism" for spring '91 issue was attracted Because of one local problem, I was especially attracted by your article on it's future, to your state ment, quote "In the realm of ontreach to the intermassied and their diildren". If fread correctly, you go on to state there should be the "attetude of realism Turther on you state, quote "for within the pree-choice living condition of north america it is only by invitation, met coexcion, that we can build Jewish life " Then in the article "On Temple Doctor" a state meat is metuded " constructively dealing with intermarried Confiles and their families." all these quotes are not actually spelled out, and this is our situation in Lina. We find that the number of people that seek & in our Touries and internet people that seek to form on Temple are intermarried, have children at finding School and the attitude between our Rabbe and these couples is very coel in nature, due eridently to his long time belief (he is 72 years old)

The Carlon House 3 Whether one or the other of these complex leas ever been converted, seems to be the problem, and my question to your article is that you have not actually spelled this out. I predict as you do, this will become more and more a problem and the question is how do you train the buture Rabbis at the school about this? must one of the complex he converted or does it matter and if the couple joins a Temple has children in Sunday School does it make a must difference that they be accepted whether a set to attend the formation of does accepted, whether one or the other is not converted and does not desire to be, I would like this spelled out. I have been Honorary President of Temple Beth Asrael -Shaare Jedek ever since om nen Temple was brult in '49 and us explained above, our Rubbi of 25 years cannot accept the problem, which exectes not only a relationship act to service attendance, but a serious condition in the Anday School as some of these students, due to intermassinge cause trouble in the school for lack of attitude and interest. I fully amderstand that most Rabbis will mit malry unless one or the other is converted, but to not recogninge profective members with this condition are not welcomed has caused priction, Should we not accept these people? We have trisble lungh as it is in a small community having enough matried cospler members to keep a Temple going and a full time Rabbi

. .

The Carlton House Lima, Ohio 45805 [elephone (419) 229-7761 Verhaps at my age (89) & shouldn't be worring about Lima's Juture, But & helped build our Temple, has part of a merger with another Synagogue in the City ( conservative and orothodog) which has worked out exceptionally well, due to om Rabbis I am sarry for the length of this letter, but om future cannot be with a full time Rabbi as he could not afford today salary, Besides exterience thas shown me that a city of on suge is only a stepping stone to a Rabbis flitule and & cannot blame them. In our history here, since 1903, our Rabbi turnover until the present has been many, also lan concerned that HUC has not given the attention and Consideration to the small community and the buttere of Reform Judaism, I have always been convinced that the Small city is the basis of Referra Judaism, not only for non, but for the picture. a reply at you leisure would be uppre cated. Respectfully Lybran Holstine 1755 Shawnee Rd #701 Luna Oh, 45805

P.S. I trust this letter lind be Confidential and not in angway come back to Linia and our Rabbi

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* CAR-RT-SORT\*\*CR50 20424584 0264 MR&MRS SYLVAN HOLSTEIN HOLS TIWE 1755 SHAWNEE RD #701 LIMA OH 45805



November 30, 1989 2 Kislev 5750

TO: Members, UAHC Executive Committee

The enclosed report by Egon Mayer touches upon one of the most controversial issues facing the American Jewish community. It is the first study of its kind and should give us all pause for thought. I refer particularly to the comment in the Foreward which notes that "there is little evidence indicating that rabbinic officiation does in fact presage subsequent conversion or other involvement in Jewish communal life."

I think you will find the entire report to be of interest. Warm regards.



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

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

February 24, 1977

Dr. Walter Jacob Rodef Shalom Temple Fifth and Morewood Avenues Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213

Dear Walter:

I am hesitant to express my opinion regarding the action of the Responsa Committee at its meeting on January 6th with reference to "participation at marriages together with non-Jewish clergy," since I was not present at the discussion. Nevertheless, I have to say that I feel strongly that the committee statement is a mistake and involves a basic orientation towards the function of the committee and the writing of Reform Responsa with which I disagree.

The fact that "there is no Halachic precedent in the traditional literature on the issue in question," is really not of any particular relevance in terms of writing Reform Responsa. After all, is it not our task to provide guidance for problems as they arise and to deal with contemporary issues? Of what possible relevancy can Reform as a meaningful religious orientation have for the contemporary Jew if we restrict ourselves only to areas which have been dealt with a millennium or so ago? By taking this stance, the Responsa Committee undermines the authenticity of the Reform approach and makes of it an empty gesture.

When the Talmudic sages were confronted by a new situation they found authority for their innovations by turning to a broad imperative such as, "You shall do that which is just and right in the eyes of God," or, "Ask your fathers and they shall tell you, your elders and they shall speak it to you." Please recall the Talmudic statement, "Jerubaal in his generation was like Mosæs in his generation. . . to teach you that even the least worthy, once he has been appointed leader of the community, is like the mightiest of the mighty. Scripture says, 'And you shall come to the Priests, the Levites, and to the Judge that shall be in your day.' Can you imagine that a man shall go to a judge who does not live in his own days? This shows that you must go to (and rely on the authority of) the judge in your own days. . . 'Say not that the former days were better than these (that the former authorities were greater than your own contemporaries.'" (Rosh Hashanah 25b.) Because some obscure Halachist in the 9th or 11th centuries dealt with a problem is certainly no reason to confine ourselves to those same problems. To adopt this position is to relegate our efforts as Reform Jews to total irrelevancy. The assumptions implicit in this position are ridiculous.

You know as well as I the traditional position on homosexuality, for example. A Reform Responsum written with integrity must reject the traditional position and develop one in the light of contemporary knowledge and insight. Does the fact that traditional literature deals with the problem justify a Responsum when all that we can do is utterly reject tradition? Or there is the whole realm of Talmudic law which deals with the relationship to the non-Jew which any civilized human being must utterly reject. Shall we write Responsa on these subjects when we know that we must reject the traditional attitudes and yet refrain from facing the myriad of problems with which contemporary life confronts us? It is completely beyond my understanding how a Responsa Committee can enunciate the position as is stated in the document which you sent to me. I certainly do not subscribe to it and have every intention of writing a Responsum on all problems which confront us as Reform Jews living in an open, free, pluralistic society. I certainly do not consider the Responsa that I do write as binding on anyone except those who wish to turn to them for guidance. The Responsa Committee of the C.C.A.R. cannot and must not shirk this responsibility.

I have been away from my desk for a month in our various Schools and so could not respond any earlier to the draft of the Responsum on Marriage on the Sabbath which you sent me some time ago. I certainly have no objection to a group of committed Reform rabbis reaching the conclusion that marriages are not to be performed on the Sabbath. My intention in writing my Responsum was really to indicate the lack of thought with which resolutions to the Conference are presented. Nevertheless, I strongly object to using the shibboleth of K'lal Yisrael as the authority for the position. Were Reform to have resorted to this nebulous concept (and I really don't know who this K'lal Yisrael is), not a single innovation would ever have been introduced. What makes this position even more ridiculous is that it is presented in all seriousness by a group of men who have rejected what the traditionalist considers to be most essential: we perform marriages without a religious get and thus, halachically, are directly responsible in producing what the Halachist considers mamzerim; we do not observe the dietary laws; we do not observe the laws of nidah and mikvaot; we do not even insist on circumcision for the conversion of an adult, etc., etc., etc. And yet we have the hutzpah to use K'lal Yisrael as a basis for an incidental minutia of marriage on the Sabbath. How can we expect to be taken seriously if we resort to such procedures?

Similarly, I am embarrassed by point 4 of the report on marriage on the Sabbath. Do we expect to be taken seriously when we cite as the basis for our decision: "economic considerations are not absent

## Dr. Walter Jacob

from the modern marriage." Point 2, as well, which would "even discourage weddings from being held on Saturday night as they involve preparation on the Sabbath," is grasping at straws to justify post-facto what we have no inclination to do <u>a priori</u>. It certainly has no validity or cogency in the light of what is happening in our temples today. I was recently a "scholar-in-residence" at a large temple. After the Sabbath morning services, three simultaneous Bar Mitzvahs with bands blaring, liquor flowing, and people dancing were taking place in three of the vestry rooms of the temple. We have to at least make a minimal attempt at honesty with ourselves if we want to be taken seriously.

By all means, let us write a Responsum on Marriage on the Sabbath and if logic and integrity lead us to a negative position, be it so, but let us do it with some respect for ourselves.

If I sound indignant and if my language is not diplomatic, please forgive it. But Reform Judaism is my life and I am too deeply committed to the proposition that we have something significant to say to our contemporary Jewish community to concern myself with niceties.

With warm greetings and best wishes, I am,

Cordially,

Eugene Mihaly

EM:er

cc: Rabbi Joseph Glaser Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld Rabbi Herman Schaalman November 21, 1994 18 Kislev 5755

Norbert Fruehau, Director Barbara Hoenig, Consultant Planning and Resource Department Council of Jewish Federations 730 Broadway New York, NY 10003-9596

Dear Barbara and Norbert:

Thank you for the videotape of the satellite broadcast on Services to the Intermarried. I am grateful for your thoughtfulness.

It was good to be involved in this program, for I, too, developed new insights from other participants. 'Thank you for inviting me to be part of the panel.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

**Council of Jewish Federations** 

730 Broadway • New York, NY 10003-9596 • 212 475-5000 • Cable: Councilfed, New York • Fax:212 529-5842

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

Dear Alex,

We want to thank you for participating in the satellite broadcast on Services to the Intermarried. Your insights and comments added immeasurably to the dialogue and discussion. The comments from the field have all been very positive, and we know that this is just the beginning of discussions at the community level.

We are pleased to enclose a videotape of the broadcast. Again, on behalf of CJF, we appreciate your giving us your time and wisdom.

Cordially,

Norbert Fruehauf, Director Planning and Resource Development

BH/ds Enc.

Received from

Barbara Hoenig, Consultant Planning and Resource Development

9/sathr.



CJF of Canada/4600 Bathurst Street, Suite 315/Willowdale, Ont. M2R 3V3-Tel. 416-635-9567-9590 FAX: 416-635-9701 United Israel Office/1 lbn Gvirol St., P.O. Box 7171 Rechavia, Jerusalem 91071 – Tel. G2-235-498 FAX: 02-235-517 Southeast Area Office/1753 Peachtree Rd., N.E./Atlanta, GA 30309-Tel. 404-881-4025 FAX: 404-874-7043 Washington Action Office/1640 Rhode Island Ave. N.W., Suite 500, Washington, DC 20036- Tel. 202-785-5900 FAX: 202-785-4937 Western Area Office/4797 Mercury Street, San Diego, CA 92111-2102-Tel. 619-627-0606 FAX: 619-627-0602 February 11, 1993 20 Shevat 5753

Rabbi Walter Jacob Rodef Shalom Congregation 4905 Fifth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2919

Dear Walter:

Thank you for setting the tone for the panel discussion on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. You were splendid and it was quite an impressive panel. I felt the program made for a very fine executive committee meeting and gave us all a great deal of food for thought as well as many new insights.

I hope our congregations will begin their own discussions on this critical issue. It can be a wonderful learning experience. While you and I aren't in total agreement, we really are not that far apart and I would venture to guess the same is true concerning grass roots opinions. It is certainly healthy to address these matters and with a bottom line of menschlichkeit and openness our movement will be well served! Whatever a congregation determines is their best path, I would hope they would make that decision known. There should be no surprises.

Again, thanks for being with us and for your wonderful participation.

With fond regards, I am

Sincerely,



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

> February 11, 1993 20 Shevat 5753

Ms Gail Donner 1820 Cardinal Lake Drive Cherry Hill, NJ 08003

Dear Gail:

I am deeply grateful to you for taking the time to share with the members of the UAHC Executive Committee the extensive study and discussion undertaken by Congregation M'kor Shalom on the role of the Non-Jew in the synagogue. It is the kind of study that I believe all of our congregations would do well to follow and I am grateful to you for sharing with us the experience of K'kor Shalom. You gave all of us a great deal to think about and to bring back to our home congregations.

With kindest greetings and every good wish, I am

Sincerely





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

> February 11, 1993 20 Shevat 5753

Vincent Vitali, Esq. P.O. Box 1123 New York, NY 10040

Dear Vincent:

Thank you for taking time from your very busy schedule to share with the members of the UAHC Executive Committee your view of the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. It was good to hear of your personal journey and I am delighted we had an opportunity to hear from you. You gave us all much to think about.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely.



RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER PRESIDENT B38 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

> February 11, 1993 20 Shevat 5753

Rabbi Stephen A. Hart North Shore Congregation Israel 1185 Sheridan Road Glencoe, IL 60022

Dear Stephen:

I am deeply grateful to you for taking the time to be with us last Monday to discuss with the UAHC Executive Committee the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Your presentation was meaningful and gave all of us much to think about. It was good having you in our midst.

With repeated thanks and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

February 11, 1993 20 Shevat 5753

Mr. Ken Rutz 671 Sunset Road Teaneck, NJ 07666

Dear Ken:

It was truly good of you to take the time to participate in the panel presentation to the UAHC Executive Committee on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Your words were very meaningful and gave our leadership much to think about. Thank you for sharing your experience with us.

I was delighted on a more personal level to meet you after all the Schindler and Sigel families have ties which go many, many years, and into the second generation for my daughter Debbie and your sister-in-law Judy were colleagues at the Rodef Sholom Day School. Please do give my warm regards to Mimi and Lou.

With repeated thanks and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

February 11, 1993 20 Shevat 5753

Ms. Karen Sholom 76 Minuteman Circle Orangeburg, NY 10962

Dear Karen:

Thank you so much for your moving presentation to the Union's Executive Committee. Your forthright comments gave us much to think about and helped all of us in thinking through our own positions on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue.

I am so pleased that your path eventually brought you into the fold. The continuity of the Jewish community is assured when our ranks are joined by caring and committed men and women such as you.

It was good of you to take the time to be with us and I am deeply grateful for your meaningful message.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Ms. Gail Donner 1820 Cardinal Lake Drive Cherry Hill, NJ 08003

Rabbi Stephen Hart North Shore Congregation Israel 1185 Sheridan Rd. Glencoe, IL 60022

Ms. Karen Shalom 76 Minuteman Circle Orangeburg, NY 10962

Mr. Ken Rutz 671 Sunset Road Teaneck, NJ 07666

Mr. Vincent Vitale P.O. Box 1123 New York, NY 10040



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

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DEAN FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

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

January 3, 1986

Personal

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

Dear Alex:

You have by now undoubtedly received the mailing from Simeon Maslin which includes "A Statement of Concern" and the "Response to Eugene Mihaly." This is the second salvo in the saga "Get Mihaly!"

The original statement drafted by Simeon Maslin, which you may have seen, was considerably more vituperative, replete with <u>ad hominem</u> hostility. This final statement has, undoubtedly due to the influence of some of the signatories, been considerably toned down.

Ben Wacholder had originally sent me a draft of his "Response to Eugene Mihaly" and asked for my reaction with the assurance that it "will be given due consideration." (Wacholder's final statement, with insignificant changes, is the same as the draft which he sent me.) I did respond to him orally and subsequently sent him a transcript of what I had stated to him. I am enclosing that transcript, which you might find of interest. Since there are a number of personal remarks in the statement which I am deeply embarrassed to publicize, please consider at least that part of the transcript (the last two pages) as personal and confidential information, which I am sending to you because of your involvement and interest in this matter. It is painful to make public shortcomings of one's colleagues. We all have them, however--scholars or not. Perhaps similar experiences led Rabbi Eleazar to state (Avot II.14) "...their bite is the bite of a fox, their sting the sting of a scorpion, their hiss the hiss of a serpent .... "

I urge that you read the essay by Philip Sigal entitled "Halakhic Reflections on the Pittsburgh Platform" in the booklet just sent out by Walter Jacob, The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect. It is a sad Page 2 January 3, 1986

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commentary indeed on the current mood in Reform Judaism that it takes a Conservative rabbi, one who was among the most learned and able, to tell us what Reform is all about. Had I written that same essay, some of my colleagues would have undoubtedly put me under the ban (which they are trying to do any way). You might also read with interest the discussion of the Philadelphia Conference of 1869 on the meaning of <u>kedat Moshe weYisrael</u> and <u>Birkhat 'Erusin</u>. The proceedings are found in Temkin's The New World of Reform.

It may also interest you to know that I wrote my "Responsum on Marriage on the Sabbath" at the specific request of the then-president of the CCAR, a request which he made of me while he was chairing the session when this matter was discussed, a session at which Simeon Maslin was present. He was an active participant in the discussion, since he raised the entire issue and initially called for sanctions on the part of the CCAR. I wrote the responsum considerably prior to the time that the CCAR Committee on Responsa even considered the question. In fact, the responsum of the CCAR committee utilized my responsum and my analysis of the sources in writing their responsum. When the draft of the CCAR committee responsum on marriage on the Sabbath was mailed to me, I responded at length (see the enclosed letter to Walter Jacob of February 24, 1977). It may also be of interest that it was at that time that I resigned from the CCAR Committee on Responsa, since they had adopted a procedure to which I could not subscribe.

In that responsum I cite the sources exhaustively and treat them with utmost objectivity. I distributed the responsum to a limited number of the people who were directly involved and interested. Even those who did not agree with my final conclusion generally agreed with my citation of sources and my treatment of them. Bernard Bamberger, <u>zikhrono livrakha</u>, though for a variety of reasons he questioned my final conclusion, wrote me at the time: "Your analysis of the traditional sources appears to me to be entirely correct."

I find it bitterly jocular that one who has been arguing for the importance of confronting the historic Jewish experience as recorded in our texts and giving it a vote in our decisions; one who has been arguing for the freedom of the individual rabbi, which I see as a heart principle in Reform; one who has insisted that the rabbi's freedom of conscience must not be interfered with and that their stance on mixed marriage not be used as a criterion by congreations (I have actually inserted myself in a number of situations, as some of the signatories of the original statement well know, to protect this rabbinic right)--that such a one should be the target of all this dishonest and ignorant attack and of personal hostility and acrimony. Page 3 January 3, 1986

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I assure you with whatever integrity I have as a scholar that all the relevant sources in <u>Responsa on Jewish Marriage</u> are cited faithfully and exhaustively. The position advocated in the responses of Maslin and Wacholder undermine, attempt to destroy, and make a joke of our efforts as Reform Jews and of our entire enterprise. I am genuinely concerned about the future of Reform Judaism in America, if that point of view is permitted to prevail. For the sake of the living Torah; for the sake of a creative, viable Judaism for ourselves and for our children, that point of view must be combatted with all energy.

With warmest greetings for the New Year, I am

As ever,

MЦ Eugene Mihaly

EM:pg Enclosures

P. S. I am also enclosing a copy of a letter which I received from Simeon Maslin.

Simeon J. Maslin, D. Min., D. D. SENIOR RABBI

Reform Congregation KENESETH ISRAEL York Road and Township Line ELKINS PARK, PENNSYLVANIA 19117

December 27, 1985

Dr. Eugene Mihaly Hebrew Union College 3101 Clifton Avenue Cincinnati, Ohio, 45220

Dear Gene:

0. 1. 1 . . .

I thought it only proper to send you copies of this mailing which will be sent to the membership of the CCAR within a few days.

I cannot tell you how saddened I was by the publication of your <u>Responsa on Jewish Marriage</u>. It was, quite simply, not worthy of you. You know better. Why you, with all that you have to offer, have chosen to be <u>rosh le-shualim</u>, I simply cannot understand. I cannot tell you how it hurts me when respected scholars hold up your <u>Responsa</u> to me (as an alumnus of HUC-JIR) and proceed to make fun of the "scholarship" of one of my teachers.

I will tell you, though, for the sake of an old friendship and an even older respect, that two of our colleagues, as upset by the absurdity of <u>Responsa</u> as I was, refused to sign the enclosed Statement out of respect for a former teacher. Together we commiserated about the debasement of scholarship. Others of us, though, felt that we could not allow your booklet to stand uncontested as a statement of Reform Judaism. Whether one does or does not officiate at mixed marriages, <u>Responsa</u> stands outside the bounds of responsible Jewish scholarship.

As you heard from Jack Stern, we would have aborted these statements had <u>Responsa</u> not been circulated to lay leaders. I can assure you, however, that the enclosed statements are being sent only to members of the CCAR.

I hope that I may one day again have the opportunity to take pleasure in the fruits of your scholarship. There is so much good that you could be doing.

Shalom,

Simeon J.Maslin

SJM:mb encl.

## Minutes

## Research Task Force Design Subcommittee

The meeting of the Research Task Force Subcommittee On Design was convened by Chairman, Paul Gans, on September 3 at the House of Living Judaism, New York. Those present were: Constance Kreshtool, Norman Mirsky, Steven Schwager, Alan Iselin, Robert Katz, Simeon Maslin, Mark Winer and Sanford Seltzer and special guest, Eve Weinberg. As the first item of business, Paul Gans asked that the Subcommittee review the cover letter and the return postal card that would accompany the Biennial delegate questionnaire. It was also recommended that the three signatories of the letter - Alexander Schindler, Alfred Gottschalk, Jack Stern - review the copy before their names were added to it.

Eve Weinberg of the Policy Research Corporation of Chicago, who had been asked to serve as a special consultant to the Subcommittee, was then introduced. She distributed the newly revised questionnaire which had been modified under her direction. In introducing her, Paul Gans reminded the Committee members that we were already running behind schedule and that it was necessary to approve the questionnaire at this meeting.

Eve Weinberg then explained her revisions, noting that they were based largely on the 4th draft prepared by Mark Winer as well as some of the suggested inclusions of Bob Katz, Bruce Phillips and Norman Mirsky. She asked that everyone complete the questionnaire in order to get a better feel of it.

Eve Weinberg called the Committee's attention to the series of additional questions at the back of the questionnaire which would be divided into six segments and apportioned accordingly in the delegates' questionnaires. Shim Maslin asked what the purpose of these questions was. Mark Winer replied that they represented a set of inquiries regarding both informal Jewish beliefs and theological beliefs and as such represented the first attempt to measure such attitudes. Norman Mirsky added that the theological questions were based upon a model of Christian beliefs in the Journal For the Scientific Study of Religion as well as ideas drawn from the new Union prayerbook.

It was then determined that the questionnaire would be reviewed on a page by page basis. This was done and additional modifications were made. Upon the completion of the questionnaire review, Eve Weinberg phoned the changes into her Chicago office so that they could immediately be programmed onto the computer. It was agreed that she would handle the printing of the questionnaire in Chicago and would notify Sandy Seltzer as to how quickly the finished product could be mailed to New York. Sandy would then coordinate distribution, etc.

Mark Winer proposed that the Subcommittee consider a revision in the projected study design. He raised the possibility of developing a consortium of Protestants, Catholics and Jewish groups who would undertake a joint national survey of religious belief and practice in the United States. Norman Mirsky opposed the idea stating that such an undertaking would discourage fundraising on the part of Jewish donors and was a much too grandiose concept basically external to the needs and concerns of Reform Jews. Sandy Seltzer, pointing to the unpredictability of religious alignments in contemporary America and emphasizing the financial weakness of such a project, also registered his opposition. The Committee then voted to reject the proposal. Dinner was served.

Steve Schwager discussed procedures which would be utilized by him and his staff at Cornell in processing the questionnaires. He noted that it would be necessary to focus on no more than 20 items for the Biennial breakfasts. A more comprehensive review of the questionnaire would follow the Biennial. The Biennial breakfasts themselves were then discussed. It was noted that there would be six rooms at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles with a total maximum accomodation of 200 persons. The breakfasts are scheduled for 7:30 A.M. There will be nearly two hours time available for discussion, etc. The Subcommittee recommended that the questionnaire return postal card have a deadline of October 14 for the return of the questionnaires and eligibility for an invitation to the Biennial breakfasts. It was suggested that in the course of the Biennial breakfasts, key findings be shared with those in attendance and that the delegates be informed that they would be receiving a periodic newsletter highlighting the activities of the Research Task Force. In serving as research associates, they would also be asked to help the Task Force locate potential donors.

Norman Mirsky stated that it was imperative that we have a well written preamble accompanying the questionnaire. He noted that it was important how preliminary findings were shared and how we dealt with the whole question of Jewish values and delegates' attitudes towards them. Norman agreed to draft a preamble to be presented to the entire Task Force for its consideration when it met on October 10. The Subcommittee also agreed that it was necessary to have a future meeting without a definitive agenda. The meeting would be devoted to dealing philosophically with many of the issues that had been addressed in drafting the questionnaire. It was agreed that such a meeting would convene January 14-15, 1986, in New York City. The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 P.M. the state of the second state of the state o

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

DATE December 12, 1985

## TO Dr. Ben Zion Wacholder

FROM Eugene Mihaly

On December 3, 1985, you sent me a document entitled "Draft of Response to Eugene Mihaly." You also appended a note which reads, "Enclosed please find a preliminary draft which will ultimately be a Statement on your Responsa." You state further that, "I would like your reaction which will be given due consideration." We met at my initiative in your study on December 12, 1985, at 11:30 a.m. to discuss your document. What follows is a written form of what I communicated to you during that meeting.

I began by expressing my appreciation for your courtesy in sharing with me the draft of your proposed answer to my <u>Responsa</u>. I also stated that I recognize that you are an adult scholar and that you have every right to write whatever you please. Out of my concern, however, for your honor and reputation as a scholar, I feel impelled to share what follows with you and to impress upon you that you are letting yourself be used for less than scholarly reasons.

As to the details of your Statement, I responded to it point by point as follows:

 My chapter on <u>kedat Moshe weYisrael</u> addresses itself to something very specific, namely, whether from traditional halakhic and from Reform Jewish perspectives, the phrase <u>kedat Moshe weYisrael...as part of</u> <u>the marriage formula which the groom addresses to the bride</u> is the "essential and traditional heart of the Jewish marriage ceremony," as the Statement asserts. I emphasize that I was addressing myself to a simple question: whether the phrase

בזית מישה רישראל

as an oral formula to be recited by the groom is the essential element of the Jewish marriage ceremony. I did not discuss whether the ceremony should be within the spirit of kedat Moshe weYisrael or whether a Jewish marriage, in the view of the talmudic Sages, takes place "according to the faith or laws of Moses and Israel," etc., etc., to which you devote your discussion and which is irrelevant to my point. I was discussing only whether the oral formula to be recited by the groom is essential. Note also that this has nothing to do with mixed marriage or anything related to it. It is a simple question of the significance of this formula as an oral declaration. In response to this, I state that since the formula as an oral formula for the groom is not mentioned in any source before the Tosaphists and subsequently is not included in any Code, and even Moses Isserles only cites the custom as "there are those who say," therefore, the statement that this formula as an oral declaration by the groom constitutes "the essential and traditional heart of the Jewish marriage ceremony" must be rejected. Do you disagree with this, Ben? Can anyone disagree with it?

Would this not indicate the possibility that the oral recitation was indeed introduced to assert rabbinic authority? Would you deny that this is a possibility? Would your vast knowledge of rabbinics permit the possibility that on occasion the Rabbis did introduce matters to assert authority? What is it that you are objecting to? Does such a possibility disturb you?

2) I never question the fact that the concept of <u>kedat Moshe weYisrael</u> is implicit in a Jewish marriage ceremony and that the ceremony takes place within that context. I was merely speaking of the oral recitation of the formula by the groom. As a matter of fact, I clearly state in my <u>Responsa</u> "that the precence of a rabbi as the officiant, however, clearly <u>implies</u> that the marriage is a religious one and that it is in accordance with the requirements of the Jewish faith...." (page 24). I have devoted an entire essay to this subject, an essay which you might read with benefit, entitled, "The Jewish View of Marriage," which I wrote 34 years ago and which has been reprinted in a number of anthologies, incidentally, some of them published by Orthodox rabbis.

Your entire discussion, therefore, that "All Jewish marriages in the view of talmudic Sages take place 'according to the faith (or laws) of Moses and Israel'" and the other citations which you go on to give are truly besides the point. The entire page and a half which you devote to this issue are irrelevant. The matter is not at issue nor is it disputed.

Crucial issues which I do discuss and to which you do not respond are the operative meaning of <u>kedat Moshe weïisrael</u> and who decides what the requirements of <u>dat Moshe weïisrael</u> are in a specific time/place. I certainly maintain that the requirements of <u>dat Moshe weïisrael</u> have undergone a series of changes through the ages. Would you deny this, Ben? What is the value of your historical and scientific learning if you are not prepared to grant this? It is as plain as day

to every beginner. It is the basis of our whole course of study at the Hebrew Union College. It is the fundamental essential and rationale of Reform Judaism.

The traditional halakhic sources have themselves defined <u>kedat Moshe</u> <u>weYisrael</u> differently in different ages. Certainly Reform Judaism has defined <u>kedat Moshe weYisrael</u> differently from the traditional halakhic sources.

Do I have to tell you that Reform is on record as considering a child of a non-Jewish mother as a Jew, without the child going through a formal conversion? You were one of the resource people for this. You gave encouragement to the adoption of the paternity position. In doing so, you well know that you disregarded the way <u>kedat Moshe weYisrael</u> was defined for 1600 years. Please write a response to yourself in the same spirit that you are writing to me.

Reform Judaism is on record that we accept a woman proselyte without the rite of mikvah.

Reform is on record that it does not require two halakhically qualified witnesses to a wedding.

Reform is on record that it will accept the divorce of a secular court and Reform rabbis will officiate at marriages of previously married women without their obtaining a traditional get.

Reform is on record that we accept adult proselytes without the rite of circumcision.

Reform is on record that it does not require halitzah.

Reform is on record that it sanctions the marriage of a priest to a divorcee.

Are you disputing the above, Ben? You never address yourself to any of this.

If you did dispute the fact that the oral formula <u>kedat Moshe weYisrael</u> is earlier than the Tosaphists, then you have every right to write a critique. If you believe that <u>kedat Moshe weYisrael</u> has retained the identical definition throughout the ages, then you have a right to respond. If you believe that Reform has not claimed for itself the right to define <u>dat Moshe weYisrael</u> in the light of its view of reality, then you have every right to dispute my conclusions. You do none of this. You skip the major points of my entire <u>Responsa</u>.

Reform has claimed the right for itself, as the authorities in Judaism have in each age, to define <u>kedat Moshe weYisrael</u> in light of its view of the demands of God in a given time and place and in terms of its perception of reality. If Reform gives up that right, its entire history is a sham and all its rabbis are comediang. Is that your position, Ben?

3) You seem to be upset by the fact that I state that the term <u>kiddushin</u> is to be understood as a rabbinic metaphor. How do you interpret the <u>Gemara's explanation of the Mishnah's use of nikneit and mekaddesh</u>? The Taimud attributes the use of <u>mekaddesh</u> to the fact that through <u>kiddushin</u> "the man prohibits her to all others <u>like</u> an object which has been dedicated for sacred use (<u>kehekdesh</u>). The very expression "like" clearly indicates that the Rabbis are using a simile, which is a form of metaphor. Furthermore, Tosaphot, <u>ad loc.</u>, clearly defines what <u>kiddushin</u> means. How can this be disputed? I further demonstrate that in the entire talmudic literature every attempt to extend the metaphor is rejected (see my note 17, page 36).

Note also that I qualify my statement in the same footnote by questioning "whether the <u>Gemara's</u> explanation of the Mishnah's use of <u>mekaddesh</u> and <u>nikneit</u> is what the authors or editors of the Mishnah had in mind or not." I clearly

emphasize that "Of relevance for our discussion is that the normative tradition from the Amoraim through the Tosaphists (and beyond), understood <u>kiddushin</u> as a metaphor." I also note the literature in the same footnote from Epstein to Abraham Weiss to Halivni, which give other explanations for the Mishnah's use of nikneit and mekaddesh.

I also clearly indicate that <u>kiddushin</u> results in an essential change in the woman's status. "Through <u>kiddushin</u>, the man prohibits her to all others like an object which has been dedicated for sacred use" (page 34).

Do you realize, Ben, that to say that an expression is metaphoric is not to denigrate it? The use of metaphor, understanding one thing in terms of another, is as natural as breathing. Communication is almost impossible without it. How can you possibly say, as you do, that "legal literature does not speak in metaphor, a device appropriate to poetry...."? Do you appreciate, Ben, that a thousand halakhic expressions are aspects of metaphor? The very word halakha is metaphoric.

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and a thousand more. How can you possibly say that halakhic interature does not resort to metaphor when practically every line resorts to tropes and figurative language? Surely you know all this, Ben!

4) Your concluding point that "the term <u>teshuvah</u> ('responsum') refers to a legal opinion which views sympathetically the rabbinic tradition" and, therefore, my booklet "should not be termed 'responsa'" is a particularly hostile statement and reveals the motive and the spirit behind your entire response. I have been under the impression that <u>teshuvah</u> means response. Are you suggesting that only the Orthodox can respond to questions, and that they have a monopoly on the word? Are you suggesting that Reform insofar as it deviates from tradition stands outside of Judaism and may not even use a Hebrew word? Did you object when through the years Freehof has written numerous responsa? Do you object that the CCAR has a committee on responsa? Did you object when the CCAR recently published a collection of responsa?

I concluded our discussion by setting your statement in the context of some actions of yours within the recent and more distant past. Some time ago, you felt a similar impulse to respond to a previous responsum of mine on marriage on the Sabbath. After writing and distributing it (I am unaware how widely you distributed it), you came to see me and profusely apologized. You admitted that you were not fair, that you did not treat the sources properly:  $\int_{\partial_{a}} -7.1 \int_{\partial_{a}} \int_{\partial_$ 

More recently, you distributed to a number of colleagues at our various campuses a scurrilous, <u>ad hominem</u>, underhanded, devious attack on me written by Simeon Maslin, without the courtesy of a copy to me, under the guise of securing their counsel. You again subsequently called me on Wednesday, October 2, at 2:40 p.m., and said, <u>inter alia</u>, the following to me (what follows is a direct quote, which I wrote down as soon as you talked to me): "I have sinned against you.

Please forgive me. I deeply apologize. I did what I did unthinkingly. I know that I have many flaws in my character. I am competitive and I fight, but I did not think that I am cruel. Apparently I have that streak in my character. I have done something cruel. I am deeply sorry. I apologize. Can you please forget it?"

Now you take it upon yourself to respond once again. I do hope that, in this instance as well, you will not have deep regrets and embarrass both of us with your contrition and apology, for in a general way I find that you misquote me. You misinterpret my intent. You address yourself to points which I never made and which are irrelevant to my discussion. You attribute notions to me which I do not hold and then proceed to argue against them. Knowing much better, you intentionally misrepresent traditional sources. Ben, I would ask again, why? What prompts you to do this?

I certainly have no objection at all to--in fact I would welcome--a scholarly discussion on the merits of what I have actually said. I am deeply grieved to say that your so-called response to me does not do this.

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Report of the Subcommittee On Mixed Marriage to the Task Force On Reform Jewish Outreach

This subcommittee report is specifically directed to the single issue of rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages. The question of rabbis performing interfaith marriages is one of the most divisive issues in Reform Judaism today. Emotion and invective have been in evidence in discussing this issue. There are reports that rabbis have been made to feel insecure and unwelcome and that children and parents are leaving the synagogue, children leaving Judaism, pulpits being withheld from rabbis, all because of this most provocative subject.

At the 1978 UAHC Board Meeting in Houston, Texas, when Rabbi Alexander Schindler proposed his programs and thoughts on outreach, conversion and mixed marriage, he did not at that time address the question of rabbis performing interfaith marriages. That was immediately raised from the floor and a debate ensued. The Chairman of the Board of UAHC, Matthew Ross, assured the meeting that the entire issue of rabbis officiating at interfaith marriages would be included on the agenda of an outreach task force consisting of both laypersons and rabbis and would be one of the areas designated for study.

During the early meetings of the Task Force, the question of rabbis performing interfaith marriages was brought up and debated. It was obvious that for many Task Force members this issue was considered to be a particularly important agenda item. It was a question fraught with controversy. Task Force Chairman, David Belin, requested from those raising the issue that the question of rabbinic officiation be postponed until after the 1981 Boston Biennial and that priority be given to other issues facing the Task Force.

At the Boston Biennial the Outreach resolutions were reported on and passed. The Biennial was also assured that the question of rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages would continue to be studied by the Task Force and reported on at the next Biennial in Houton in 1983. In 1909, the CCAR took its first official stand on the subject when it declared interfaith marriage as contrary to the "traditions of the Jewish religion." That position was reiterated in 1947 and served as the basis for the 1973 statement of the CCAR, the last time the subject was evaluated by the American Reform rabbinate. Equally noteworthy is the historic position of the Reform laity in both recognizing and respecting the integrity of individual rabbinic decisions in this regard. In 1971, the CCAR decided to discuss the issue of rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriage at its meeting to be held in Atlanta in 1973. A committee was appointed to study the matter and present its findings at the 1973 convention . After two years of hard, diligent work and debate, the committee presented its report with both majority and minority opinions. The debate at the 1973 CCAR conference was long and intense. The following resolution which took a stronger stance in discouraging rabbis from performing interfaith marriages was passed by a sizable majority.

"The CCAR, recalling its stand adopted in 1909 that mixed marriage is contrary to the Jewish tradition and should be discouraged now declares its opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage.

The CCAR recognizes that historically its members have held and continue to hold divergent interpretations of Jewish tradition.

In order to keep open every channel to Judaism and K'lal Israel for those who have already entered into a mixed marriage, the CCAR calls upon its members:

 To assist fully in educating children of such mixed marriages as Jews,

- 2) To provide the opportunity for conversion of the non-Jewish spouse, and
- 3) To encourage a creative and consistent cultivation of involvement in the Jewish community and the synagogue."

At the present time, it is estimated that a substantial minority of reform rabbis officiate at interfaith marriages. Their decision is generally governed by a variety of religious and personal criteria of which the following is but a partial list. There are instances when individual rabbis have other criteria and cases when there are no criteria for officiating.

- a) Willingness of the non-Jew to study Judaism.
- b) A commitment by the non-Jew to allow his/her spouse to maintain a Jewish home and to raise their children as Jews.
- c) That the couple enter into a period of pre-marital counseling with the rabbi.
- d) The Jewish member of the couple or his/her parent must be a member of the congregation.
- e) That the ceremony take place in the rabbi's study or some place other than the sanctuary.
- f) A revision of the ceremony so that it is not a traditional Jewish ceremony and the words "....under the laws of Moses and of Israel...." are omitted.
- g) That a rabbi(s) be the sole officiant(s).
- h) Referral by a colleague who does not perform interfaith marriages.

In the decade since 1973, the controversy over rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriage has continued. Arguments both pro and con, some echoing sentiments expressed during the 1973 CCAR debate, have been offered by rabbis and laypersons alike. A summary of some of these positions follows. Arguments Advanced In Favor of Rabbinic Officiation

- Rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriage enhances the possibility that children will be raised as Jews and the non-Jewish spouse will be more likely to consider the possibility of conversion at some later date.
- 2. When a rabbi refuses to officiate at an interfaith marriage the couple may be alienated from the synagogue. The person of another faith, or of no professed faith, who requests that a rabbi officiate at his/her marriage has already made a first, positive decision toward Judaism. If outreach is truly a goal of the Reform movement, rabbis must be sensitive to the fact that their rejection may be taken personally, quite often at the expense of a future Jewish commitment by the couple.
- A refusal to officiate cannot be reconciled with Reform Judaism's emphasis upon interfaith dialogue and the prophetic message of universal brotherhood.
- 4. Rabbis can create wedding ceremonies appropriate to the occasion rather than utilizing the traditional Jewish ritual.
- 5. It is time to stop being concerned at the reactions of Orthodox and Conservative Judaism to the practices of Reform. Over the years, Reform Judaism has made numerous decisions which contravene Jewish law. In our pluralistic society, a significant percentage of Jews now marry persons born outside our faith. These marriages are increasing regardless of the rabbinic stance. We cannot afford to reject such a large proportion of our young people and their parents.

- 6. American Reform Judaism is being unduly influenced by pressures emanating from Israel and other parts of the world. It is time to be more forthright and more attune to our priorities.
- 7. Both the 1973 CCAR resolution and the statements found in the Rabbis Manual have exerted powerful pressures upon rabbis to refrain from officiating at interfaith marriages lest in doing so they jeopardize their futures as members of that body.
- 8. Outreach begins before a marriage takes place. An outreach program which is intent upon reaching out to couples in an interfaith marriage but which disapproves of rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages is a contradiction in terms.
- 9. Rabbis should be permitted to officiate at interfaith marriages in the sanctuary of the congregation. Such an act would increase the chances of the non-Jewish partner's conversion to Judaism.

Arguments Advanced In Oppostion to Rabbinic Officiation

- Premarital promises regarding the religious upbringing of children are prone to change subsequent to the birth of a child. Often commitments to educate children as Jews or to convert oneself are not voluntary but concessions to pressure brought to bear by the Jewish partner and the Jewish partner's family.
- 2. A growing number of interfaith married couples have affiliated with synagogues and are raising their children as Jews despite the fact that they were not married by a rabbi.
- The preservation of one's particular Jewish identity is both consistent and necessary if the integrity of other cultures, ethnic groups and faith communities is to be defended.
- 4. The rabbi is the symbolic representative of Judaism and of the continuity of the Jewish tradition. To tailor the ritual to fit the religious needs of the couple is to subvert the basic assumptions under which both Judaism and the State have granted the rabbi the prerogative to serve as an officiant in the first place. The rabbi's participation in the ceremony is construed by the Jewish partner and the Jewish family as a sign that the wedding is a Jewish wedding thereby assuaging the family's discomfiture at the reality of an interfaith marriage.
- 5. It is not a question of Reform versus Orthodox interpretaions of Judaism. It is a question of Jewish survival and the sanction of behavior which violates the purpose and meaning of Jewish marriage and rabbinic responsibility.
- Opposition to rabbinic officiation antedates the establishment of Israel and the existence of liberal communities in other parts of the world.

- 7. The Central Conference of American Rabbis has always permitted the free exchange of positions and points of view. The 1973 resolution clearly recognizes that members may hold divergent views regarding officiating at interfaith marriages.
- 8. The Outreach program stands on its own merits. There is no inconsistency whatsoever in a program designed to deal with the religious needs of couples after their marriage and the affirmation that a Jewish marriage is one involving men and women who are committed to Judaism as a personal way of life.
- 9. To solemnize a wedding between a Jew and a non-Jew in a synagogue sancturary is to transform a sacred moment in the life cycle of the Jewish people into an act of hypocricy.



The issue has been set before you. There are no easy answers. And yet we have accomplished a great deal in our long hours of study and debate. Most of us, rabbis and laypersons alike, started this discussion four years ago with strong personal opinions. Our anger against those on the opposite side has been replaced with understanding. We went through a process of change. We all learned to listen thoughtfully to what others were saying. As a result, our prejudice, ignorance and anger disappeared and we joined together in a consensus.

Regardless of their positions, everyone would agree that couples contemplating an interfaith marriage and the parents of couples involved in these marriages should have ample opportunity to meet with a rabbi and fully discuss all aspects of the marriage. This should be standard procedure whether a rabbi officiates or not. Certainly, a refusal over the telephone by a rabbi's secretary is not in the best interest of anyone.

The Subcommittee, therefore, affirms the right of every rabbi to act in accordance with his/her religious conscience in the matter of officiating at interfaith marriages free from any external pressure.

It is the consensus of the Subcommittee that the Reform movement as a whole must enter into a process, as we did, of a most thoughtful consideration of this issue. We must all, rabbis and laypersons alike, express ourselves, listen to others carefully, learn, and become informed.

We, therefore, urge that the entire Reform movement enter into the following program:

a) The issue of rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages is but one aspect of a far more complex subject. A consideration of all aspects of interfaith marriage, and not just the question of rabbinic officiation, is necessary in light of the current trends in the North American Jewish communtiy. However, the Task Force does not have either the time or the resources to undertake such a study. It recommends that the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion jointly undertake an extensive evaluation of the ramifications of interfaith marriage in the latter part of the twentieth century in North America, utilizing appropriate resources and calling upon experts in various disciplines to help in assembling and interpreting information in this area. The data is to be gathered and presented within a time period not to exceed two years.

- b) That a program of "Forums for Listening and Learning" on the entire subject of interfaith marriage be created on a national, district, regional and congregational level so that all of us can join together and listen openly and without prejudice to what others have to say on this subject so we can better understand other points of view.
- c) The CCAR and its members should continue to study this issue.
- d) Educational programs and aids should be created to help in the understanding of this issue for both laity and rabbis.
- e) All the campuses of HUC-JIR should address this issue in their formal curriculum so that our rabbis will have a better understanding when they begin their work.

As Reform Jews we have the right and the obligation to make choices. However, we must make sure that our choices are educated ones based on understanding and our commitment to the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people. TEMPLE

Hauppauge Road Commack, New Yor

(516) 499-0915

March 11, 1985 Cell M.

Rabbi Alexander Schindler 838 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

I enclose the most recent draft of my article on rabbinic officiation at mixed marriages for <u>Reform</u> <u>Judaism</u>. For your convenience I have circled your quotes.

If I misinterpreted you or if you would like to make any changes, please call my secretary, Joan Tassa between 8:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., by Friday, March 15 at the latest. If we do not hear from you by then, I will presume your approval of the quotations.

As you will recall, <u>Reform Judaism's</u> editor Aron Hint-Manheimer and I will proceed with publication of this article only if it serves to strengthen the Reform Movement and the rabbinate. We hope that our effort will raise the level of discussion about this sensitive issue. If you have any suggestions to improve the article, please call me as soon as possible.

Thank you again for your participation and cooperation in composing the article. We anticipate that its publication will encourage the mature sharing of viewpoints on this complex issue.

Sincerely ours

Rabbi Mark L. Winer, Ph.D.

Senior Rabbi Mark L Winer, Ph.D.

Rabbi Scott L Shpeen

Cantor Peter Taormina

Educator Lester Bronstein

Director, Nursery School Arline Kasdin

President Pearl Goldhagen

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## The Controversy Over Rabbinic Officiation

at Interfaith Weddings

Article submitted for publication in <u>Reform</u> Judaism

Rabbi Mark L. Winer, Ph.D.

A new pamphlet affirming rabbinic refusal to officiate at interfaith weddings has intensified the debate on this already controversial subject. Some have criticized the timing of its publication. David Belin of Des Moines, Iowa, who chairs the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, feels that its release should have been deferred. "The most divisive issue on the agenda of the Reform Movement is whether or not rabbis ought to officiate at interfaith weddings. Almost every time I speak about Outreach, the first question from the floor concerns rabbinic officiation. The rabbis and the lay leaders of the UAHC had held off a full discussion of the issue until our tripartite study will be completed. Frankly, I wish the study would have been finished sooner. I'm afraid that the new booklet opens up the whole issue for debate. It raises the heat under this boiling cauldron."

Asked why he convened the rabbis' meeting which produced the pamphlet, Simeon Maslin, of Congregation Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia, defended its release. "I thought it was scandalous that so many congregations were declining to interview rabbis who would not officiate at mixed marriages. These rabbis are in full compliance with the stated position of the CCAR and the Jewish tradition, and yet they are being denied consideration for pulpits." Entitled "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," the pamphlet seeks to explain the consistent opposition to rabbinic solemnization of interfaith weddings. The Central Conference of American Rabbis held in 1909 that intermarriage is "contrary to the traditions of the Jewish religion." The same position was restated in 1947 and amplified in 1973. This most recent resolution, passed by a substantial majority at the CCAR Convention in Atlanta twelve years ago "declares its opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage."

Most rabbis justify their refusal to officiate at interfaith weddings on the Jewish conception of marriage as a covenant between two Jews. Rabbi Haskell Bernat of Temple Israel in Miami explains the rabbi's role. "Contrary to what is often thought, the rabbi neither confers God's blessings on the bride and groom nor does the rabbi 'marry' the couple. As a 'M'sader Kidushin' the rabbi serves as a witness on behalf of the Jewish People. The rabbi <u>is</u> the Jewish People at the ceremony and enters into the covenant with the bride and groom."

Some rabbis and many lay people believe that the normative rabbinic stance is out of touch with modern realities. Alfred Miller of Montreal is among those who urge rabbinic officiation at mixed marriage ceremonies. "It is impossible to stress too strongly how bitter the Jew feels when the rabbi refuses to marry him. This rejection leaves a scar from which he rarely recovers. He feels he is being rejected by the Jewish

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People. If a religious marriage is refused, it does not stop the couple from getting married - it only turns them away."

According to Mel Merrians of Larchmont, New York, rabbis should solemnize mixed marriages only if "the young people have come to an agreement that they are gong to have a Jewish home and that their children will be raised Jewish. Also, the non-Jewish participant should take a course about Judaism so that he will be informed and sometime in the future make up his own mind whether or not he can live as a Jew." Merrians criticized those rabbis who co-officiate with Christian clergy. "I don't think you can be married within two religious traditions."

Among the minority of Reform rabbis who sometimes officiates at a wedding between a Jew and a non-Jew, most insist on commitment to maintain a Jewish home, join a temple, and rear their children as Jews. Some like Harry Danziger of Memphis "require that they study the same program as those studying for conversion." As a result of their participation, the rabbis believe that their officiation at interfaith weddings brings the couples closer to the synagogue and to Judaism. Kenneth Segal of Montreal reports, "I see more of them than I see of the Jewish-Jewish parties after marriage."

Almost no one involved in the issue of rabbinic solemnization at mixed marriage ceremonies does not express a great deal of ambivalence on the subject, regardless of his or her position. Rabbi Segal finds no issue more troubling than this one. "Despite the general feeling that I am doing the right thing, the problem is that I am doing so

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many of them. When at least two-thirds to three quarters of my marriages are mixed marriages, I've got to wonder what it says to those who are looking at me and observing this in terms of the integrity of Reform Judaism. What does it say to the Confirmation child or Bar Mitzvah about carrying on Judaism? I remember David Einhorn's classic line about mixed marriage as the nail in the coffin of Judaism and it taunts me. The more I am doing it, the less I know."

Although she stresses that the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach "does not have a view on whether or not rabbis should officiate," Outreach Director Lydia Kukoff of Los Angeles personally believes "that a rabbi should not officiate at a marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew. Yet, in my dealing with the couples themselves, a rabbi's agreeing to officiate at their marriage has really been an important factor, something that does influence them." Paul Gans of East Rockaway, New York.typifies the ambivalence which characterizes so many in confronting the issue of rabbinic officiation at interfaith weddings. "There has to be some middle ground to accomodate both the rabbi's commitments and the couple's feelings."

Many Reform Jews applaud the general practice of rabbis, even if their own rabbis did not officiate at their weddings or those of their children. Joan Quaderer of East Northport, N.Y. recalled, "At first I hoped that he would, but I understood why. I was glad that he had the integrity to say 'no.' I am glad that I found one to marry me, but

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I want my sons to marry Jewish girls and to be married by a rabbi who makes it very difficult for them to marry anyone but a Jewish girl. I want my sons to stay Jewish and I want my grandchildren to be Jewish."

Alan Iselin of Albany feels that "the demand for officiation at mixed marriages is just another symptom of our wanting to mold our faith to meet our own comfortable Twenty First Century desires. People become affiliated because they pay their dues. They never have to set foot in the synagogue, pray, or have a shabat dinner, but they're entitled to have a rabbi perform a ceremony."

UAHC President <u>Alexander Schindler</u> supports the normative rabbinic stance against officiation because of the threat he believes intermarriage poses to the future of Judaism. "It represents a potential drain on the numeric strength of the Jewish people and on its inner commitment. Whether I like it or not, my officiation would be seen as a seal of approval and would therefore become encouraging of intermarriage. If I participate I give license to those who say 'Well, the rabbis are officiating, why in heaven's name is there anything wrong with my intermarrying?"

"Let me personalize this. I told my children that if they marry somebody outside of the Jewish faith and there is no prior conversion, I cannot officiate If I violate that with the first daughter, then I have no more arguments with any of the other children."

Several of those interviewed suggested that the rabbis' refusal to officiate is often misunderstood as rejection. "It's very hard as "the temper of the times." Unlike rabbinic students in earlier generations, most students now come from Reform homes. But they feel closer to traditional Judaism in many respects. "On the issue of rabbinic officiation at interfaith weddings, they prefer to hold to the mandates of the CCAR arrived at in an earlier day."

Congregations which consider for rabbinic posts only those who will officiate, find it severely narrows their field of choice. Some support the imposition of this kind of "litmus test" in the selection of rabbis. · Paul Uhlmann of Kansas City feels that the rabbis' particular position on the issue should be a part of his or her curriculum vitae. Rabbi Kenneth Segal of Montreal compares a congregation's rabbinic choice to the selection of a husband or wife. "If the congregation feels that to them mixed marriage is important, that's their right."

But UAHC Chairman of the Board Chuck Rothschild condemned the "litmus test." Whether or not the rabbi officiates at mixed marriages "should not be an important criterion in determining a rabbi's suitability for a particular congregation." Although he supports rabbinic officiation at interfaith weddings in some circumstances, Mel Merrians of Larchmont, New York, believes that the rabbi's position on the issue "should not be a part of the interview process. Congregations should make up their minds based upon his or her religious principles and philosophy." CCAR Executive Vice President Joseph Glaser feels that "it's stupid for the congregation to knock out of consideration any rabbi who will not perform mixed marriages, because they knock out over half of the members of the Conference.

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when a member who has given his being to the synagogue suddenly finds his child in a mixed marriage," comments Carl Feldman of Providence. But Connie Kreshtool of Wilmington, Delaware, President of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, believes that too many parents make rabbis into the scapegoats for their childrens' mixed marriages. "They often place most of their anger, frustration, and disappointment onto the rabbi rather than looking to themselves for the reasons why."

Obviously, the stance of most rabbis in declining to officiate must be communicated more adequately, emphasized Gunther Plaut of Toronto, the President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Many might not like the position, but at least they could understand it. "The standard is not, do you love the rabbi? But do you respect the Judaism he proposes?" Haskell Bernat of Miami declines to officiate at interfaith weddings in part because he believes that his converts have a special claim on him as the guardian of the boundaries of the Jewish People. He imagines that if he would officiate, they might confront him, "How dare you give to those unwilling to make a similar commitment, the same benefits and privileges?"

Recent Jewish community studies indicate that approximately one in three Jews currently entering marriage has a partner who was not born Jewish. Despite the rise in the frequency of Jewish intermarriages, fewer rabbis appear willing to solemnize mixed marriage ceremonies than might have done so fifteen years ago. The trend is particularly notable among rabbinic students. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion President Alfred Gottschalk sees the tendency away from officiation

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They cut down their odds on finding the kind of rabbi they ought to have as leader, teacher, pastor, and all the things that a good rabbi is supposed to be. Yes, it's unfair to the rabbis but it's also extremely unfair to the congregation."

In addition to reinforcing its fundamental stance of opposition to rabbinic officiation at mixed marriages, the 1973 CCAR resolution laid the foundation for the Reform Movement's outreach efforts.

"In order to keep open every channel to Judaism and Klal Yisrael for those who have already entered into mixed marriage, the CCAR calls upon its members:

- to assist fully in educating children of such mixed marriages as Jews;
- to provide the opportunity for conversion of the non-Jewish spouse; and
- to encourage a creative and consistent cultivation of involvement in the Jewish community and the synagogue."

During the last decade, outreach has become one of the most active facets of Reform Judaism. Numerous local temples have initiated programs to encourage the affiliation of Jewish intermarriages. Introduction to Judaism courses have been widely offered by local Reform rabbinic groups and by UAHC regional outreach committees. The Commission on Reform Judaism Outreach coordinates all of these efforts. Rabbi Sanford Seltzer of Boston estimates that each year several thousand people convert to Judaism under various Reform auspices.

Many thousands of others not born to Judaism are married to Jews affiliated with Reform temples. Although they may not convert formally to Judaism, they no longer follow their former faiths. They rear their children as Jews, observe Jewish holidays at home, and sometimes even become active in their temples. These "<u>de facto</u> Jews" have become numerous in some temples, especially in more isolated and smaller Jewish communities. Outreach programs acknowledge their inclinations toward Jewishness and try to reinforce their efforts to rear their children as Jews and to identify personally with the Jewish People. The CCAR's 1983 resolution on patrilineal descent legitimizes the Jewishness of the children of intermarriages in which the mother is not Jewish. Orthodox and Conservative rabbis have condemned the patrilineal descent resolution and some Reform rabbis outside of the United States do not follow its letter, although they fulfill its spirit.

The connection in the 1973 resolution between the refusal by rabbis to officiate at interfaith weddings and vigorous outreach efforts, is widely misunderstood. Paul Uhlmann of Kansas City exclaims, "You can't kick them out before they're married and welcome them in after." But UAHC P<u>resident Schindler</u> does not find the two strategies incongruous.

"Outreach is predicated on the assumption that we can maintain our opposition to intermarriage without at the same time rejecting the intermarried. The rabbi who does not officiate (and I follow this rule meticulously) should spend an inordinate amount of time and energy striving to convince the couple that there is no rejection involved. I invariably will spend ten times as much time with the couple to whom I have to say "no" than with the couple to whom I say "yes" - in

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counseling them, in working with them. If at all possible I come to that wedding ceremony itself to demonstrate symbolically my embracing them even though I could not myself officiate at that marriage."

Lydia Kukoff views refusal to officiate and outreach as opposite sides of the same coin. The combination of what appears to be incompatible strategies reflects a distinction in Jewish Law. At the point of officiation, rabbinic refusal is based on the principle of "L'chatchila" or "at the outset." Once an interfaith marriage has occurred, "we are taking a stance of 'B'diavad' or 'once it has happened,'" Kukoff explains. "I absolutely do not accept the notion that a rabbi who does not officiate at interfaith marriages cannot have an outreach program."

One of the rabbis who combines refusal to officiate with vigorous outreach is Leslie Gutterman of Providence. Before the wedding, he often works with an interfaith couple to "help them articulate their own commitments and enable them to write their own service to be officiated at by a judge. These couples usually come away feeling that I have helped to facilitate a meaningful beginning to their married life. They know I wish them God's blessings and that what we have done is honest and written with an integrity that the couple can convey to family and friends whose support and encouragement will be important in nurturing their marriage."

In order to bring more knowledge to bear on this complex topic, the newly forced Research Task Force for the Future of Reform Judaism has been commissioned to design a research project which will investigate

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every facet of Jewish intermarriage. Within the context of evolving American Jewish identity, its many manifestations will be examined. These include conversion, unaffiliated mixed marriages, and rabbinic officiation at interfaith weddings. After a year of design, approximately four years will be required to complete the project.

The controversy over rabbinic refusal to solemnize mixed marriage ceremonies will not be easily resolved. Intermarriage impacts most American Jewish families, so debate over officiation can often become highly personal and emotional. The interfaith wedding is precisely that moment when two common wishes become incompatible. Most of us American Jews want both full integration in American society and preservation of Jewish distinctiveness. Nothing so sharply brings these two desires into conflict as intermarriage.

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Research Task Force on Interfaith Marriage

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS - CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS - HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION 1330 BEACON STREET, SUITE 355, BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS 02146 (617) 277-1655

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מתקדמת באמריקה

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Members Research Task Force

FROM: Rabbi Sanford Seltzer

DATE: September 19, 1985

Enclosed please find a copy of the Biennial Delegates' questionnaire in anticipation of our October 10 meeting as well as the minutes of the September 3 meeting of the Design Subcommittee.

Chairman Alan Iselin Co-Chairman Rabbi Murray Rothman Director Rabbi Sanford Seltzer

STEVEN S. JACOBS 201 S. 18TH STREET # 1519 PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103

> (215) 546-8293 January 2, 1986

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

Dear Alex,

In my mind, you are virtually the only Jewish religious leader of any note on the American scene who has the courage and foresight to push for changes (in accordance with Jewish tradition) which are necessary to keep our Jewish community competitive in this free-wheeling American society of ours.

Let me therefore submit a letter entitled <u>GENTILE</u> FIANCÉ OF JEW TELLS WHY HER CONSCIENCE DEMANDS SHE CONVERT TO JUDAISM AND RAISE FUTURE CHILDREN AS JEWS. It is signed by a real convert to Orthodox Judaism named Donna, but entirely ghostwritten by me. It is designed to be read primarily by Jews in their teens and twenties (and up) and their parents. Secondarily it is to be read by non-Jews who are engaged or married to Jews. And it also is meant to be read by Jews involved with the Christian missionaries.

Why is this letter different from any other piece of literature ever written on the subject? Because it explains that the Greek Testament stories (which Christians call the New Testament) is the primary theological source or anti-Semitism as we know it today. And it puts the stress on the conscience of the reader.

I should like to get this letter into the hands of every young marriage-age Jew in the country, including those under the guidance of the Reform movement. It does not have to be sponsored by the Reform movement as such; but I must have your complete cooperation....

I wait for your early reply, and send my best personal regards.

Sincerely,

GENTILE FIANCE OF JEW TELLS WHY HER CONSCIENCE DEMANDS SHE CONVERT TO JUDAISM AND RAISE FUTURE CHILDREN AS JEWS

Dear Mom and Dad,

I know you were very disappointed when I told you that I accepted Barry's proposal of marriage. Even though you like him and think he would make someone else a good husband, I understand why you prefer me to marry a Christian instead of a Jew like Barry. It is only natural. You both are Christians and raised Tommy and me as Christians.

Therefore, I realize you also were disappointed when I told you of my decision to convert to Judaism and to raise any children Barry and I might have in the Jewish faith. Please understand that Barry did not demand that I convert. I made the decision of my own free will after much thought and prayer.

Perhaps you will understand my decision better if I set down some of my reasons for deciding to convert to Judaism and to establish a Jewish family with Barry.

Suppose I decided to marry someone other than Barry, someone who was neither Christian nor Jewish but whose religion contained statements and doctrines in its holy book that you both are damned or cursed because you remain Christians. Suppose I joined a faith which taught in this holy book that my grandparents, including Grandad Bob who died last year, are children of the Devil and not of God even though they are the nicest grandparents anyone could have. Suppose I agreed to raise my children in a faith which proclaimed Christians deserve to be burned and even murdered for refusing to accept certain claims made by the founder of that faith. Suppose it taught that Christians are hostile or enemies of <u>all</u> mankind.

Suppose the doctrines and teachings which I just outlined above were part of a faith of someone I planned to marry. Would you be pleased? And what about my own conscience. Could I in good conscience agree to be part of such a faith, or allow my children, either passively or actively, to be raised in such a faith?

Just as I could never in good conscience insult you by permitting my children to be raised in a faith which contains teachings that you are cursed or damned, that my grandparents are children of the Devil and not of God, that Christians deserve to be burned and murdered and are hostile to all mankind, so I could not in good conscience insult Barry or his family or allow my children to become or identify as Christians because these are precisely the teachings of Jesus and others according to the New Testament. Even if I did not formally convert to Judaism, I would never insult Barry or his family, or act contrary to my own conscience, by allowing my children to be raised in a faith which contains doctrines of this sort.

In case you don't believe these doctrines are part of Christianity, let me show you exactly where they appear in the New Testament. Mark 16:16 says anyone who does not believe in Jesus is "damned." Paul claims that Jews who reject Jesus in favor of their own Mosaic traditions are "cursed" (Galatians 3:10). Jesus himself reportedly claimed anyone who did not accept his leadership would be "thrown away like a (dead) branch and burned" (John 15:16), yes, even murdered (Luke 19:27). He also reportedly called Jews who would not accept him as their religious leader "children of the Devil" (John 8:44) and "not of God" (John 8:47). And I Thessalonians 2:15,16 asserts that Jews "killed Jesus, murdered the prophets, and are hostile (some translations read "enemies") to <u>all</u> mankind."

These statements and teachings are insults to Jews. These diatribes are the source of hatred, persecution and murder of Jews for centuries. And they are untrue. Take for example the assertion in I Thessalonians 2:15,16, which I mentioned above, that Jews killed Jesus, murdered the prophets, and are hostile to all mankind. The Jews could not have killed Jesus because their Roman overlords in that era forbade them to practice capital punishment, crucifiction being a Roman punishment in any event. According to the Bible (which I was raised to call the Old Testament), the only Jews ever to kill prophets were apostate Jews who lived at least 400 years earlier and had abandoned Judaism for the idol worship of the pagans (I Kings 18:13; 19:1,10; 21:26; II Chronicles 24:18, 21-22; Nehemiah 9:18,26). And never were Jews anywhere hostile to or enemies of all mankind:

My decision to become Jewish and raise my children as Jews also results from my realization that I share the same basic views and beliefs found in Judaism. In that sense, I already was a Jew but without knowing it.

Some of the basic Jewish views and beliefs which I share are found in the Bible (Old Testament). They include the belief that life is sacred and good works, the noblest spiritual achievment. "It has been told you, O mankind, what is good and what God wants of you -- only to do justly, love mercy, and walk with humility before God" (Micah 6:7,8). The belief that every human being, Gentile and Jewish, is equal in the sight of God. "Think you, O Israelite, that you are better to Me (God) than the Ethiopians? (Not so!) I brought Israel from Egypt. Yes, and also the Phillistines from Crete and the Arameans from Kor" (Amos 9:7). And Gentile converts are to be treated with equality and respect. "The convert (ger) who dwells among you shall be treated like the person born a Jew; you must love him (or her) like yourself" (Leviticus 19:34). Mother and Dad, the Jewish People are not a race or single ethnic group as most people mistakenly believe. The Bible itself says Jews were a "mixed multitude" almost from the start (Exodus 12:38). There are black Jews from Ethiopia and the United States, dark-skinned Dravidian Jews from India, white Jews from Europe, and even some Jews who are Japanese and from other parts of the Orient. It is estimated that some 14,000 people, mostly from Christian family backgrounds, convert to Judaism every year and the numbers are increasing. Many do so because they plan to marry or are married to a Jew. Many others do it without marriage in mind. So I am not alone or unique in this respect.

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I hope the thoughts which I have expressed above help you to understand and appreciate better why I have chosen this path, to get married in a Jewish religious ceremony, to become a Jew myself, and to raise any children in the Jewish faith.

I love you both.

Your daughter,

Donna

Note: Donna is a convert to Judaism and married to a Jew by birth. This letter is being sent to you in hopes it will be both interesting and useful. If you have any questions or comments, please send them to Simon Jacobs, 2037 Chestnut Street #15892, Philadelphia, PA 19103.



From	Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler	26 Tevet 5746
То	David W. Belin; Lydia Kukoff	Date January 7, 1986
Copies Subject	Stated Marray	no fut
P	Steven Jacobs sent me the attached. It is self-explanatory. What do you think?	
Y	Warm good wishes.	
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	alex this is terrible Othersk this is terrible Othersk happy to elabor I will be happy to elabor I will be happy to I will be happy to.	ate B



Union of American Hebrew Congregations 838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

איחוד ליהדות 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

מתקדמת באמריקה

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

May 16, 1993 25 Iyar 5753

Rabbi Alexander Schindler To:

Dru Greenwood From:

Glaser's "The Gathering Crisis of Intermarriage" Re:

Has this already gone out to the CCAR and therefore you are considering a public response? Or is it awaiting a further commentary from you before being sent out? Is it possible to prevent its being distributed at all? Despite the changes Joe has made in his introductory memo, I continue to see this as a potentially very divisive piece for the same reasons I mentioned before. There are plenty of rabbis who feel truly overwhelmed and beleaguered by the changing demographics of our congregations. This will make them feel even more so, with Outreach lobbies and clietele on the march. Us and them, with "us" being the lonely voice in the wilderness.

I'm enclosing a copy of my previous memo to you with portions marked that I feel still apply.

Just a note about the two attachments, Walter's piece and yours. Basically I have no quarrel with Walter's remarks, although I might read Jewish history and its application differently. It's a straightforward thesis which invites evaluation on its merits without stirring up anxiety. While your remarks certainly hit squarely on the main points that need to be made, they are in such a form--inexact transcript of a semi-formal response to Walter's speech and other Board commentaries--that they seem almost offhand and therefore don't serve the general argument as well as they might. In addition it does sound as if you are saying there should be no distinctions between Jews and non-Jews in ritual practice for Chairperson bar/bat mitzvah and it's an easy step, which you don't prevent Harris Gilbert here, to extend that to all ritual practice. (Didn't Joe also cut Co-Chairperson off your remarks? I thought there was more on this later in your Vice Chairpersons What about preparing an edited version for Elizabeth Linkoninclusion if this document actually goes out? Pamela Waechter

I don't know what you've heard about the Outreach Executive Director Dru Greenwood Committee meeting. Mel and Danny were both there, as were Walter

and Joe. The majority of the discussion, as I suspected, centered around the new process guide for the role of the non-Jew. You might be interested to know that Joe turned down a suggestion of Danny's that the CCAR draft "the" policy on ritual participation. Joe said that he wants to involve laity in these decisions. 111 I also had a private meeting with Joe last week to discuss wordfor-word his concerns with the new process guide. We made out fine on the word-for-word. But during the course of the conversation, he accused me of "social working" this issue rather than taking the stand of a "leader", so I noted that you had taken the stand of a leader and that Joe didn't seem to like that either. I also mentioned that if I asked five different rabbis about where exactly they would draw the line in ritual practice, I would get five different answers. He didn't care for that, but conceded it was so. I told him that my position is that it is the right and responsibility of the congregations individually with their rabbis to address this issue, learning from our tradition using available resources and that they are doing so with our help. That's what Reform Judaism is about. We parted friends and he is adding me as an associate member of the CCAR (by virtue of position). GO figure. In any case, I think the softening, if it can be called that, of the end of his memo with regard to Outreach may be due in part to these ongoing discussions. I intend to keep them up. I'll also be staying at the CCAR convention for most of its duration, even though I'm only scheduled for a pre-convention workshop on... the role of the non-Jew.

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## PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

April 21, 1993 30 Nisan 5753

To: Rabbi Alexander Schindler

From: Dru Greenwood pur Hope this is helpful.

Joe's piece on the role of the non-Jew made my heart sink. I thoroughly agree with your last comment about a potential war between the rabbinate and the laity. I also wonder how, in all candor, he can ask you if his piece is "accurate, fair and nonconfrontative." Maybe he operates at such high decibels that he can no longer hear himself. His language is loaded and militant in its imagery. He makes Outreach sound like Frankenstein, "taking on" a life of its own." It's sad that he feels so embattled.

In any case, here are a few thoughts on substance:

1. The reason that we are working so hard on the issues of policy setting on the role of non-Jews in the synagogue <u>is</u> that we are concerned about the integrity of Reform Judaism in the future. Outreach and the integrity of Judaism and Jewish life are not dichotomous--they are mutually interdependent. We should take great pride in the fact that we have stepped forward proactively to meet the challenges that inevitably have come to us, not shied away from them.

The fact is that for historical reasons, many Reform congregations have policy and/or practice that is very far from the sample ("sample" not "model") constitution and may not conform to Reform responsa either. (Your quote from Leo Baeck is a great example of why this is so.) Engaging such congregations in the process of thinking about the purpose of a synagogue and the requirements and meaning of membership, governance and ritual participation, and in studying the tradition including Reform responsa, is a healthy, affirming process that meets the mandate of Reform tradition for informed choice. It is my experience that congregations (lay leaders and rabbis) take Reform responsa and the sample constitution very seriously in their deliberations, but that they do not consider them binding.

Chavperson Harris Gilbert Co-Chairperson Rabbi Leslie Gutterman

Vice Chairpersons Elizabeth Linkorf\*\* Pamela Waechter

Director Dru Greenwood Strong Outreach committees do <u>not</u> necessarily "loosen the rules" (second paragraph. The Conservative movement is just now recognizing (often kicking and screaming) the fact that there are intermarried couples in their congregations. Jerry Epstein told me last fall with a straight face that there were no interfaith couples who belong to Conservative synagogues and he seemed quite hostile to almost everything I said. I met him at the Brandeis Think Tank on the Unaffiliated.) In fact, when Reform congregations undertake the process of reexamining policy, they more often than not end up tightening the rules. Feedback that I've received indicates that they feel empowered and supported in doing this through the Outreach materials and programs, which again include responsa and the sample constitution.

- 3. Outreach has been a major priority, not only of the Union, but of the Reform movement as a whole, since 1978. The Commission is a joint Commission and the College has been fully represented and active in forming the Outreach program as well. Joe's listing of "clientele" (bottom page 1) certainly does seem like he's describing everyone in our congregations (including many rabbis and cantors as well). I guess they congregant balance as he describes it has tipped. And when you get to "friends and families of mixed couples", the clery balance has probably tipped too. Maybe that's why there's some identification with "the clientele." Too bad that Joe sets it up as "us" and "them". My question is: what "crucial changes appear to have to be made"? Reform congregations have always been open and have stressed universality. Older constitutions and by-laws often reflect this. Newer ones address current needs for boundaries. This seems to me to be firmly and in a healthy way following Reform tradition. Yes, it's painful and difficult sometimes and rabbis often are the point-people who carry the multiple projections of the issues. Issues that matter profoundly are hardly ever simple. But, I agree with you, we can't allow ourselves to be put in an embattled position. That's a no-win situation.
- What is the "critical mass in Reform Jewish life? ... born and 4. converted Jews, or that clientele resulting from intermarriage?" When we are talking about tachlis temple programming, again this is an unhelpful and damaging dichotomy. If Outreach is seen, as I have been painting it wherever I go, as essentially about inviting Jewish choices, the vast majority of the programs we do address fundamentals of what it means to be a Jew and inspire and encourage people to make active Jewish choices for themselves. The Commission is focusing now on integrated programming that strengthens the Jewish pride, commitment and life choices of all, both Jew and not-yet Jew--learners minyanim, workshops that talk about spirituality, holiday workshops, life cycle discussions. Intro classes are taken by temple adult confirmation classes as well as those considering conversion to Judaism and interfaith couples. In many instances the needs for Jewish learning presented by interfaith couples and by Jews are identical. How many Jews don't know why or how to be Jewish? This is why I have been working so hard to integrate our work

with youth, education, Sisterhood and Brotherhood, etc. Obviously, we need some programs that are directed to particular issues of interfaith couples, but they are timelimited and aim to bring couples into the Jewish life of the congregation. The Task Force on the Unaffiliated, which the CCAR elected not to join as joint sponsor, is under the umbrella of Outreach precisely because of the similarity of mission, the basic questions raised (Why be Jewish? How can I do it?) and the similarity of the process of enabling and supporting Jewish choices.

- 5. I do not understand Joe's increasing discomfort "with the outreach focus on converts, relating them more closely to the non converts than to the born Jews." Converts are Jews and many people continue to be concerned about what they perceive to be Outreach's singling out of Jews-by-choice, particularly those who have been Jews for some time and are well integrated. That of course is not the intent; rather it is to welcome, teach and support those considering conversion and those who are new Jews-by-choice during the period of transition. The big secret about converts seems to be that they were once not Jews. (It's rarely mentioned that Ruth was first intermarried with Naomi's son.) Outreach is deeply involved in the often messy business of easing the transition.
- "Anything that a rabbi or a congregation might deny this 6. clientele is seen as a rejection or an insult, or both .... " V This is a vast overgeneralization that it does not serve us well to overemphasize. Leaving aside the question of sensitivity on the part of the rabbi or congregation, even assuming the best, yes there are individuals who react in this manner. However, there are many non-Jews and their Jewish family members who understand very well the concerns of the Jewish community for continuity and integrity and who are or can be allies in protecting it. (The members of the panel for the Exec Committee are good examples.) We need to listen for and encourage those voices, acknowledge the pain when it is there, and seriously explain our reasons for the decisions. It's hard work, but it can be done. (I've already expressed my feeling about focusing on encouraging inmarriage in my memo re Bayme, so won't go into it here. Suffice it to say, nothing about Outreach lends itself to simplistic statements.)
- 7. About the UAHC Executive Committee meeting, Joe can be refered to your opening comments on p. 146. It was not just a mind stretching exercise. I think it was Don Day who expressed the sense of the committee that this was a topic that they had not realized the significance of before, and that members should bring the mandate back to their congregations and regions to engage the issue. (The discussion seems to me to degenerate further into vitriol here and for the next few pages.) Joe seems not to have heard your two points of agreement: that we must welcome and that we must set boundaries. (The operative word is "and", not "but", which Shelly used in his remarks, by

the way.) This is a repeat of my point #1. Why does it seem so hard to get?

Officiation and final page. First, the "Outreach establishment" (whatever that is) does not have a vested v interest in officiation. There is pressure on rabbis to officiate because two thirds of all marriages involving a Jew (more among Reform Jews) are intermarriages. Rabbis care about the individuals and families involved (would you want it any other way?). And they care about the future of Judaism. Again, many lay people understand the issues and agree with a decision not to officiate. Many rabbis have found ways to help laity understand their decision when it is not to officiate. Rabbis and laity share common ground in caring deeply about the future Jewishness of the family. Yes, the rabbi is often the point-person or scapegoat for the fears, feelings of guilt, etc. that individuals and families experience. That does come with the territory unfortunately. If I am part of the "Outreach establishment", I do all I can to ease this situation. I've had similar experiences in congregations to the one Joe describes. I will also be meeting with the New York students who are about to be ordained to help them formulate ways of speaking with laity about their officiation policy. Maybe we all need to think together about how this sore spot can be alleviated.

Another thought: My sense is that fewer new rabbis now start out by deciding that they will officiate, so that it's possible that the pool of rabbis who officiate is shrinking. The greatest conflict seems to arise when there is a change in rabbi in a congregation and the previous practice (by them misinai) is also shifted or challenged. This is another built-in structural reasons for the pressure.

Finally, do you know that both Joe and Walter are planning to be at the Outreach Executive Committee meeting on May 3? As I mentioned to you, they are already concerned about the Kansas City piece. I anticipate that will be somewhat of a non-issue, since I think the Exec Committee will agree with them and not wish to further distribute the B'nai Jehudah document. On the other hand, that discussion could be only a warm-up for the discussion of the new supplementary process resource that I put together and sent out. (You should have a copy.) The main issue there, aside from the thing itself, will most likely be the material that Maggie Wenig put together with the committee from Beth Am, the People's Temple. I included it because I think it's very well based in the tradition, albeit a different strand from that favored in Reform responsa. The arguments are carefully drawn and have integrity. I also feel that it will be helpful to some congregations and rabbis. However, it is pretty far to the left and quite radically As you may know, Maggie has an ongoing non-authoritarian. "engagement" with Joe et al. He and Walter will probably disagree vigorously with its inclusion. Just wanted you to know. I've alerted Danny, Mel (who called me with comments on the draft), Harris and Les.

8.

Norman M. Cohen, Rabbi



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

egon 27, 1993

Rabbi Alexander Schindler UAHC 838 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10021

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

I want you to know how much I enjoyed your biennial sermon address during Shabbat morning services this year. As always, I am grateful that you speak for the length of time that you do. It doesn't hurt for my congregants attending the convention to realize that my sermons aren't all that long!

Our congregation has been going through a heart-wrenching, but very beneficial, process this year of examining the role of the non-Jewish spouse in the synagogue. I listened intently to all of your observations, and I wanted to respond by sending you copies of the materials we've been working with this year.

First of all, I opened the discussion with my Rosh Hashanah morning sermon, entitled "What Does It Mean to Say a Bracha?". Last year at the regional UAHC biennial in Pewaukee, Wisconsin, I presented one of three papers on this topic. I'm enclosing all three papers for you to look at.

I'm also sending you the materials we presented to the congregation as take-home packets following Rosh Hashanah morning services. People were urged to read and study before our first of three congregational town hall forums. At the first forum we had three speakers (much like the regional biennial program the year before). Then we broke into small groups of 10 to 12 people each. There were over 100 people in attendance at that first town hall forum, and we are a congregation of fewer than 400 families, which gives you an indication of the importance with which many people regard this topic.

Finally, I would like to let you know that we have already, in the 12 years of our congregation's existence, developed some appropriate "new rituals" in which we involve the non-Jewish spouses. When a non-Jewish spouse is supportive of the Jewish upbringing of the children, we try to involve them in a number of ways in the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies.

While the non-Jewish parent does not actually pass the Torah down, they stand with the Jewish spouse, and I say very clearly, "The Torah is passed from your grandparents to your mother who, with the loving support of your father, passes it on to you". This accomplishes a number of things. First of all, it includes the non-Jewish spouse in this critical moment. They are not left to the pews or to a non-central symbolic position. It also states clearly our recognition of their importance in the passing of that Torah. (As you might have read in my paper, I don't see the Torah as being something that a non-Jew can pass down. The way I understand it, the Old Testament, which Christians accept as part of their Bible, is not the same as Torah, and that is why I resist the idea of a non-Jew passing the Torah down in this particular ceremony.)

Also, as part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ritual, when the Jewish parent is invited to do the Torah blessing, the non-Jewish parent stands with him/her and recites the following words, which come from <u>Gates</u> <u>of Prayer</u> and conclude with the Shehechiyanu which, I think, is quite appropriate since it is not an "asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav" blessing.

My prayer, standing at the Torah, is that you, my son/daughter, will always be worthy of this inheritance as a Jew. Know that you have my support. Take its teaching into your heart, and in turn pass it on to your children and those who come after you. May you be a faithful Jew, searching for wisdom and truth, working for justice and peace.

And, of course, when the Jewish parent addresses the child with a drasha, the non-Jewish parent is invited to also speak to the moment, basing comments on the portion.

The night preceding the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony, the entire family is invited to lead the congregation in the blessings over the candles and the kiddush. The non-Jewish parent usually reads the paragraph leading up to the blessing.

I know that you are interested in encouraging the development of new appropriate rituals to deal with this very "important issue", and I hope this might be something that other congregations could feel free to use and/or adapt.

I must tell you that the major issue in our congregation is the emotional reaction we are seeing from many different segments of our membership. The non-Jewish spouses are the ones who are least upset by this whole process. Many of them want the congregation to be clear about what the limits are. However, their spouses are the ones who are very often perturbed and irritated, often saying that we are making them feel unwelcome and pushing them away when, in point of fact, we are providing many opportunities that I suspect remind them of the lack of opportunities and the very strong emotional responses many of them may have experienced at the time they were dating, engaged and married.

We also get a very strong emotional reaction from the born Jews married to born Jews, who are uncomfortable with the increasing number of non-Jews playing a role within our communities. I suspect that many of these members are more disturbed by the fact that this isn't the synagogue "they grew up in". My goal is to get them to see the presence of non-Jewish spouses in our synagogue in a positive way, indicating that we are not losing the children of mixed marriages to the Christian or secular world. Rather, we should be encouraged by the growing number of non-Jewish spouses, not only willing, but enthusiastic about raising their children as Jews.

And, finally, people who have become Jews by choice are most appreciative of the distinctions made, so that there is an understanding that what they did by "converting to Judaism" counts for something.

I hope this has been helpful. I certainly was moved by your sermon and wanted to share these things with you.

שלום Shalom,

Rabbi Norman M. Cohen





RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS BRESIDENT BRESIDENT B38 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

November 3, 1993 19 Heshvan 5754

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

Dear Norman:

Thank you so much for your letter of October 27th. Your report is most encouraging and I like the manner in which you resolved this vexing problem within your congregation.

Your solution is precisely what I had in mind when I spoke at the Biennial. I am glad you understood me well. Judging by the response of some of our colleagues at the Rabbis Breakfast, I am not so sure they did.

I really don't know why everyone is so frightened of this subject. The manner in which you and your congregation approached the resolution is really admirable and I especially like the creative manner in which you allowed the participation of the non-Jewish partner in the ceremony of passing the Torah as well as in participating in the Aliyah.

I am going to share your letter with several of our colleagues and the people around us here at the Union in the hope that your meaningful experience will be of worth to others as well.

Cordially,

Alexander M. Schindler



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

> May 16, 1989 11 Iyar 5749

Mr. B.J. Tanenbaum, Jr. U.D.S., Inc. 111 N. Main Street Dumas, AR 71639

Dear B.J.:

Anter maring

I thank you for your confidential letter of May 8, 1989. I much appreciate your having shared your thoughts with me.

This is a matter which I think would be best discussed face to face. We will seek an opportunity when the two of us my chat quietly and share our thoughts and concerns on the subject.

With heartfelt appreciation for your continuing care and concern, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION 838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100 CABLES: UNIONUAHC 1989 MAUATA A MULIAR MULIAR MAUATA A MULIAR MULIAR

איחוד ליהדות מתקדמת באמריקה

May 8, 1989

CONFIDENTIAL

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

Dear Alex:

As you may note, I am writing this letter to you and have shared its contents with no one except my wife, Pat. I have done this, not because I would restrict you from letting someone else read it, but instead, I am giving you my opinion. I am not trying to embarrass you or our Movement, to which you know I am totally devoted.

I do, however, have a very significant concern. This concern is essentially the problem of mixed marriages. This is not a new problem and, of course, I am by no means the first one to addresss it, nor will I be the last. It has now been 10 years since our Movement began its Outreach Program under your great tutorage and leadership. This program pioneered inovative action and reactions within not only our Reform Movement, but indeed, impacted Judaism throughout the World.

In ten years we have made significant progress because of the insightfulness of our Lay Leadership who have been involved on the Outreach Commission, as well as the continued work of our dedicated professional leaders. This marvelous impact has extended into the Union of American Hebrew Congregations Regions and to the Congregations themselves. I am positive that this program will continue to grow each year. It has the ability to modify and change with the times and has already joined other cornerstones of our Movement to create a new foundation to build Progressive Judaism into the next century.

The one thing that has not changed, however, in these 10 years, is the CCAR resolution on performing mixed marriages.

Page -2-Rabbi Alexander Schindler May 8, 1989

From my perspective, the CCAR, itself, has even become more resolute in their position that their Atlanta resolution, which stems from the early 1970's, and the subsequent Outreach program of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations have nothing to do with each other. How ridiculous is this position! It is amusing to me to see learned scholars, our very spiritual leaders, engross themselves in an argument that they will surely lose in the long run. Their logic makes no sense.

Frankly, I have never even discussed with you what your personal feeling is about Rabbis performing mixed marriages. I really do not think that is an issue here. The pragmatic point is that mixed marriages exist, they are going to continue to exist in North America and throughout the World. They are a reality of our modern times and our acceptance by society as a whole, and indeed our integration into it. We are no longer a ghetto society. Our children are exposed to other precious human beings whose life they wish to share for other reasons than religious affiliation. The children, the products of those unions, are now being welcomed into our Movement and the non-Jewish spouses are, in most cases, and certainly officially, being encouraged to consider conversion. And yet, the official policy of the CCAR continues to state that, essentially they deplore, condemn, and encourage against the performance of mixed marriages by their Rabbis. Naturally, they do not emphatically say that it cannot be done and there is a significant minority of Rabbis who do perform mixed marriages. I thank God for these Rabbis, or else, in my opinion, the dire predictions of previous sociologists working on forecasts for a Jewish population in 1990 and beyond would indeed prove to be correct. The doom-sayers would have prevailed.

Let me consolidate my thoughts ---

I do not feel that we have the right to tell any Rabbi that they must perform a mixed marriage. However, I do feel that it is consistent with the Outreach Program that certain compatability standards for a mixed marriage could be augmented and supported by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations that would <u>not</u> discourage this practice by our Rabbis, but instead sanction it under prevailing conditions. Let's be realists.

I do not propose that Rabbis marry everybody regardless of conditions, regardless of Jewish study, regardless of many other Page -3-Rabbi Alexander Schindler May 8, 1989

factors. I do not propose that we encourage mixed marriages, but rather establish Union of American Hebrew Congregations guidelines that at least sanction them. But, I do propose that we become realistic rather than idealistic. That we become pragmatic, rather than problematic. That we work with the CCAR and HUC-JIR toward adapting our Movement for Progressive Judaism (the U.A.H.C.) so that it can grow; so that it can prosper; so that it can offer God's beckoning light to our posterity.

Some of our children, and almost all of our children's children's children, will be the product of these mixed marriages. Within 2 or 3 generations almost no family will go untouched. It is time that we wholeheartedly recruit these people to our Movement and that our Rabbis do not place impediments in our path. Not every mixed marriage will work. Nothing works in any society or any concept perfectly. In the major leagues a batting average of .300 is considered excellent. On the gambling tables of Atlantic City or Las Vegas, 55% would be a very winning average. In business, it is said that you need to right 2 out of 3 times to be a winner. Why should our Rabbis expect 100% success?

I know that mistakes will be made, but not nearly as many mistakes would be made, as are now being made, by turning the Jewish partner of the mixed marriage, their children, and in many times their families, away from our faith for the rest of their lives. This problem, along with serving and recruiting the unaffiliated are absolutely necessary for the long range survival and viability of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Progressive Judaism throughout the World.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you in the future as I feel that at this particular point in history, only you can answer the call of our People. We cannot deafen our ears to their cry.

Most sincerely,

J. Tanenbaum, Jr.

Vice-Chairman Union of American Hebrew Congregations

couples. "Anyone who is not Jewish who wishes to explore w should not be a member

> Washington Jewish Week, March 17, 1994 29

by Na'ama Batya Lewin Staff Writer Does outreach threaten the fabric of \_\_\_\_\_\_ JEWISH LIFE? Different movements adopt alternate approaches to intermarriage

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.

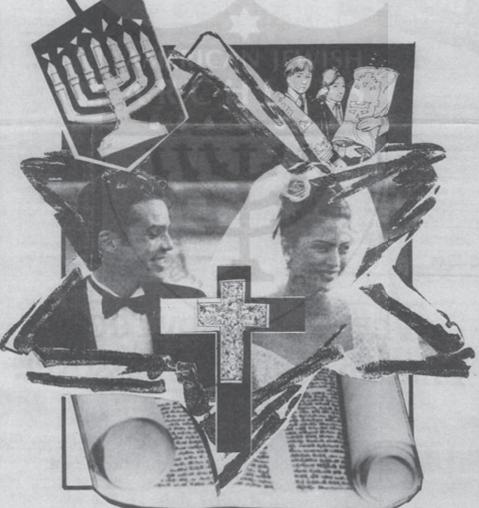
Often these families ask to be accepted by the community as they are, without the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse.

According to a Washington Jewish Week survey, an aver-age of <u>15.4 percent of those</u> who regularly attend Reform congregations in the metropoli-tan Washington area are non-Jews. All area Reform congre-gations provide family member-ships for intermarried couples, under which the non-Jewish spouse joins the synagogue. Ninety-three percent allow the non-Jewish spouse to seek rep-resentation on synagogue comresentation on synagogue comnon-Jews to be synagogue of-ficers. Forty-three percent of Washington Conservative congregations suggest that the Jewish spouse of an intermarreied 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 com-munity centers and social service agencies are trying to make intermarried couples feel more comfortable with Juda-ism. They believe that if inter-faith families have a positive Jewish experience, they may choose to build a Jewish home or send their children to Heor send their children to He

or send then children the brew school. Competition among the out-reach programs has become fierce. Which organization is fierce. Which organization is more accepting toward these couples? Which is more flex-ible? Who is more successful in families into the lewbringing families into the Jew-ish fold?

Conversion to scens no longer to be the focus of outreach. In synat-gogues, rabbis who find they have a growing number of nonlaws attending services regu-larly refrain from portraving in-terfaith relationships as a mis-fortune so as to avoid offend-ing 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 Commit-tee 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

"It is a delusion to believe that with outreach and inter-marriage you can enlarge the Jewish community," insists Steven Bayme, director of the lewish Communal Affairs De-Jewish Communal Affairs De-partment for the American Jewish Committee. Outreach, Bayme continues,

is a way to "teach families how 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 mi-nority faith cannot be pre-served if it is not the only reli-gion in the home."

Rabbinic leadership in both the Reform and Conservative doubts about the success of outreach programs. The past president of the Reform Cen-tral 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 be-come members of Reform congregations. And Rabbi Avis Miller, chairman of the Com-mittee for Kirav and Giyur for the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism, recently

published a paper suggesting that Conservative rabbis should no longer welcome intermar-ried 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-munity." munity.

#### In practice

Within synagogues "out-reach" typically means accept-ing interfaith couples as eli-gible participants in religious life. Rather than treating Jews who intermarry as betrayers of the faith, synagogue congrega-tions pull these couples into the community and teach them about todainer. about Judaism

By contrast, secular outreach programs are more like therapeutic "rap" sessions. Internarried couples meet to discuss issues that come up in daily life. In Washington, the Jewish Community Cen-ter of Greater Washington and the Jewish Social Service Agency have been able to at-tract a large number of inter-married couples because of a welcoming response to inter-faith relationships. These in-stitutions reach couples that synagogues might never see.

There are no prerequisites for joining the interfaith pro-gram at the Jewish Com-munity Center of Greater Washington. Lisa Shapero, who runs the program found dust over a very set of the who runs the program found-ed just over a year ago, does not ask anything of couples who come to her classes. She doesn't question their home-life 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 Shap-ero. The 28-year-old does not attempt to "persuade" par-ticipants to convert. "We try to be welcoming and not judgmental. If we don't reach

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out to people who may be po-tential Jews, then where can they turn?"

Erika Engelmann, who has been running interfaith work-shops from the Jewish Social Service Agency of Greater Washington for almost 23 years, is expert in making in-terfaith couples feel comfort-able. She explains that she teaches the couple how to re-late better.

"I open the doors for dia-logue," Engelmann says. "Couples come to me to dis-cuss issues — their own reli-gion and heritage. I encour-age them to talk about their feelings. I help the couple with communication and the skills of listening." En-gelmann suggests that indi-viduals usually battle over regelmann suggests that indi-viduals usually battle over religious issues the same way they argue over buying a new couch.

When couples come for ad-vice, Engelmann will not sug-gest that they join a synagogue or send children to Hebrew school. She will not advise fam-ily members to light Chanukah candles rather than decorating a Christmas tree. 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 couples are counted as new members. Last year Rabbi Al-exander Schindler, president of the Union of American Heof the Union of American He-brew Congregations (UAHC), suggested that the move-ment's outreach program be-'come more aggressive. Schin-dler proposed that Judaism convert "non-church-going Christians" as well as non-Jewish spouses of interfaith couples

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

Since that time, intermar-ried couples have been al-lowed to join Reform congretowed to join Reform congre-gations 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 says

But a few months ago Jacob, outgoing president of the CCAR, told his colleagues in a paper presented to UAHC Executive Board; 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 Jew should not be a member of a synagogue. "The syna-gogue is not a golf club or a spa which we may share with others," he said. "The syna-gogue seeks to further very specific Jewish ideals and goals through a community which ac-cepts them .... If individuals want to become members, they should become Jews. Our doors are always open." Rabbi Josenh Glaser

Rabbi Joseph Glaser, CCAR's executive vice presi-dent who sent copies of Jacob's paper to Reform rab-

dent who sent copies of Jacob's paper to Reform rab-bis across the country, at-tached a cover letter stating: "I believe it is time to exam-ine 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 move-ment, which does not allow the non-Jewish spouse to be a member and forbids its clergy from performing an inter-marriage, has also been re-considering its outreach pro-grams. Rabbi Miller of Wash-ington's Adas Israel Congre-gation said in a recently pub-lished American Jewish Com-mittee paper that Judaism's "first line of defense" must be "to emphasize the mitzvah of endowarn." The measure be "to emphasize the *mitzvah* of endogany." The message that Jews should marry other Jews must be transmitted "with firmness but without

"with firmness but without rancor." "The goal of outreach is conversion," insists Rabbi Robert Abramson, director of education for the United Syn-agogue of Conservative Juda-ism. "Efforts only to make people feel comfortable do lose sight with where we are coming from." In 1985 the Conservative movement developed a three-tiered response to inter-marriage. When prevention fails, the movement encour-ages the non Jewish spouse of an intermarried couple to convert. If the spouse has no interest in conversion to Ju-daism, the Conservative com-

ages the non-Jewish spouse of an intermarried couple to convert. If the spouse has no interest in conversion to Ju-daism, the Conservative com-munity provides an outreach program with the hope that the non-Jewish partner will 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 Torah-reading. But everyone is wel-come to attend services and adult education programs. Some Conservative congre-gations address synagogue mail to the entire family. Miller acknowledges that total acceptance of non-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 Jew-ish nourishment to last be-yond their own lifetime, to pass on to the next genera-tion." Calling for outreach that does not "sacrifice our 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 non-religious Jews. observance among non-

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 Jew-ish or studying about Juda-ism is warmly welcome," says Rabbi Joel Tessler of Beth Sholom Congregation in Po-tomac. "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." "Anyone who is not community.

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

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

marriage come from college campuses," says Schreier. "We decided that was where "We decided that was where we could make a difference." The RCA's program is de-signed 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 Re-All Conservative and Re-form synagogues accept chil-dren 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 Con-servative congregations ask servative congregations ask that a student with a Jewish father undergo conversion be-fore he or she reaches har or

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bat mitzvah age. Some area hat initizent age, come area Reform congregations — which accept patrilineal de-scent — only ask that a child not attend another school that teaches a non-Jewish re-ligion

that teaches a non-Jewish re-ligion. Does the presence of these children affect the content of the Hebrew school cur-riculum? Can teachers com-fortably tell their students that Christmas is not a Jew-ish holiday if a significant number actually celebrate it with the approval of both parents? Will intermarried parents? Will intermarried parents remove their children from synagogue Hebrew schools if Judaism is advo-cated too ardently? One local rabbi, who asked

Cated 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 Many Jewish leaders believe that intermarriage results from inadequate appreciation of Ju-daism in the home. Therefore, they question whether the Jew-ish 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

annually for an interfaith program. Texecutive 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 com-munity could better spend these funds on programs such as outreach to the non-filiated Jew, Jewish educa-tion, or assistance to Russian Jewish immigrants. Thyllis Margolius, presi-dent of UJAF, insists that the pomparison to what is spent funding for outreach to in-funding for outreach to in-funding for outreach to in-ficience, she says, in a broader contex. The reality is there are a

context.

"The reality is there are a lot of people in the com-munity — some of whom are in all-Jewish households and others in interfaith house-holds — who have a desire to be Jewish and pass on their Judaism." Margolius insists, "We need to open doors rath-er 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 Con-gregation Beth Chai — a Hu-manist synagogue in Fairfax, Va. — who is one of a few Washington-area rabbis who The reality is there are a

co-officiates at interfaith mar-

co-officiates at interfaith mar-riages. "If you tell them they are not Jewish, they will be loss. If you tell them they are Jewish, they may want to learn something more." Traditional rabbis, says Becher, mislead the Jewish foarents have a Jewish home and keep kosher, their chil-dren 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 ailed."

failed." Blecher was ordained as a Conservative rabbi in 1975 at the Jewish Theological Semi-nary 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 cou-

"I only want to make sure "I only want to make sure they are an appropriate cou-ple. That they love each other and take the commitment se-riously. I don't have any pre-conditions," 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 im-portance of religion in soci-ety. Quoting Torah just isn't going to cut it in this genera-tion."