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Central Conference of American Rabbis, Adult Education  
Committee, 1947.

## REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ADULT EDUCATION

C.C.A.R., June 27, 1947

Colleagues:

At the Executive Board meeting of the C.C.A.R. on October 22-23, 1946, "it was moved and adopted that a committee shall prepare a preliminary survey of adult education as carried on in the programs of the Brotherhoods, Sisterhoods, etc., and to report at the same session as the Religious Education Day program."

Your Committee felt that the subject can be treated adequately only when viewed from the broader aspects of adult Jewish education, and that the programs of our Sisterhoods and Men's Clubs can be most constructive when planned as organic functions of the congregation and community as a whole.

All rabbis recognize the importance of adult education in Judaism, yet in the fifty-six conventions of our Conference, the subject was treated only twice, at the 1927 session, when the late Dr. Hyman G. Enelow delivered an eloquent paper on the need for its revival in the synagogue and in Jewish life, and at the 1928 session, when our esteemed colleague Dr. Jacob Singer presented a scholarly discourse with many practical suggestions. Since then, the subject has remained dormant.

There are two major areas of adult education, the strictly academic, and the popular. Your Committee desires to make brief statements on each of these.

### A. Academic

With regard to the former, we, American Jews, are deplorably deficient. We represent the only major religious community without any formal academic establishments, except for the training of rabbis. Our sin of omission, especially in the light of our glorious intellectual tradition, may perhaps be best gauged by noting what other religious bodies are doing in this field.

According to the Encyclopedia of Educational Research (ed. Walter S. Monroe, 1941, p. 195), there were at the beginning of this decade 704 church related four-year and junior colleges in our country, half of which number (384) reported an enrollment of 194,604 students. In other words, the total enrollment in these colleges today may be close to half a million students. The National Catholic Almanac (1946, p. 349) lists for 1942, 24 universities with 82,917 students, 52 men's colleges with 32,019 students, 120 women's colleges with 45,433 students, or a total of 196 Roman Catholic institutions of higher learning, with 160,369 students.

We Jews alone have failed to provide such facilities for a portion of our youth, and for some non-Jewish students, for even small denominations, such as the Society of Friends, maintain their own colleges. The situation is particularly deplorable when we

realize that our youth live largely in a non-Jewish environment, that they are constantly exposed to religious evaluations not in harmony with our tradition, that even our community leaders and professional workers are all too often woefully ignorant of the fine spiritual nuances of Judaism and of the mighty social forces in our history. Your Committee, therefore, recommends:

I. That the spokesmen of Liberal Judaism encourage the establishment of Jewish chairs and departments of Jewish learning in all universities and colleges where this is feasible.

II. That the C.C.A.R. extend greetings to the authorities of the newly founded Brandeis University, and express the hope that this new institution will organize its schedule and program so as to promote also Jewish learning and the cultivation of the Jewish religious spirit.

III. That we look forward to the broadening of the scope of our theological schools to include the training of Jewish professional workers other than rabbis, and perhaps also facilities for Jewish students, other than those in preparation for the rabbinate, to enroll in accredited Jewish courses while attending general colleges and universities.

IV. That we view with satisfaction the recent expansion of the program of the Jewish Chautauqua Society, which reaches thousands of Jewish as well as non-Jewish students, and lend our hearty support toward its further growth.

#### B. Popular

In approaching the specific field of popular adult education, your Committee examined the material offered by our national offices, consulted the C.C.A.R. members on their local programs and activities, and mailed out a questionnaire to the members of one large congregation respecting their Jewish reading habits.

1. Our national offices offer the following material:

a. The Commission of Jewish Education sponsors the American Institute for Jewish Studies, which endeavors to organize adult and youth study groups in the congregations (by youth is meant young people of 17 and over). The Commission has also published a number of books suitable for adult classes.

b. The Department of Synagog Activities of the U.A.H.C. sponsors the Town Hall discussion program, and has issued mimeographed outlines for the same.

c. The N.F.T.B. has a "Fifteen Minute Treasure Plan," based on Dr. Eliot's Five-Foot Bookself Plan. Under this plan, four courses appear serially each season in the Jewish Layman, and then in pamphlet form. 5,000 booklets of the first series were

distributed in four months. The second series ran in the Jewish Layman this year. The N.F.T.B. encourages its local units to have classes and to introduce Jewish content into the monthly program meetings, and has distributed, toward that end, Idelsohn's Ceremonies of Judaism, and Cohon's What We Jews Believe, as well as its little magazine, the Jewish Layman, which has a circulation of 40,000.

d. The N.F.T.S. likewise stimulates its local units to conduct study groups and to present some Jewish content at the monthly program meetings. It has published a number of books for this purpose: Sachr's Dramatic Moments in Jewish History, Friedland's A Bird's Eye View of Jewish Literature, Landau's The Contributions of Jewish Composers to the Music of the Modern World, and Gittelsohn's The Jew Faces His Problems, as well as the material prepared by Mrs. Julius Mark and Rabbis Markowitz and Starkoff for its Child Study and Parents Education program.

e. The N.F.T.S., the N.F.T.B., and our Tract Commission have also endeavored to popularize Jewish topics and motifs through their distribution of Jewish pamphlets, art calendars, prayer and psalm cards, etc.

Your Committee is of the opinion that in recent years the work in adult education, conducted by our national offices, and especially some of the newer experiments, such as the American Institute for Jewish Studies and the program of the N.F.T.Y., suffered from the general war conditions, and that a more adequate study of this activity can be made next year.

In surveying the activity of our national offices, your Committee has also noticed that the several arms of our U.A.H.C. create, each independently, their own educational materials, and it recommends

V. That, while recognizing that each department and federation has its own vital program of Jewish education, and without wishing to impinge on the right of each branch to determine the materials most necessary and suitable for its membership, proper staff coordination in advance of publication would be advantageous to all, and some sort of Central Planning Committee on Adult Education should be established for the purpose of achieving a better integrated program.

2. All C.C.A.R. members, who serve a total of 338 congregations, were circularized regarding their local programs and experiences, and replies came from 58, or 17%, representing as many congregations in 44 cities and 24 states. It may be assumed that those who replied represent the congregations most active in adult education, and their report reflects the most that is being done in this field by the members of our Conference.

Of the 58 men who replied, 28 had classes, 23 had discus-

sion groups, 19 had lecture series, 6 had adult colleges or institutes, while 8 admitted having nothing by way of adult education. An examination of the replies showed that less than half of the congregations had any classes or discussion groups whatever, one third had lectures of some kind, while only 1 in 10 had any serious attempt at regular formal class activity. Only 2 of the 58 reported a serious program of library activity in their congregations.

Of the 58 men who replied, 20 claimed that their Sisterhood meetings had some Jewish content, 13 made such a claim for their Brotherhood meetings, while 10 asserted for their Sisterhoods and 7 for their Men's Clubs as having absolutely no Jewish content at their regular meetings.

Of the 58 men who replied, 25 stated that they made no use of the material produced by our national offices, 4 claimed that they used the material, while 11 claimed that they used just one or another of the items. (6 Union Tracts, 2 American Institute, 2 Town Hall).

Your Committee examined the replies and comments sent by the members of the C.C.A.R., and felt that our individual work in adult education is most effective when the content of our classes and discussion groups is related to the vital present day currents of Jewish life and thought, when the instruction is given in popular, non-technical language, when the session is divided about half for a lecture or presentation by a respected teacher or specialist and half for group discussion, when each lesson is carefully planned in advance and an outline is distributed in printed or mimeographed form among the students, when the classes are kept relatively small and the members are encouraged to undertake specific readings, and when the courses are of relatively brief, 4-week, 6-week, and 10-week, duration. Your Committee recommends

VI. That our national offices provide kits and syllabi for adult courses of between 4 and 10 week sessions, on subjects which will contain Jewish substance and reflect current interest.

3. A questionnaire was mailed out to the thousand members of one congregation in the Middle West, in Milwaukee, respecting the contemporary Jewish periodicals which they read, and while the Committee has no recommendation in this regard, we feel that the members of the C.C.A.R. may be interested in the replies.

There were 411 replies, or 41%, and here again we may assume that this number represent those most interested in Jewish reading.

Of the 411 replies, 342, or 83%, receive Liberal Judaism. Of those who receive it, 120 or 35% read it all, 162 or 47% read it irregularly, and 63 or 18% do not read it at all. 159 or 46% indicated that others in the family read it.

Of the 411 who replied, 306 or 74% subscribe, at \$4 per annum, to the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle, our local Anglo-Jewish weekly. Of these, 231 or 56% read its news items, 213 or 51% read its feature articles, 24 or nearly 6% read only its social column, 6 or 1.5% read it only occasionally, and 21 or 5% never look at it.

Of the 411 who replied, 75 or 18% read only Liberal Judaism, 24 or about 6% read only the Chronicle, 117 or 28% read these two but no other Jewish magazine, 6 or 1.5% read no Jewish magazine whatever, while 189 or 46% read either Liberal Judaism or the Chronicle or both plus some other periodical, mostly those issued by national organizations to which they belong, such as American Jewish Committee, Bnai Brith, Council of Jewish Women, Hadassah, ORT, Zionist Organization, etc.

We note with satisfaction the growth and improvement of our Jewish periodical literature in English, such as Commentary, Jewish Frontier, Jewish Social Studies, Liberal Judaism, Menorah, Reconstructionist, and others which enter the homes of our members, though these serious magazines are not necessarily those with the largest circulations.

5. In any comprehensive view of adult Jewish education, note must be taken of the routine activities of the rabbi, who through his regular conduct of worship, his public preachment and lectures, and his pastoral ministrations is constantly engaged in the processes of adult education. Certainly his continuous presence and service in a community is a source of enlightenment as well as of inspiration, and constitutes one of the major factors in the preservation of Jewish life and loyalty.

Of course, not all rabbis are pedagogs, and not all of them are convinced that their working with a handful of people, and occasionally with outwardly unwilling pupils, is of sufficient value to warrant the effort required to stimulate study. The rabbis, too, need constant inspiration, the stimulation of close contact with their colleagues, and cultivation and continuous improvements of their skills and techniques, the incentive which comes with keeping abreast of all progress in the homiletical, pedagogic and professional work. Your Committee, therefore, recommends

VII. That a study be made of the feasibility of publishing a professional journal for rabbis, wherein the techniques of preachment and teaching may be discussed, new aides and suggestions presented and the projects and creations of rabbis made available to their colleagues.

6. There is in our country a large and growing number of scholarly and gifted Jewish academicians, whose learning and talent should be drawn toward the synagogue. It is a well known and notorious fact that much of our best intellectual power is channelled in other directions, away from our Jewish moorings, and is often

laid on the altar of other faiths, of foreign ideologies. Adult Jewish education need not and should not be limited to rabbis. It can profit greatly, and Judaism itself may be enriched mightily, by the utilization of the hundreds of Jewish men and women scattered throughout the land in practically all institutions of higher learning. Your Committee, therefore, recommends

VIII. That a study be made of how best to attract Jewish academicians to Judaism, and how to enroll them for practical service in our religious educational program, especially through the program of the Jewish Chautauque Society, through the columns of our national magazine, Liberal Judaism, through a lecture bureau conducted by our national offices, and through work in our adult classes, properly organized and led, in the hundreds of our congregations.

Respectfully submitted,

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Jacob J. Weinstein  
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Chairman

